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Sue Harris Rimmer

The human face 2

Ellen Geraghty

You catch 'em, he'll clean 'em 3

Anne Hunt

Science, faith and our children 4

The bible

You the reader 5

The tradition

Being part of the drama 6

Our Say – Beyond social constructs

Sociologists remind us that every human society is constituted by – among other things – a web of social constructs. Of necessity we develop rituals, customs, symbols and a variety of ways of going about the business of daily living. They are not “given”, we “make them up”. They carve out for us an arena of meaning in the world. Their essential purpose is to give us a place in the world, as it were, to encounter what is true and real.

We can, however, become very attached to our constructs because they give us a certain confidence that we are in control of our lives. When they cease to work for us or are threatened, we feel threatened. This is why times of change can be so distressing. This is also why we might absolutise constructs and treat them as ends rather than means and become resistant – even violent – to those who do not share our way of constructing human society.

The mature person knows that constructs of one kind or another are inevitable. The

mature person also recognises their relativity and interacts with those constructs with a grace that is open to other possibilities, other constructs that offer alternative ways of encountering the true and the real.

What is true of human society in general is true of religious societies in particular. As religious men and women we also necessarily develop a web of constructs. Their purpose is to give us a place in the world, as it were, to encounter the living God, who has been revealed in human history in Jesus Christ and whose liberating Spirit has been let loose in the world through the death of that same Jesus Christ.

The normal context from which we will encounter God's action in the world, in and through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Spirit, will be the community of the baptised. And that community stands in a long line of communities of the baptised, stretching back to the hill of Calvary and the garden of Easter morning. And through the

ages those communities have developed and treasured certain constructs, ways of expressing the Christian mysteries. However, it would be hard to point to any particular construct that has remained exactly the same through the ages. Even the central mystery of the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup has changed dramatically over generations. Today it is celebrated differently in different parts of the world.

If we are to develop a culture of conversation for renewal within the Church, we must learn to hold our social constructs respectfully but lightly. Conversation breaks down when we absolutise the relative, when we treat means as ends. Behind every instance of bigotry or prejudice or racism, is an idolisation of social constructs.

A *sine qua non* for good conversation is a sense of what does and does not matter. More particularly, conversation grows best when people are grounded in what is true and real, beyond the constructs. □

This journal is one of the works of
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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.

Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated publishes *The
Mix* as one of its forums for conversation. All
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renewal of the Church are welcome. The Editor
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Not all the opinions expressed in *The Mix* are those
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THE HUMAN FACE

My name is Susan Harris Rimmer. I
was born in Coonabarabran NSW in
1972, and work as a human rights lawyer
for the UN. The obvious question I've been
asked all my life (put more or less
tactfully): why is a country girl from
Coonabarabran so passionate about human
rights? Part of the answer is definitely my
quirky ecumenical upbringing.

My childhood was something of a study
in contrasts — my dad is a working class
Manly boy. He was a lay-preacher in the
Baptist church when he met my mother.
My mother was a farm girl, and her family,
particularly my grandmother, were regular
church attendees at the Scottish
Presbyterian church in Coonabarabran.

Until I was five, we lived in Nimbin, in
northern NSW, as my father was a
television technician at Mt Nardi for the
ABC. Those years in the mid-70s were the
heyday of alternative lifestyles and radical
thought in Nimbin, and it was a fantastic
place to be a kid in terms of face-painting,
being barefoot all the time and having your
every creative whim celebrated by admiring
adults!

We went every week to the Uniting
Church across the road and to Sunday
School, which I loved. My earliest
memories of church are joyful singing,
learning the Lord's Prayer and hearing
Bible stories I thought were a little bit
magic, especially Noah's Ark. Already I
was in love with the rich language of
Christianity, the words and stories and song
lyrics.

My father was having serious struggles
with alcoholism and gambling at this stage,
and my parents were fighting constantly.
My mother left him suddenly one night and
we all went in a loaded-up truck to
Coonabarabran.

When I was nine, my mother became
seriously involved with my now stepfather
Noel, a strict Catholic. Mum started to seek
an annulment of her marriage, so she could
marry Noel properly in the Church.

It was a lengthy process and often
painful for Karen and me; at first, just going
to Mass felt like entering a secret world
where we didn't know the language or
understand the cues. The whole concept of
an annulment I found counter-intuitive and
painful.

For high school, my sister and I went off
to Lismore to live with our dad and
attended the large regional Catholic school
there, where I was extremely happy. The
school had a strong tradition and
expectation of community service, and for
the first time I realised that advocacy for
people's rights was a valid form of
community service, along with the more

conventional assistance with welfare. About
Year 8, I found out about Geoffrey
Robertson and realised you could have a
career as a human rights lawyer, and that
was it for me!

When I went off to university in
Brisbane, it was the first time in my life that
I didn't attend a weekly church service. I
became very critical of the way the Cath-
Church handled issues of gender,
particularly homosexuality and abortion,
and whilst the Church was sometimes very
strong on human rights issues, like East
Timor, sometimes it was unforgivably
silent.

That judgement has persisted. The
Church would have to undergo a radical
change for me to go back. I realised this
when I recently got married. My partner is
an atheist and I wondered for about two
minutes about whether I wanted to be
married in a church and receive the
sacrament, but the answer was no. We
were married on a blissful mountainside
instead.

I'm now basically a humanist, with a
keen interest in ecumenism and interfaith
relations. I still hold many members of the
Church in the highest esteem, especially
nuns, who can still get me to do their
bidding! I think nuns can spot a pliant
former Catholic schoolgirl a mile away. I
still believe in the concept of a vocation —
that is how I feel about my work.

My strongest feelings of spirituality
have come whilst sharing in the faith
of others when working overseas: the East
Timorese with their incredible choirs, the
Somali refugees and their faith in Allah,
despite all that has happened to them. I still
believe in faith. Working with survivors of
often terrifying human rights violations, I
see it is only their faith, courage and
capacity for hope that keeps their humanity
intact.



Sue Harris Rimmer

Your Say – You catch 'em, he'll clean 'em

Ellen Geraghty

Once upon a time, religious brothers had to move rooms on a frequent basis, to prevent them from becoming attached to a room. They weren't supposed to make friends, and if they did, they would be separated as far as practicable. Occasionally, folks would come in to breakfast and find the bloke they had been sitting next to for the last year or so wasn't there — his place empty. He had left the order and was never spoken of again.

Both religious brothers and sisters wore the heavy robes of their orders, which had often begun in Europe — the colder climates of Europe obviously not being an ideal place to design religious garb for the heat of Australia.

When the remarkable transformations which Vatican II had made filtered down to religious, vast numbers of them delightedly cast off their heavy robes and exchanged them for lighter trousers, or summer dresses, in the women's cases. One sister I know told me once how strange it was to feel a breeze about her lower legs.

I feel that we often lose sight of our goal, which is to help souls to heaven, not to hinder them with politics and terror tactics and other nasties.

Forty years on, as I contemplate my own vocation, I am starting to realize how fortunate I am to be a part of the Church in the post-Vatican II era. While much remains to be done in our Church to complete what Vatican II began, the changes it has already wrought are sufficient to render the 'post-V II' Church almost unrecognisable as the same Church which existed 'pre-V II'.

Thank heavens, I say. For in exchanging the pre-V II Church for the post-V II Church, God — or our conception of God, at least — also seems to have been changed: transformed from a God of fear and retribution to a God of love.

While many disagree with what seems to be such a liberal God, rather liking their iron-bound rules and lightning-bolt-throwing deity more than a God whose most attractive force is love, I say, bring it on.

For what good is a Church — or even a God — who retains its followers by coercing them with the threat of eternal

damnation? The Nazis, advocates of great evil, made tremendously effective use of not-dissimilar scare tactics.

And what good is a mindless set of followers, doing exactly what they are told without question? Even a dog will do the right thing when threatened with punishment for wrongdoing.

I cannot believe that such a God, or any Church based on such a conceptualisation of God, is right or good. God granted us free will and a nature capable of recognising and responding to love with love. I can only imagine that he intended us to use these faculties in our lives and in that perpetual aim of our lives, which is God himself.

I feel that this is the great good that Vatican II has achieved: freeing us to love God, to honestly choose God, rather than being compelled to do so. Vatican II gave us as human beings the chance to explore this free will of ours — to ask questions, to doubt, to reject God if we wish. But it simultaneously gave us the chance to believe, to say to God, *I love you!* — and to really mean it, rather than just mouthing the words for fear of the alternative.

I realise that this option was available before V II. The point I wish to make is that once the Church started moving away from scare tactics, free choice became a much more viable option. Few people take risks — questioning things, doubting things — when taught that these things are sinful.

My understanding — my feeling — is that we should be free to question and to doubt. If there really is a God, if the Catholic Faith really is what it's cracked up to be, then questioning and doubting will do no wrong, because questions will be answered, and doubt is what makes believing so wonderful.

The end result will be people who believe in God and the Church because they really do believe, not because doubting is 'Not Allowed'. And that's gotta be good.

As I consider my vocation in the post-V II Church, I am delighted to explore a life choice which is proactive, creative and, above all, loving.

This is where I feel the Church, as a whole, needs to be heading. I feel that we often lose sight of our goal, which is to help souls to heaven, not to hinder them with politics and terror tactics and other nasties.

Let us continue to bring about a metamorphosis in our Church; let us create a thing of beauty of it; let us use it to show people the way of God — unquestioning, unconditional love.

It should be our greatest tool in helping God (how fortunate, to gain heaven by working for and with God!)

I saw a bumper sticker once: 'You catch 'em, He'll clean 'em'.

It obviously referred to God and the stories relating to Fishers of Men. This, I believe, is what we are all called to do: we do not need to change people — only God can bring about conversion! We just need to bring them into a sacred space where they can meet him.

If there really is a God, if the Catholic faith really is what it is cracked up to be, then questioning and doubting will do no wrong, because questions will be answered.

So let's do it. Let's continue what Vatican II began, let's make our Church a welcoming place, a place of gentleness and of love, a place where people *want* to be, not where they *have* to be because everyone knows you burn in hell for all eternity if you miss Mass on a Sunday. And once this 'net' of ours is set, we can leave the rest for God!

Note: In this reflection I have referred to God as "he". While recognising that God is genderless, the constraints of language mean that it is easier to write using gendered language. Given that people are traditionally more comfortable with masculine-gendered language when speaking of God — I prefer to use it myself, just because I'm more used to it, and so more comfortable with it — I have used this rather than the feminine.

I'd rather that those reading this were as comfortable as possible, so that they can read it for the important ideas in it, rather than getting caught up in a petty, purposeless argument as to whether God is male or female — which is quite irrelevant anyway. God is God.

Ellen Geraghty is a twenty-one-year-old law student who says she loves our Church and wants her voice to be heard within it — 'no matter how softly or how few the numbers it reaches'.

Essay – Science, faith and our children

by Anne Hunt

The following is most of the text of a presentation given by Dr Anne Hunt at the Catalyst Dinner in July 1999. Due to other commitments it was not possible to publish the text at the time; due to the quality and depth of the presentation, we believe it is every bit as topical and valuable now as it was when first delivered.

I come to this topic, having completed my first degree in Science. Science remains one of my great loves. I came to Theology much later in life and it is another great love of mine. More pertinently to our topic, I am the principal of a Catholic school for girls. In approaching the question I was keen to consult with senior students – by no means children, however, but young people currently in Years 10–12 who are very much on the edge of adulthood.

Keep in mind the cognitive development plus faith development factors at play in these discussions with young people: Is what they say (to me and in front of their peers) really what they mean and believe? At this stage of their lives, they are desperately seeking identity of self, often in contradistinction to the significant adults in their lives. They are in that frequently painful process of seemingly disowning the Faith and values of their significant others in order to appropriate those values as their own.

Students described Science as being methodical, logical, factual, orderly, proven, reliable; having to do with how the world is, with physical reality; as having a high credibility and accuracy; of logical explanations, supported by evidence. There was a genuine sense of surety in regard to Science and a certain comfort and trustworthiness in the demonstrability of its findings. Science compared to Faith/religion was much easier to accept and understand, with its propositions all laid out in order.

Faith on the other hand clearly pertained to a much more personal realm, as students described it. Though these were not their words, they in effect referred to the *private* domain of Faith as distinct from the *public* domain of Science. Faith had to do with a personal decision about what we believe and judge to be true. The students spoke of a great sense of freedom in the realm of religious faith, a freedom to decide for themselves (and rightly so). But I sensed a good deal of confusion, too, about making those decisions. Some also spoke of a sense

of Faith/religion as a comfort in life.

Students perceived that Faith related to beliefs and opinions, and that it was concerned with life questions and questions of meaning (as distinct from the realm of facts in Science). Faith was much more personal than Science. Students recognised a lack of proof and certainty in this realm. Some students – the more mature – clearly recognised that proof is not necessary to belief, that indeed herein resided the challenge of Faith, that there is no certain scientific kind of proof in this realm.

Nevertheless, for the students, the lack of proof makes it more difficult to believe; so they had a sense (cum suspicion) that one is told what to believe (never very palatable to teenagers), together with a sense that Faith does not always make sense; that it is not demonstrably true like Science, that it is sometimes even counter-factual. Students recognised that Faith and Science address different kinds of questions, that Science doesn't address, for example, moral questions as to what is right and what we should do; that Faith as distinct from Science addresses such questions as: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Students commented that Faith and Science meet in moral decision-making, for example, in questions of cloning, genetic engineering, abortion, and euthanasia, with Science telling us what is possible, but Faith addressing the question as to what we should do.

Our young people long to make a difference to the world. Their idealism and optimism – the natural gifts of youth – yearn to find expression in lives of meaning and in contributions of significance to society.

What struck forcefully was the students' faith in Science and in scientific method, and the sheer comfort and confidence that is afforded by empirical evidence. We do indeed live in a very empirically organised culture. Admittedly, the students expressed a rather naive view of Science – they showed little comprehension of science as offering models (e.g. atomic structure), and they appeared to regard Science and scientific method as somehow pure of interpretation and judgement, but

that is a very sophisticated notion, not one shared in the general public either.

On the other hand, they were clearly struggling with their Faith and with belief as presented to them in RE. But remember the age and stage factor – Is what they say what they really mean? Remember that these young people are at an age where they are unsure about themselves (and they rather ingenuously described themselves as such in our discussions); they are unsure of their own beliefs, confused, and their confusion, some explained, was heightened to some degree by learning about other religions (in the respectful kind of way that we do in Catholic schools, wanting our students to appreciate our distinctly Catholic Faith by seeing it in the context of the great world religions, and doing that in a way which is deeply respectful of other religions and their adherents).

Interestingly, creation emerged as a significant issue for discussion, in particular the Genesis stories as distinct from scientific theories. There was clearly some confusion in regard to symbolic language (which is perhaps related to the devaluation of the symbolic-mythical consciousness in our very empirically organised culture). This issue was not just a question of language and imagery, but the much more vital question of trustworthiness. As one student said: if creation (i.e. the beginning of the Bible) is not true, how can the rest be true? Another made the point regarding Santa Claus: having grown up to find out this was not true, maybe the story of God was not true either; maybe other things our parents taught us are also not true. Most students seemed able to understand that creation did not occur literally in seven days and could distinguish between mythical narrative and scientific fact. But the question remained: what is the truth?

In terms of RE and Faith development, I suggest that we need more actively to nurture a more critical consciousness of Faith's teachings; for example the creation stories, of the biblical text as story. We shouldn't accept or allow a simplistic approach to religious matters/ideas that we wouldn't accept in the other areas of their learning, for example, in history where a critical assessment of sources and a grasp of the context from which the text emerge, is expected of students.

We need a kind of 'spiral curriculum' which works over the Old and New Testa-

ment stories a number of times during the students' school life and in ways that are cognisant of the students' developmental stages, a 'spiral curriculum' which doesn't leave our graduating students with an immature understanding of Scriptures, and indeed of ethical and philosophical issues.

More importantly still, our task is to foster *their* spirituality. By no means is there an absence of 'natural spirituality' in young people today. Indeed there is a very strong spirituality, I suspect; but it is a very different cultural context in which they live and express their spirituality, and it is not one which finds expression in traditional religious practice. But just look at their social justice work – the overseas aid abroad, city mission work, the work with new migrants and refugees – and it is often the rebels who are among the most generous givers.

Our young people long to make a difference to the world. Their idealism and optimism – the natural gifts of youth – yearn to find expression in lives of meaning and in contributions of significance to society. They are crying out for meaning and significance. The challenge for us as a community is to bring their spirituality into contact with the Christian tradition and in explicitly Christian terms. I would have to say that this is no easy task for us, for so many young people see our Church, and see our community, as an institution that doesn't seem to value them or to welcome them, that is not interested in listening to them, that is remote from their world, and that is suspicious of them and of youth generally.

We can and must foster *their* spirituality and an important means is by providing opportunities for explicit religious experience in our schools, families, and communities. Liturgies in particular – eucharistic and non-eucharistic – are such a vital aspect of life in our schools.

But I would add one point here: to nurture religious experience – that takes time and a certain leisure and quietness. Our children's lives are filled with noise and with activity. Our own lives are often overfull. We haven't the time to take our time, to ponder the great mysteries of life, to contemplate the beauty around us. In my work and surely in yours, I see families under such enormous pressure, pressure of all kinds, not least the pressure of time. In our homes and in our schools, we need to nurture the experience and the value of stillness and quiet.

As I pondered my discussions with the students, I came away with the question as to whether science versus faith was

the question/issue for young people. I think not! The students to whom I spoke were genuinely perplexed by the question. I saw no sign at all that it resonated with their questions and concerns. I had no sense that science was the good news for young people, not at all. Science is simply part of the world in which they live.

It seems to me that the bottom line question is whether the Faith we are trying to hand on is relevant to our young people in their everyday existence. Are we fostering a Faith that is meaningful in relation to their contemporary existential questions?

Our question would seem to assume an Enlightenment perspective. But our young people are not living in the world of the Enlightenment; they are children of post-Enlightenment times, living in a post-modern pluralist society of belief and unbelief. Science is not the cause of a crisis of Faith in our society and in our children, but a culture of pluralism and moral relativism.

Our young people see the world in terms of a plethora of choices (including the world religions). This is the Options generation, as Hugh Mackay describes it. Our children live in a radically pluralist society where relativism seems the easy – indeed the workable – option. (So you make your choice, I'll make mine; your choice is as good as mine; there is no common ground on which to stand to assess the options; hence the interminable debates on ethical issues.)

The result of this cultural malaise is a great crisis and confusion of values in our culture. I remember a wise parent describing the situation to me with a very apt analogy: It is as if our children were living in a giant supermarket, but with all the price tags mixed up, with low prices on things of great value and high price tags on things of really very little value.

Australia's high suicide rate, the problems of substance abuse and youth homelessness, together constitute an indictment on our failure as a society to mediate meaning and value to our young people. It is meaninglessness that threatens our children. It is the absence of meaning that is killing them. Their concern is meaning; our task is to assist in meaning-making.

Our Catholic schools, to a greater degree than ever before, are in what is more aptly described as a pre-evangelising situation with so many of our students. Our task is not

faith seeking understanding (the classical definition of theology), but *experience seeking meaning*. This is the context in which we are working and a simplistic return to the past is no way to foster Faith now.

As a school principal in one of our Catholic schools, I look at this generation and wonder about the next, a generation perhaps even more remote from any kind of official Church affiliation. This raises serious questions for us in Catholic schools, like enrolment of students, appointment of staff and the kinds of liturgies we celebrate.

I see wonderful, faithful, committed parents. I see schools working with energy and dedication to foster the Faith. Yet I also see vast numbers of our young people not finding a spiritual home in the Church. Why is this? Why is it not good news for them? Why is the Faith we are striving to hand on to them so disposable, no more than one option among many?

It seems to me that the bottom line question is whether the Faith we are trying to hand on is *relevant* to our young people in their everyday existence. Are we fostering a Faith that is *meaningful* in relation to their contemporary existential questions? It would seem not; they are voting with their feet – at least in terms of religious practice as we have understood it until now! Here we come face to face with the messiness and confusion of the human condition, particularly as our young people experience it, and face to face with hard questions that don't yield to easy answers and demand nothing less than utter integrity. But if the Faith we are trying to nurture in them is to be real and meaningful and relevant for them, it has to engage at precisely this point.

But lest you be mistaken, my response is not one of pessimism; by no means. I urge each and every one of you to respond not with pessimism, that is so destructive, but with faith and hope and love, that is tangibly expressed for our young people to see. You don't need me to tell you that our youth have an acute sense of hypocrisy. Our Faith is not served by pessimism nor with foreboding. Let us have faith, faith in the presence of the Spirit; faith that God is with us, faith in Jesus who did not come to preach to the converted; but came with *good news*, news that was palpably good. The question for us: how is Faith good news for our young people?

(Dr) Anne Hunt is Principal of Loreto Mandeville Hall girls' school in Melbourne. She is also author of an excellent book, *The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery*, Liturgical Press, 1997.

Words for a Pilgrim People

I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2:19-20)

□□□

While He was on earth Christ revealed Himself as the Perfect Communicator. Through His incarnation, He utterly identified Himself with those who were to receive His communication and He gave His message not only in words but in the whole manner of His life. He spoke from within ... He preached the divine message without fear or compromise. He adjusted to His people's way of talking and to their patterns of thought. And He spoke out of the predicament of their time. Communication is more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level it is the giving of self in love. (Pastoral Instruction on Social Communication ("Communio et Progressio" – from Pontifical Commission for the Means of Social Communication, 1971), 11.

□□□

'The shell must be cracked apart if what is in it is to come out; for if you want the kernel you must break the shell.' And therefore, if you want to discover nature's nakedness, you must destroy its symbols and the farther you get in, the nearer you come to its essence. When you come to the One that gathers all things up into himself, there you must stay. (Meister Eckhart in R. Blakeney, Meister Eckhart, Harper Torchbooks, 1949, 148.)

□□□

Maybe the burning bush was burning all the time and Moses didn't notice. Maybe the miracle is when you stop and pay attention. (Francine Prose, Household Saints, St. Martin's, 1981, 220.)

□□□

The Gospel of Mark may represent the oldest telling of the Good News. Even with the considerable attention Mark's Gospel has been given in recent generations, we cannot say for certain who he was or where his text was written. That need not be an obstacle. We can, if we turn our attention to the drama of the narrative, be drawn into the action of God both then and now.

Consider just one part of Mark's narrative: The ending or, at least, what was probably the ending of the original narrative – Mark 16:8. The narrator tells us: "And the women came out and ran away from the tomb because they were frightened out of their wits; and they said nothing to a soul, for they were afraid" This is a most extraordinary way to end the Gospel. Where does that leave us, the readers?

Frank Moloney – see Suggested Reading in this issue of *The Mix*, page 8 – writes: "The Gospel of Mark is unique among the gospels and unlike most other narratives in that the crises which emerge during its course are not resolved through a *dénouement* at the end of the story (Mark 16:1-8). Much is resolved, but a further crisis emerges that cannot be resolved by the story itself. (Thus) one of the major conclusions of this commentary (is that) this suggests that it might be resolved in the lives of the people reading the story. We should recall that in a good story the reader is told enough to be made curious without ever being given all the answers. Narrative texts keep promising the great prize of understanding – later. The 'later' of the Gospel of Mark, I will suggest, is the 'now' of the Christian reader."

**Where are you, the reader?
.... In what sense does the
drama continue in and
through you?**

We would completely misrepresent Mark's story if we just looked for "the facts", "the details" or some kind of coherent historical account of "what happened". Mark gives voice to a drama and like all good drama, we are drawn into it. We are more than detached onlookers or disinterested listeners. We are participators in this drama – this is our story. Our lives will carry this drama forward, today, tomorrow and the next day. Mark evokes some very personal questions: Where are you, the reader? How do you embody the drama? In what sense does the drama continue in and through you? Are you trying to "tie it down" and "wrap up" the story – something Mark refused to do? □

The Tradition – Being part of the drama

The authentic tradition has always been deeply suspicious of anything that smacks of fatalism or "quietism". The negative side of this suspicion is that mysticism and contemplation tended to be marginalized. But that is another story, a tragic story of misunderstanding and misrepresentation. The positive side of the suspicion is that the baptized have always been urged and encouraged to become part of the drama of God at work in the world, to actively seek out their particular role in that drama and make themselves utterly available to be instruments of God's Spirit.

**Individuals sought out the
holy men in the desert and
asked for a word that would
help them in their search.**

The early Christians took this very seriously, even to laying down their lives. The Desert Fathers were another group who took it very seriously. Individuals sought out the holy men in the desert and asked for a word, wisdom that would help them in their search. Down the ages, this tradition has been kept alive in a stark and specific way in the Benedictine tradition. When the monk expresses his desire to join the community, he is asked why. His answer must be simply: "I seek God". There is no other reason good enough to warrant entering the monastery. Rembert Weakland wrote of Thomas Merton: "When a monk enters a monastery, what is asked of him is 'Are you truly seeking God?' The question isn't 'Have you found God?' The question is 'Is he seeking God? Is his motivation highly involved in that search of who and what God is in relationship to us?' It's not philosophical – it's existential. And Merton, to me, was a great searcher. He was constantly unhappy, as all great searchers are. He was constantly ill at ease, he was constantly restless, as all searchers are; because that's part of the search. And in that sense he was the perfect monk. Contemplation isn't satisfaction – it's search." □

Bulletin Board

Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

SIP Meetings

CLP Promoter - Terry O'Loughlin on (02) 9816 4262 or (02) 9816 5091.

Email: terry_catalyst@hotmail.com

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

SpiritualityinthePub

NSW and ACT - 7.30-9.00pm unless specified:

° **Albury** New Albury Hotel, Kiewa St March 20 "Forum - So how do we Pray?" Michael Morwood (Info: Fr Glenn 6026 5333).

° **Alstonville** Catalyst Dinner May 17 "Young People and the church - sign of discouragement or sign of hope?" Fr Bill O'Shea (Info: Anne 6628 6428)

° **Bowral** The Grand Bar and Brasserie April 23 Bishop Peter Ingham (Info: Julian 4861 4649).

° **Campbelltown** Campbelltown Catholic Club March 12 "Religion in Indonesia: a promise or a threat?" Stephanus Dharmanto & Jon Soemarjono (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

° **Canberra** - When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free. The Southern Cross Club Woden March 26 "Taking responsibility: who's accountable?" (Info: Rita 6260 6737).

° **Engadine** - Pathways to God Engadine RSL March 19 "Do I have time to be spiritual?" Kate Englebrecht & Fr Bob Bossini (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

° **Five Dock** - Challenges in a Changing Community The Illinois Hotel, Cnr Paramatta Rd & Arlington St March 26 "Young & Restless" Lyndon Cox, Fr Tom Devereux & Pam Sheehy (Info: Susanna 9798 8071).

° **Jamberoo** - Search for the Sacred The Jamberoo Hotel March 10 "The Ongoing Journey" Julian Miller & Monica Brown (Info Anne 4232 1062 or Gabrielle 4232 2735).

° **Kincumber** - Out of the Chaos Came ... - The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive March 4 "Keeping our Collective Hopes Alive" Howard Glenn & Terry O'Loughlin (Info: Clair 4333 7117 or Margaret 4382 2753).

° **Moree** - I have Come that You may have Life April 30 "Social Justice - Refugees" Fr Jim Carty sm Mary Gilhooley's Pub Club (Info: Lynne 6625 1195).

° **Northern Sydney** - Prayer, Faith &

God Relationship Union Hotel, Cnr Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney March 17 "Relationship with God - the ultimate success" Bede Heather & Kate Englebrecht (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

° **Paddington** - Of Human Life The Bellevue Hotel, March 5 "Human being - being human" Naomi Malone & John Moonie; April 2 "Passionate beings" Paul Dyer & Lisa Jinga (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

° **Penrith** - Making a Difference Golf Club April 23 "Respecting Differences: My Story, Your Story, Our Story" Michael Whelan sm & Julie McCrossin (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

° **Rouse Hill** The Mean Fiddler on Windsor Rd March 4 "From Fear to Hope" Dorothy McRae-MacMahon; April 1 "The Spirituality of Thomas Merton" Colleen O'Sullivan (Info: Maria 9680 2220 (H))

° **Rydalmere** - Responding to Change - Rydalmere Bowling Club March 11 Fr Peter Williams & Lance Brooks (Info: Kerry 9630 2704).

° **St George Kings Head Tavern** South Hurstville March 26 "The Difficulty of Belonging" Graham English & Justice Margaret Beazley (Info: Ken 9580 1183).

° **Waitara** - Act justly, Love tenderly and walk humbly with your God: How do we meet this challenge in our world today? The Blue Gum Hotel March 19 Terry O'Connell and Chris Sidoti (Info: Carmel 9477 4824).

VIC:

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

° **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm March 4 "What on earth does the Pub have to do with Spirituality?" Fr Andrew Hamilton sj (Info: Yvonne 9700 7340 or Joyce 9700 1250).

° **Colac** The Union Club Hotel March 7 "Pilgrimage of St James" Peter Morgan (Info: Winsome 5235 3203).

° **Collingwood** The Vine Hotel, Cnr Wellington & Derby Sts, 8pm-9.30pm (Info: April 9327 4433).

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

° **Heidelberg** Tower Hotel, 838 Heidelberg Rd, Alphington, 8pm-9.30pm March 12 "The Church" Tony Hicks & Chris Toms (Info: Susie 9859 6184).

° **Mordialloc** The Kingston Club, 7.30pm-9pm April 23 "The Spirituality of Sexuality - Failure and Signs of Hope" Sr Angela Ryan & Terry Monagle (Info: Maria 9579

4255).

° **Mornington** The Royal Hotel, Victoriana Room, 770 The Esplanade, 8pm-9.30pm March 26 "Facing the Future: Coping with Fear and Uncertainty in a Troubled World!" Tamsin Symes & Martin Flanagan (Info: Ange 9787 8178 or Carole 5976 1024).

Other States

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

° **Hobart North** The Mustard Pot Hotel Moonah 7.30-9pm May 6 "Where is God in the Story of the Universe?" Angela Cameron pbvm & Dr Nick Cooling (Info: Gwayne 6228 2679).

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

° **Perth (WA)** - Towards Joy The Elephant and the Wheelbarrow, cnr Francis & Lake Sts, Northbridge 7.30-9.10pm March 26 Marlene Jackamarra & tba (Info: Andrew 0422 305 742).

° **Macclesfield (SA)** Three Brothers Arms, Venables Street (Info: Michael 8388 9265).

° **The Talking MIX** is now available on tape. 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. Michael Whelan SM is the Director (Info: Sue on 02 9247 4651).

° **Mount St Benedict Centre**, Pennant Hills, "The Road to the Cross in Mark's Gospel" April 12 10am-4pm; Retreat "Seasons of Hope" April 7 - 14 (Info: 9484 6208).

° **St Mary's Towers Retreat Centre** Douglas Park March 7-9 Prayer weekend; March 14-20 Guided retreat (Info: Sr Joan 4630 9159).

° **Catholic Institute of Sydney** "Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion" Gerald Gleeson March 5 - April 9; "Reconciliation" 7.30-9.30pm March 11 Dr Richard Lennan; March 28 Dr Neil Ormerod; March 25 Fr David Ranson; April 1 Dr Gerard Moore (Info: 9752 9500).

° **Reflection Morning** with David Ranson oco March 22 "Where is God? God and our pain. Marist Centre 1 Mary Street Hunters Hill 9.30am-12.30pm.

Recommended

Francis J Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2002, 398 pages, footnotes, indexes, bibliography, hb, \$69.95.

Chris McGillion, editor, *A Long Way From Rome: Why the Catholic Church is in Crisis*, Allen & Unwin, 2003, 211 pages, endnotes, index, bibliography, pb, \$29.95.

Brendan Smith, *The Silence of Divine Love*, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998, 173 pages, pb. Purchased second hand through <abebooks.com> for \$7.95(USD) + post

Readers of *The Mix* will be very familiar with the work of Frank Moloney. Not only is he a Patron of Catalyst for Renewal, he is also an internationally renowned New Testament scholar. His many books include both popular and scholarly texts. The beauty of *The Gospel of Mark* is both its readability and its scholarship. This is a book to be treasured by both students writing a serious paper on Mark's Gospel and serious searchers seeking food for the soul as they reflect on the Gospel of Mark in the Sunday Readings this year. As the title suggests, the book is a commentary on the Gospel of Mark. As such, it can be picked up and browsed in small chunks, particularly with reference to this or that specific Gospel text. But the 24-page introduction should be carefully studied sooner or later – and it does require careful reading as it is a fairly dense summary of modern scholarship on Mark's Gospel. If you begin reading this introduction with naïve or fundamentalist leanings, you certainly will not finish it in that frame of mind. Those especially gifted individuals like Moloney do us a wonderful service by the generosity and dedication with which they accept their vocation as intellectuals within the community. The Church was never more in need of these gifts. Read this book on your own or study it with a group.

The former Opinions Page editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and current religious affairs columnist for that same paper, has gathered together six stimulating essays. As the title suggests, the essays reflect on the state of the Catholic Church in Australia. The authors, apart from McGillion, are John Carmody (lecturer in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of New South Wales), Paul Collins (historian, broadcaster and writer), Morag Fraser (editor of *Eureka Street*), Damian Grace (associate professor in the school of social work, University of New South Wales), Juliette Hughes (writer and reviewer) and Michael Mullins (editor of online Catholic News Service). Chapter titles include, "Visions, revisions and scandal", "The lost art of Catholic ritual" and "Popular culture's new high priests". The essays do not pretend to be deep analyses and the book suffers a little from this. The focus is predominantly critique – an attempt to expose what is wrong. Much as one finds the doctor's correct diagnosis a relief and a basis on which to proceed, thoughtful Catholics will – for the most part – welcome these essays. Paul Collins' essay – "Imagination abandoned" – is particularly good. There is much in this book to stimulate conversation for renewal. *A Long Way From Rome* would be a useful book for group study.

The call of the Gospel is first and last a mystical call – a call to unity in Christ. It is only incidentally about this or that rule or law, this or that organizational or institutional structure, this or that wording of doctrine or dogma. The Good News is that the deep longing we all have for intimacy can be realized. We are just beginning to recover this truth; it is more possible now than for many generations for Catholics to emerge from the oppressive dominance of moralism, legalism and dogmatism. Books like *The Silence of Divine Love* are little treasures because they speak with the wisdom of experience of God and God's eagerness to draw us into the Love for which we were created. When we are on the way to being in Love, we also realize that nothing is what it seems. Emptiness is fullness, darkness is light – and vice versa. At the center of reality is the greatest paradox of all: The triumph of the cross. Brendan Smith knows his way though this territory and is able to draw as readily on such people as Sartre and Pascal as Origen and John of the Cross. Do not take up this book if your interests in Christianity are merely organisational or sociological, nor should you take it up if you think being in Love is a nice thing. Only take it up if you sense that you are being invited to surrender and go where you do not understand.

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