



THE MIX



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Our Say – Traduttore traditore

Italians say the translator is a traitor. Anyone familiar with another language knows that translation isn't easy. The writer and semiotician Umberto Eco does. His latest book is called "Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation". Sometimes the result is funny, like the European hotel sign: The lift is being fixed, during that time you will be unbearable. However, for Catholics the translation of the liturgy from the Latin original is of central importance. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: what we pray is what we believe. It is not like secular translation, but requires a deep knowledge of language, theology and patristics.

Last month, at their regular meeting, the Australian bishops considered their response to a new draft translation of the Order of the Mass. Some history is needed. The Second Vatican Council authorised Mass in the vernacular, in our case English. The bishops of the English speaking world set up ICEL (International Commission on English in the Liturgy). The Vatican

authorised a translation principle called dynamic equivalence, that the sense rather than every word be translated. Our current ICEL translation using that principle was approved by Rome.

In recent years official Roman dissatisfaction with ICEL and its translations grew. It was said that too much of the faith had been clouded or lost in the translation. In the late 1990s a new principle was approved in a document called *Liturgiam Authenticam*, requiring a more literal approach. That has been applied in ICEL's new translation, which is what our bishops considered.

Readers can review the new translation for themselves. The confidential draft was leaked to the ABC and is at www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/re/rpt/liturgy.htm. Much of it is an improvement, more accurate and beautiful. However a large part suffers from lengthy sentences, poor syntax and archaic language (to use the English bishops' analysis as reported in *The*

Tablet). Our bishops have apparently taken a similar view. The strained literalism is a barrier to our encounter with Christ in the Mass.

Further consultation, care and catechesis is needed. As between the English speaking bishops, ICEL and Rome (the last advised by a committee chaired by Cardinal Pell), there must be honest conversation and the real collegiality envisaged by the Second Vatican Council. A further draft should be made public for comment. Care must be taken that ideology does not dictate a hasty and unsatisfactory outcome.

The new translation offers us all a great teaching moment. It must not be introduced without careful and thorough education of the faithful. If that is not done, the result will almost certainly be resentment at what will be seen as yet another exercise in centralism and manipulation from Rome, rather than bringing us to a deeper understanding of our faith. That is the ultimate opportunity and challenge to be faced. □

THE HUMAN FACE

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 Editorial Committee is:

Michael Whelan SM, Geraldine Doogue,
Catherine Hammond, Tim O'Hearn and consultants

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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
catalyst-for-renewal@tpg.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. Names must be supplied, though for good reason, the Editor may publish a submitted text without the writer's name being made public. Not all the opinions expressed in *The Mix* are those of Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated.

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My name is Marie Biddle, born of Molly and Bob Biddle in Glen Innes. I'm a fourth generation Australian and have been blessed with three great brothers. I attended St Joseph's Convent school from Kindergarten to Leaving Certificate and was happily gifted with small classes, great teachers, a love for learning and for good music. After a short time at Armidale Teachers College, I decided to enter the Josephites. Since then I've taught in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Institutions and am now teaching at Aquinas Academy in the heart of the city.

What brought me to who, what and where I am today is traceable to my early years. Mum and Dad have had a tremendous influence on me. Dad's great gift was his love for us all and particularly for Mum. My enduring memory of him is his simple goodness, his reflective nature and a sense of timelessness. This was manifested in the at-home-ness he had with life — whether in crises or on holidays.

I knew I could depend on him to give good common-sense advice. However I often winced at his "bye-n-bye", a phrase he used to gain time, whether for further thinking or stalling me when I pressed him for action!

Delicate in health, Mum suffered the loss and grief of four miscarriages and one stillborn boy between me and my younger twin brothers. We regarded their birth as miraculous and a blessing. Before they came bounding along, Mum spent 7 out of the 9 months in bed!

Her great gift is her sense of humour, her ability both to treasure life, love and family and to be detached from what doesn't really matter. When she and Dad needed further care, she was able to "leave her boats behind" and her home of 56 years and launch out into life at the St Joseph's Hostel, Hunters Hill.

Dad had often remarked, "When I fall off the perch, the nuns will put a veil on Moll!" Little did he suspect that they nearly had one on him, as he spent his last year at St Anne's Nursing Home next door to Mum.

It's been a great adventure to live in these times. I entered with other post-war boom babes in the 60s, when there were 84 other aspirants in my Josephite group and 76 in the group above. This was the time of JFK, Flower Power and Vatican II. Seminaries and Novitiates were overflowing with energetic young men and women fired with the hope and possibility that was in the air.

Imagine our profession group singing the Alleluia Chorus, not to mention the wonderful Latin motets and Gregorian

chants. The structures and schedules were important then, just to keep order, but they also gave the space and solitude within the large community-living environment that was needed to catch up with oneself. We had two novice mistresses and two mistresses of study to oversee our spiritual, intellectual and social formation. Perhaps I might not have made it through if there had been greater scrutiny!!

When I went to one of my two interviews with my novice mistress, I remember asking her if she would be up-front with me and let me know as soon as she saw that I didn't really belong here. When she looked somewhat surprised, I said that I wasn't much good at working out what God wanted and I'd really be happy to go.

Her reply strikes me as one of the sanest bits of advice I know about discerning one's vocation; she said, "You can't pass the buck, dear. You have to work that one out!" So God and I had a tussle until I had the wonderful opportunity of studying under Fr Adrian Van Kaam, some eighteen years later. Finally I understood that a "vocation" was a matter of identity — not a case of a neat fit.

All I can do is choose a context in which I can grow to be who I am in Christ. So I'm still growing. And I'm grateful I chose this context.

Being a teacher and a religious has exposed me to wonderful people and opportunities well beyond my expectations. The sixteen years in the school scene and the subsequent 20 years with adults have confirmed my love for simple goodness, for relationships that really connect with reality and what matters, as well as my need for reflective times to catch up with the peaks and valleys in it all! I find I often muse over Dad's phrase of 'bye-n-bye' when I'm waiting for my next inspiration to gel!



Marie Biddle

Your Say – Mysticism and the Institutional Church

Warren Johnson

The institutional Catholic Church does not seem to tell the laity much, if anything, about the mystical sayings in the Bible. For example, Matthew 6:22 and Luke 11:34, in the Catholic version of the Bible, say that “if your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light”. But the primary meaning in the original Greek is not a healthy eye, but a *single* eye, and Dom Bede Griffiths, in his book on Hindu spirituality, *River of Compassion*, says that the single eye is the true meaning:

“The single eye is the third eye which sees the truth. It is symbolised by the point between the eyebrows which is held to be the centre of this inner light. In Byzantine ikons the third eye can often be seen on the face of Christ, suggesting that this symbolism may have been widespread in the ancient world.”

The extraordinary power and meaning of the single eye was lost when the meaning became, instead, merely a *healthy* eye. But even this lesser meaning, although feeble in comparison, is mystical enough.

Yet, in a lifetime in the Catholic Church, I have never heard any explanation of what these words might mean. This is very strange, because these words are so beautiful and seemingly so mysterious. But perhaps it is much worse than just being ‘strange’ if it means we have been diverted from where we should be.

Dom Bede Griffiths helps us to pursue the idea when he explains that the single eye means to be focused, not distracted; being focused leads to the mind being still, and thus resting in the Spirit within.

This idea of the focused, still mind is found not just in Hindu spirituality, but also, for example, in Zen. There is a wonderful story in Zen about the young novice who had been in the monastery for six months, but had not learned anything about Zen. So he went to the Zen master and asked him when he would learn about Zen.

The master asked him, “Have you had your breakfast yet?” The novice replied, “Yes, master”. The master said, “Well, then, just go and wash up your breakfast things”

So just wash up — just that, nothing more! And so be focused, not distracted by irrelevant thoughts. But the novice had to come to the realisation that it *is just that*.

This is well explained by another story in Zen about a disciple asking a master what it was like to be enlightened. The master answered, “When I am hungry, I eat, and when I am tired, I sleep”.

The disciple said, “But that’s what I do, and I am not enlightened”.

The Zen master replied, “When you eat, you think a thousand thoughts, and when you sleep, you dream a thousand dreams”.

That is the reason for the many different activities that people engage in, such as meditation, yoga, tai chi, tea ceremonies, flower arranging, calligraphy and so on. So many different things, but all about the same thing: to let the mind be focused and free of distractions.

Being focused leads to the mind being still, and thus resting in the Spirit within.

In Psalm 46, there are words that, in their literal meaning, tell particular warring nations to stop fighting. But in the Catholic version of the Bible, they are translated as, “Be still and know that I am God”. Perhaps these words have the same meaning as the words of Matthew and Luke, telling us that if we want to know God, we should let our minds be focused and still.

Zen tells us that to be focused and still means to be free of what some call the stream of consciousness, the continual flow of thoughts and distractions. This stream of consciousness is so crucial that Zen calls it the barrier that must be removed. The various activities mentioned previously, such as meditation, are all for the purpose of removing this barrier.

While this barrier remains in place, Zen says that we are sleepwalkers and dreamwalkers. Even in our everyday language, we say, “Wake up to yourself!” But if the barrier is removed, then, as Zen would say, we can become enlightened, or, as Matthew and Luke say, we will be full of light.

Maybe when we urge, “Wake up to yourself!” the true meaning is so much more than we know. Maybe it really means, “Be full of light” or, as Bede Griffiths has told us, “Rest in the Spirit within”. Such a profound truth! — and yet, somehow or other, we seem to have missed the point...

Zen can also tell us, it seems, about other mystical sayings in the Bible that are usually called ‘hard sayings’. For example, “hate your father and your mother”. Our understanding of these sayings appears to be limited to reasoning about them as much

as we can, praying for a while, and then just saying they are mysteries!

But Zen would tell us they are *koans* like, for example, what is the sound of one hand clapping? It will tell us that there is a way of relating to them that will lead to enlightenment or, as we would say, to the Kingdom of God within us.

Somehow or other, again, we have missed the real meaning of mystical sayings in the Bible.

The eminent Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner, said that in the future, Christians will be mystics. There have always been mystics in the Church, but it doesn’t ever seem to have been an integral part of the institutional Catholic Church and so available to everyone.

Simone Weil may have pointed us in the direction of the reason when she said that the language of the Church is often not the language of mysticism, but of the marketplace. She seems to mean that the language of mysticism is more like that of lovers.

Much of the language of the Mass, for example, is not mystical, and that may block us from experiencing the true mysticism of the Mass.

But whatever the reason for the institutional Church’s lack of interest in mysticism, it is evident that there are many people who are indeed interested.

This would explain the split that now exists between religion and spirituality, with people affirming that they are not interested in religion, but *are* interested in spirituality.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer helps us to understand this: he talks about our “primeval depths”, and says that we can “see for a moment into mysteries of which we had never dreamed”.

No doubt it is inappropriate for people to affirm interest in spirituality but not in religion. But maybe these people are saying that they don’t want to miss the encounter with the Divine in the “primeval depths”. Maybe they are lamenting that they institutional Church does not tell us about the mystical inner journey to the Kingdom of God within us.

They don’t want to wait for Karl Rahner’s “sometime in the future”.

It could be that there is too much emphasis on the institutional Church and not nearly enough on the individuals in the Church making the mystical inner journey.

Maybe that is why we do not know that “if your eye is single, your whole body is full of light”.

Essay - God and Me

by Michael Kirby

The following is most of the presentation given by Michael Kirby, Justice of the Australian High Court, at Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney, on Friday 19th March 2004. The complete text (with footnotes and references) may be obtained from the Editor.

When did you first meet God? For me, it was in kindergarten: Mrs Church's school attached to the Anglican Church of St Andrew at Strathfield in Sydney. In between the plasticine and interminable concerts, I was introduced to God. Generally speaking, we have been on friendly terms ever since.

In the coloured illustrations Mrs Church showed us, later confirmed in the Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopaedia*, God was portrayed as a Middle Eastern potentate with a beard and a turban.

Eventually, when I grew old enough, my parents gave me a Bible which I still have. Many a judicial oath of office I have taken on it which I certainly did not foresee back in the 1940s. I took it (the King James version naturally) to Sunday School. There I learned of Jesus and his love for us all. It was a wonderful discovery. Since then, I have never felt parted from that love. For me, it was a human manifestation of God that was more comprehensible to my understanding. Most of us, brought up in the Christian tradition, have felt the great power of this discovery. God was not, after all, an angry grandfather with a beard. He (and in those days it was certainly a he) was a very loving presence - rather like our parents, actually. It is a blessing of my life that I have always been surrounded by love. I am not in the slightest embarrassed to talk about it.

When I eventually grew old enough to attend Morning Prayer in St Andrew's Church, it was like moving into the Big School. Out of the church hall where kindergarten had been conducted and Bible stories taught in Sunday School, and into the church itself. It was then that I found that, almost certainly, God was an Englishman.

Above the altar (or did we call it that in the Sydney diocese?) hung the Australian flag. But in pride of place was the Union Jack. This, after all, was the Church of England. In the 1940s the word "Anglican" never crossed our lips.

I was not sure whether I preferred the somewhat cold and haughty God I found at

this stage, to the angry prophet from the desert featured in the Michelangelo plates of Arthur Mee. True, this English God was not so angry. He just seemed to be remote - up there with the King and all the members of the Royal family for whom we prayed each Sunday. The rector was the Reverend Cecil Dillon. He had been an Army chaplain. In those post-War days, he wore a line of military ribbons in proof of his war service. A kind and gentle man, he taught me to understand the power of the beautiful liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* in lifting the mind from pedestrian to spiritual thoughts.

I began to have direct conversations with God. They were helped along enormously by Cramner's beautiful words. As I came to church from our home in Concord, I always thought that the Second Collect for Peace was written specially for us at St Andrews:

"Oh God, who are the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

It was then I found that, almost certainly, God was an Englishman

The talk of "assaults of our enemies" in the Collect had resonance with the great English hymns that we sang to God. Come back in your minds to those days. England which, with the dominions had stood alone against the godless fascists and Nazis, had come through the War triumphant. In the words of the hymn, under God, England still had "Dominion over palm and pine".

We were not the first, or the last, to invoke God in war, to create him in our own image. At that time the British Empire still flourished We felt pretty sure that God looked on British subjects with special favour. White British people had a civilising mission. But we did not really want Asians or black people in White Australia. We wanted to remain pure white - just like the images of God's son shown in the stained glass windows. God was certainly not Asian or black. If he was not an English

man, at the very least he was white like us.

PROTESTANTISM

About this time I also came to know that there were unfortunate people who lived outside this calm and beautiful English church where God dwelt. Some of them were Roman Catholics. It puzzled me to learn that they had a bigger church. Of course, somehow it was always on the top of the hill. At noon and at six their bell rang out for *Angelus*. On 2SM, Norman Cardinal Gilroy intoned the prayers. There was a lot of talk about Mary, described as the "Mother of God". All of this was alien to my beliefs.

So about this time, I discovered that God was Protestant. I would return home from school to tell my mother what I had learned that day. About the Tigris and the Euphrates and the beginnings of civilisation. About the gods of the ancient world. And the birth of the notion that there was just one God. And actually, he was not English after all. He was Jewish. But he was Protestant.

My mother's father had come to Australia from Belfast. He was loyal to his Protestant view of the Christian religion. Prompted by my questions, my mother (somewhat reluctantly I felt) would endeavour to explain the differences between the mistaken beliefs of Roman Catholics and the highly rational approach of us Protestants who had cast superstition and ignorance out of the temple. It is hard to imagine now, but mid-century these were still times of sectarian conflict. We were still a church-going country. Overwhelmingly, the people were Protestants, like the English themselves: we thought it ignorant to forbid priests and nuns to marry; we thought it absurd to conduct church services in the dead language of Latin; we regarded it as a presumption not to share the cup of the Lord at Communion with the people; we viewed talk about Papal Infallibility as scientific nonsense; and we regarded the recently proclaimed doctrine of the Bodily Assumption of Mary as heretical.

At this stage I had not read Foxe's *Martyrs*, describing how Queen Mary I had burned Cramner and hundreds of other Protestants at the stake for their beliefs. But I was convinced that God was Protestant because the simplicity, rationality and clarity of the reformed religion seemed infinitely superior to one that, sadly, appeared

to have strayed from scriptural text, if not worse from commonsense so well beloved of the English.

Strange isn't it how, in the matter of God, we like, even as children, to get into the winning team? We like to look down on those in other teams. The Roman Catholic Church might be the biggest Christian denomination in the world. But it was not so in Australia or most of the settler dominions of the British Crown. With Kipling, we in the Church of England could say: "We've got the men, we've got the guns, we've got the money too".

As a young boy on the brink of my teenage, I was pretty comfortable that I had the inside running in the matter of God. Things were fairly cut and dried. I used to look at the red on the map and feel mildly irritated by the little section of yellow where Thailand severed the link between Burma and Malaya. No doubt, I thought, an imperial war would, in due course, fix this up. Mr Dillon would go with the troops and, as usual, the British would win the last battle, for truly God was on our side.

Little sparks of doubt were planted in my mind on Sunday nights. On my crystal set I would tune to Dr Rumble, an Anglican turned Catholic priest, explaining the error of Protestant ways. Question. Reply. The authority of Pope Pius XII (carried at shoulder-height on the papal throne) was painted as unquestionable. I knew nothing at that time of that Pontiff's omission to respond wholeheartedly to the terrible plight of the Jews and other victims of the Nazis. To me he seemed a remote figure. But neither he nor Dr Rumble could really cast doubt in my belief that my religion had reached a higher form of rationality.

Even as a boy I knew that Protestant truth had given me a hotline direct to God. I did not need the intercession of bishops and priests. I could speak *directly* to God. He was always with me. There was no confession to a human being. Simply a direct dialogue with God - always there, always listening, always watching. But God was pretty distracted by so many other obligations. Rather like the British Empire, come to think of it. God did not have everyone in his fold. Probably only a quarter of humanity, like the new Queen's dominions. The rest were heathens, communists and members of religions that did not know that belief in Jesus was absolutely essential. It was the needed password to catch God's attention. In those days, Australians never thought about Islam. We knew that there were Hindus in India. But Buddhism and other beliefs were beyond the pale. We were sure that Roman Catholics would one day see the light and embrace the Protestant reforms. Generously, God and I accepted

them as Christians, although in an earlier, more primitive, state of development. Little did I realise that the second Vatican Council was just around the corner. And that many of Martin Luther's changes would be embraced by the blessed Pope John XXIII - a Christian leader who could be loved by us all. I am glad that in my life I grew out of my early sectarian attitudes.

For a time, I broke away from the Church of England. I attended the Wesley Methodist Church in Concord. This was no great theological conversion. God did not tell me to become more Protestant or to learn new and better hymns. It was just that Parramatta Road, ever more dangerous, stood between me and Anglicanism. We knew that the Methodists were

The world's Roman Catholic Bishops were also later to add to their castigation even celibate homosexuals.

really Anglicans with more money. But this Wesleyan interval reinforced my view that God was rational. That we humans had been given intelligence to read, think and talk about him. Nowadays, the Wesley Church in Concord is packed with Korean Australians. As in 1950, they sing Wesley's great hymns with fervour and speed.

I returned to the fold of the Church of England at Fort Street High School. That great preacher, Dr Stuart Barton-Babbage, taught Scripture to the huge Anglican class. He presented me for confirmation at St Andrew's Cathedral. That is where my relationship with God might have been arrested. It was a solid, competent, somewhat prideful superiority of mixed racial, cultural and religious beliefs. It was not a *bad* grounding for a spiritual life. But it kept God in a proper compartment. The English were never obsessively religious and neither was I. In a sense, surrounded by love at home with parents and siblings and close relatives, God was an other-worldly phenomenon of the same type of love extended universally. But then a very strange thing happened to me. I reached puberty.

HOMOSEXUALITY

When I realised that my sexual attraction was to people of the same gender, and did not change, I knew that this was not looked on as a good thing. My

knowledge did not come from the Reverend Dillon. If ever he read the passage from *Leviticus*, I must have missed it and all the other strange injunctions appearing there. Nor did it come from my family. But at school, the occasional denunciation of "poofters" led me to know that I should treat my sexual orientation as something very, very bad indeed. The newspapers would occasionally report on famous people entrapped by the police and tried for crimes. Police Commissioner Delaney was always going on about it. At first, I shed a few tears. I felt embarrassed and ashamed about myself. But I got on with my studies; kept speaking to God; and continued with life in a state of denial.

This, presumably, is what was expected of me by religious people. So far as I knew, the Anglican Church said nothing about the subject. Perhaps that was because, in an English type of way, a former Supreme Governor, King George V, had declared: "I thought people like that shot themselves".

But other churches were not so reticent. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was later to make the Church's position plain:

"Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' They are contrary to the natural law... Under no circumstances can they be approved."

The world's Roman Catholic Bishops were also later to add to their castigation even celibate homosexuals. Not just acts but beings. They were to declare that violence against them, in some circumstances, should not cause any surprise:

"Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.... The Church... is really concerned... about those who may have been tempted to believe (the) deceitful propaganda (of the pro-homosexual movement)... When... homosexual activity... is condoned... neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised... when irrational and violent reactions increase."

As to relations between homosexual people in loving partnerships, *this* was absolutely forbidden:

"*De facto* unions between homosexuals are a deplorable distortion of what should be a communion of love between a man and a woman... The bond between two men or two women cannot constitute a real family... (M)aking *de facto* unions equivalent to the family... is an evil for persons, families and societies."

Back in my first days of discovery, such thoughts were furthest from my mind. The late Cardinal Winning of Scotland, before his death, reminded an audience of those far off days:

"... [T]he threat to the Christian family is very real. I would ask you to cast your mind back to the dark days of World War II. The parallels with today are striking. In place of bombs of fifty years ago you find yourself bombarded with images, values and ideas [of an active and militant homosexual lobby] which are utterly alien".

Over the years, not to be outdone by the Roman Church, Evangelical Christians increasingly became more noisy as I was growing up. In my day, it was the comparatively benign call of evangelist Billy Graham to come forward and renounce the Devil. Subsequently, the language of the charismatic churches became more vehemently obsessed with homosexuality. Take this later instance from a Christian Evangelist, diverting his teaching from the loving message of Jesus of the New Covenant into language that has become sadly common in the charismatic churches:

"You don't have to go out into the world to find homosexual devils. They're in the Church ... Demon possessed, a homosexual. I know you don't like to hear it! They don't like me to air this ... But I don't care what they like! I am not politically correct! ... Homosexuality is not another lifestyle. It's a demon spirit. In the beginning God made Adam and Eve. He didn't make Adam and Steve. ... [T]he devil has come in and he's thwarted the program of God".

It was not all that surprising that some interpreters of God from the Jewish religion should join in this fray. After all, the passage in *Leviticus* appeared in the Holy Book they had shared with other religions. A former Chief Rabbi of England, Lord Jakobovits, described an ultra-orthodox Jewish view of God's will to the House of Lords:

"'Gay', 'partner' and 'homophobia' are all terms to whitewash what is morally unacceptable to the vast majority of the citizens of this country and elsewhere. We should not aid and abet this use of language. [A] tiny dissident minority of under 5% - perhaps under 1% - cannot demand that the other 95% or 99% must accept and treat as equal violations of the moral code which, after all, has distinguished civilised life for millennia ... [V]iolations of the laws of God ... cannot endure in the long run".

It might seem strange to hear a Jewish leader talk in such percentiles. After all, the Jews had been but 2% of Hitler's Germany.

But for the good Lord Rabbi, God had spoken; and that was that.

We have it on the authority of Miranda Devine in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that Osama bin Laden's "Letter to the American People", published in 2002, demands conversion to Islam. But it also requires putting a stop to "homosexuality, intoxicants, gambling and trading with interest". In the *Holy Koran*, homosexuality is linked with

More people were hanged in London in 1834 for homosexual offences than for murder.

the biblical story of Lot and is mentioned on five occasions. Homosexuals are included amongst those who specifically incur the wrath of God. It is therefore unsurprising that the *Criminal Code* of countries like Iran provide for the death penalty for homosexuality. Indeed, it is not so long ago that we had severe punishments in our legal system. More people were hanged in London in 1834 for homosexual offences than for murder. When I reached law school I learned about the stern punishments meted out for "the abominable crime". For an adolescent, full of hope and spirit, these were frightening times. Especially because you were frightened into silence and could not share your deepest feelings even with those family members closest to you.

Do not think that these times have passed in sunny Australia in a new millennium. Violence against people for reasons of their race, gender and sexuality are daily occurrences. Youth suicide is extremely high, especially amongst boys and young men. Last week I was told of the funeral of a highly talented young man, rejected by his Italian Australian family because of his sexuality, driven to suicide. At his funeral, after the prayers and the music died down, all that could be heard was muttering: "It doesn't matter. He was just a pooffer".

GETTING THROUGH LIFE WITH GOD

So how did my relationship with God survive this experience of self-discovery?

First, I never doubted for an instant the surrounding love of my parents, my brothers and sister. I knew, in my heart, that they would always love me as I was.

For years we did not confront the subject verbally. We did not really need to do so. When we did, it was exactly as I expected. No big deal. Not everyone is so lucky.

Second, I was greatly blessed by having many loving friends and companions, homosexual and heterosexual. Especially blessed in finding a loving partner, Johan. He is not here tonight. He has very little time for religion and churches. He has often said to me: "I don't understand how such an intelligent person can take seriously religions that all oppress women, people of colour and gays". He prefers to be out there helping his Ankali. He volunteers to clean and cook and scrub the toilet-bowl for a patient living with HIV. That is his "religion". He has contempt for what he calls "the Bishops in their frocks, spouting words of hate". For thirty-five years, despite the impediments of the world, we have been together. Not everyone is blessed with such relationships. Not everyone wants them. But they are not evil or disordered - just loving, kind, loyal and mutually supportive. To deny humans such love and gentleness is truly disordered, unnatural, some may even say evil.

Third, I was lucky with the timing of my life. My life has coincided with great advances of science, including in the study of human sexuality. At the same time as Commissioner Delaney and the odd Bishop or two were having their say, the press in Australia was bringing reports of the research of Alfred Kinsey and all of his successors who researched human sexual diversity. We were living through a great age of science. We knew that we were in the atomic era. We saw *Sputnik* in the sky. We witnessed the advent of jumbo-jets, the computer, the human genome. We knew that the churches had modified their beliefs about the Creation story following Darwin's revelations. My generation had confidence that science would reveal more truths. One of them concerned a minority of human beings with a sexual attraction to their own sex. We knew that if this reality existed everywhere in nature it could not be "evil". It had a purpose. Ultimately, as in the past, the Sacred Scriptures would need to be re-examined. New interpretations would need to be found. Lawyers know that this has to be done all the time with ancient words.

Truth is a weapon. It is the truth that sets us free. First, a small group, then more, and eventually most citizens came to know the truth that some people are homosexual. To deny them love and companionship is just plain cruel. To deny them equality as citizens is unjust. To punish them for private adult conduct is oppres-

sive. I was fortunate to live through a time when these truths became gradually, increasingly and overwhelmingly accepted in Australia and other civilised countries. Of course, remnants of the old disordered view linger on, even in God's churches. Doubtless in some places they will last longer than others. But in the end, scientific truth will prevail.

Fourth, I was strengthened in my approach to these issues by my religious upbringing. The Anglican Church in Sydney has its faults, as we all have. But it is part of a denomination that grew out of the Elizabethan settlement in England. After the terrors against Catholics of Edward VI and against Protestants of Mary I, it was imperative to establish a Church of many mansions. Thus, in Sydney to this day, we have the Cathedral, the Church of St James and Christ Church St-Lawrence. They represent the low, middle and high church traditions. There is always space for diverse opinions. It is not, and has never been, monolithic.

It is not, I think, entirely coincidental that it is the Anglican Communion that has witnessed not only the worldwide move to the ordination of women (an absurd exclusion from the ministry), but also the ordination of openly homosexual priests and the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson as elected Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire. The Uniting Church in Australia has also played a part in this gradual movement, as have other religious groups. Changes will not happen overnight. There will be storms ahead. With bin Laden as an enemy, we cannot be entirely relaxed and comfortable. But out of the essential diversity of these temperate beliefs, committed to rationality, has come gradual progress towards enlightenment. Eventually, if our species survives, rationality will embrace all religions everywhere. Rationality, truth and science must be the modern companions of spiritual belief. They cannot be the enemies. If they are, science will trump religion every time.

Fifth, I have never been cut off from God. Never in the darkest days of secrets, fear and alienation have I felt removed from the loving presence of God. Not for an instant did I feel cast out of the temple. Some will think it a presumption, but I never felt myself "intrinsically evil". I never felt guilty of "grave depravity". Never. I knew that this was the way that God and nature meant me to be. It had a purpose. Perhaps that purpose can be seen tonight. We are not at the movies with grandchildren. Johan is out there cleaning a

toilet-bowl. I am here speaking with you.

To be brought up in a spiritual belief with a personal God is a mighty comfort. It helps you get through the problems of life. God was with me in bereavement and in

God was with me in bereavement and in moments of pain and of success.

moments of pain and of success. To be brought up in a Church of Jesus is specially comforting for minorities. As Bishop Spong said from this pulpit, Jesus was a revolutionary. The universality and non exclusiveness of his church was a new message for religion at that time. His instruction to love one another, to forgive enemies and to seek reconciliation is one specially relevant to the dangerous contemporary world. His New Covenant undoubtedly extends to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, intersex and all queer minorities. In fact, it extends to everyone. But many in the world, including many still in error in his Church, are not listening.

To those who think God has been superseded, indeed replaced, by science, I commend the series *Testing God* now being shown on the ABC *Compass* programme. The first reviewed whether science had killed the Creator. The second, the impact of Darwin on the divine. Of course, these programmes reveal that many scientists reject theology. The need to postulate a God is less pressing to them now we know more about how the universe and matter first came into existence, evolved and are still evolving and decaying.

Yet there are other great scientific minds who think that God is not just a human invention. They ask the deepest questions of life and death. How and why did the Big Bang happen in the first place? What (or who) caused it to bang? What was there before the bang? Are we alone as sentient, intelligent beings in a Universe of such enormity? Why is there such human evil in the world? Why are people - including so many people of religion - so cruel to each other?

Thinking about God in the current age, cannot be divorced from scientific knowledge. Staring at the endless universe, looking at the twinkling stars and pondering the infinitesimally tiny atom of matter or the gene that makes us up, helps to put issues of religion in true perspective.

My notion of God has little to do with Osama bin Laden's opinions. Nor, for that matter, with those of Cardinal Winning, Rabbi Lord Jakobovits or others of like opinion. Their anthropomorphic, contorted, nasty little view of God is incompatible with my notion of the enormity of God's presence, as the universal phenomenon. It is humans that stamp on God their own petty conceptions. It is humans that try to reduce God to their own paltry and often mean imagination. The notion of God as a bearded prophet or as an Englishman or as a Protestant or Catholic or as an Islamic, Hindu or other human possession is, frankly, absurd. But the notion that around us, "immortal, invisible ... and divine" is a loving God is one that millions of humans cling to and believe in. It is a notion that is not incompatible with science. It is unproved. But it still exists.

Certainly, that notion is incompatible with cruelty and unkindness to one another. There has been altogether too much of this in the name of God. For centuries people of all religions just accepted a contemptible, little view of God. But now, in our age, a new and larger vision is emerging. As this vision gains strength, many of the human cruelties of the past will be seen for what they were. Then Jesus' injunction to "love one another" will take on a new meaning. The trivial doctrines will be discarded. We will all be closer to God, not just to some creation that humans have fashioned in the image of their own prejudices and selfish conceptions.

I honour those in all churches and faiths who reach out in love and inclusiveness to all people. Tonight I specially honour those who reach out to sexual minorities. Those minorities have been cruelly and wrongly abused in the name of God and often still are. In the millennial year 2000, the Pope prayed: "Let us ask pardon ... for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitude sometimes taken towards the followers of other religions". To that prayer, I would say *Amen*. But I would add "Let us ask pardon ... for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken towards women, towards people who are different from ourselves and towards sexual minorities", who are a full part of God's creation. That prayer will come one day. Of that there can be no doubt. And when it comes, let us all be ready to say, *Amen*. □

The Bible – God is a community

Words for a Pilgrim People

'I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you'. (John 14:25-26)

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"Jesus reveals in its fullness the mystery of the living God. There is only one God, revealed by Jesus Christ his Son who is his Word sprung from the silence." (Ignatius of Antioch, **Letter to the Magnesians**, 8.

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"(In the Song of Songs) the Bride speaks: 'Upon my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves ... but found him not. I called him, but he gave no answer.' How indeed could she reach with a name the one who is above every name?" (Gregory of Nyssa, **Homilies on the Song of Songs**, 6.)

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"The mystery that is beyond God himself, the Ineffable, that gives its name to everything, is complete affirmation, complete negation, beyond all affirmation and all negation." (Dionysius the Areopagite, **Divine Names**, II:4.)

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"The achievement of freedom from fear is a lifetime undertaking, one that can never be wholly completed. When under heavy attack, acute illness, or in other conditions of serious insecurity, we shall all react to this emotion -- well or badly, as the case may be. Only the self-deceived will claim perfect freedom from fear." (**The A.A. Way of Life; A Reader** by Bill, Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1967, 263.)

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Following our celebration of Easter, we celebrate at Pentecost the presence of God's mighty Spirit at work with our spirits (see Romans 8:16). Following our celebration of Pentecost, we celebrate the Trinity (see, for example, John 16:12-15). This is an affirmation of God as community.

In the Semitic world from which Abraham emerged, *El* was the common name for God. *El* is the archaic and poetical equivalent of *Elohim*. *Elohim* is a plural word, probably implying an understanding of the divinity as a multiplicity of forces. Already we see here a profound intuition: God is one yet God is manifold. Later, the people are drawn more deeply into the revelation of the mystery of God. Moses receives this revelation on behalf of the people. The revelation is given in unfamiliar surroundings, in the wilderness in fact (see Exodus 3:1-15; 33:18-23 & 34:1-7). When Moses asked for God's name He received the enigmatic reply: "I am he who is" (see Exodus 3:14). The name Yahweh, derived from the verb *to be*, will be used to speak of God henceforth, and it will imply not just *existence* but a *active presence*.

**God has to love me
infinitely because
God is God.**

The Incarnation brings a further development in the revelation of God. The "active presence" is embodied in an historical person. This person *is* God-with-us. Through his life, death and resurrection, we find the fullness of the revelation of God. The one and manifold mystery intuited in the name *Elohim*, is now revealed as *Father* and *Son* (see, for example, Matthew 7:21 & 11:27; Luke 2:49 & 22:29; Mark 12:6 & 13:32; John 3:35 & 5:23; Romans 15:6 & 2Corinthians 1:3) and *Spirit* (see, for example, Matthew 1:20 & 4:1; Luke 1:35 & 4:14; Mark 1:11 & 13:11; John 3:34 & 16:14ff).

The Gospel revelation of God-as-Father, God-as-Son and God-as-Spirit may be thought of in terms of communion and relationship. God *is* communion, God *is* relationship, both in the most perfect form. Thus we say, "God is love" (see 1John 4:8 & 16). Communion, relationship, love, all suggest inclusiveness, reaching out to gather in. It is of the very nature of God to seek me in love. God cannot help it. Because God is this way, there is absolutely nothing I can do to make God love me more or less. God has to love me infinitely because God is God. □

The Tradition – God in history

God, revealed to us through both the Old and New Testaments, whom we celebrate and worship, name and reverence, is incomprehensible, uncontrollable and unnameable. Gregory of Nyssa sounds a warning: "Every concept formed by the intellect in an attempt to comprehend and circumscribe the divine nature can succeed only in fashioning an idol, not in making God known" (*The Life of Moses*). Any name or description we give to God must protect the mystery, it must enhance our reverence and sense of awe before the infinite, it must bring us to silent waiting. Maximus the Confessor puts it nicely: "Only wonder can comprehend his incomprehensible power" (*On The Divine Names*).

There are, as it were, two choruses that sound throughout the Christian history: The *apophatic* and the *kataphatic*. The latter chorus keeps reminding us that we can and must make meaningful statements about God. Thus, when John's First Letter says, "God is love", this is part of the *kataphatic* chorus. This is sometimes called *the positive way* or *the way of affirmation*. The former chorus keeps reminding us that God is never adequately described by any human language or concept. Thus St Paul says we see "in a glass darkly" (see 1Corinthians 13:12). The above quotations from Gregory and Maximus both suggest the same *apophatic* tradition.

**"Only wonder can
comprehend his
incomprehensible power".**

Doctrinal statements obviously depend on the validity of the *kataphatic* tradition. Thus the Church has, since the Council of Nicea in 325, maintained the teaching that Jesus is both divine and human. The Western Church's teaching that the Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son ("*Filioque*") has been a source of conflict with the Eastern Church. □

Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

SIP Meetings

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

Email: terry_catalyst@hotmail.com

<http://groups.msn.com/SpiritualityinthePub>

NSW and ACT – 7.30-9.00pm unless specified:

° **Albury** New Albury Hotel, Kiewa St June 8 “Stewardship and Natural Resources” Lucinda Corrigan & David Mitchell (Info: Joan 6021 6880).

° **Ballina** Paddy McGinty’s Pub August 24 “The Church and Politics” Marlette Black pbvm (Info: Anne anneanne@ballinacatholicchurch.org.au).

° **Bowral** The Grand Bar and Brasserie June 23 “In the Beginning: Genesis & John” Bede Heather & Antoinette Collins (Info: Julian 4861 4649).

° **Campbelltown** Campbelltown Catholic Club June 9 “Are refugees a threat?” Peter & Robyn Presdee (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

° **Canberra** – Currently suspended – awaiting the formation of a new committee. Anyone interested contact Terry as above.

° **Engadine** – Engadine RSL June 16 “Conscience or compromise” Fr Michael Whelan sm & Kate Englebrecht (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

° **Five Dock** The Illinois Hotel, Cnr Parramatta Rd & Arlington St June 30 “Prison – from the inside” tba (Info: Susanna 9798 8071).

° **Goulburn** Soldiers Club July 13 “” Dr Anna Corbocrehan & Fr Michael Whelan sm (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

° **Jamberoo** The Jamberoo Hotel July 5 (Date Change) “The Road to Discipleship” Fr David Catterill & Loreta Brinkman (Info: Gabrielle 4232 2735).

° **Kincumber** The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive July 6 “Political Paradox?” Rev Elenie Poulos & Victoria Kearney (Info: Clair 4333 7117 or Sue 4334 3174).

° **Lismore** Mary Gilhooley’s Pub (Info: Lynne 6625 1195).

° **Newport** – Newport Arms Hotel August 26 “Respecting Differences” Gail Gill & Robert Fitzgerald (Info: Terry 9973 1192).

° **Northern Sydney** Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney June 21 “We are Witnesses” Bill Byrne & Sr Patty Fawkner sgs (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

° **Paddington Theme** “Walking the Edges” The Bellevue Hotel July 7 “Redefining the Edge” Kathleen McCarthy & Michael Whelan sm (Info: Marea 9387

3152).

° **Penrith** Golf Club June 16 “Being with others, being with me and being with God” Geraldine Doogue & Fr Gerry Iverson (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

° **Rouse Hill** The Mean Fiddler on Windsor Rd September 7 “Prayer – Our connection to God” Judy Taylor & David Ranson (Info: Maria 9680 2220 (H)).

° **Rydalmere** – Rydalmere Bowling Club June 8 “Search for the Sacred” Margaret & Tim O’Hearn (Info: Janice 9684 4109).

° **St George** Kings Head Tavern South Hurstville June 23 “Healing and Hope” Helen Cacciola & Prof Gordian Fulde (Info: Ken 9580 1183).

° **Waitara** – The Blue Gum Hotel June 16 “Where is: the Life we have lost in living? the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? the knowledge we have lost in information?” Peter Wood msc & Dorothy McRae-McMahon (Info: Carmel 9477 4824).

VIC:

° **Ballarat North** Midlands Golf Club, Heinz Lane, Second Wednesday each month 12.00-2pm (Info: Kevin 5332 1697).

° **Bendigo** Boundary Hotel (Info: Helen 0409 212 009).

° **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm July 20 “Australian Spirituality” Jack Stuart (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

° **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel (Info: Clare 5236 2091).

° **Darebin** Olympic Hotel, Cnr Bell & Albert Streets, Preston, (Info: John 9478 3642).

° **Echuca** The power of my story through the window of ... The Dock Hotel August 18 (Info: Carmel 5482 1342).

° **Fitzroy** Pumphouse Hotel, 128 Nicholson St, first week each month 8pm-9.30pm (Info: Denise 9816 3001)

° **Goulburn Valley** Terminus Hotel (Shepparton) 7.30pm-9pm August 21 Dinner “Are Australians Spiritual?” David Tacey (Info: Kerry 0408 579 904).

° **Heidelberg** Tower Hotel, Alphington, 8pm-9.30pm August 11 “Spiritual Journeying – has organised Religion lost its way?” MaryAnn D’Souza & David Tacey (Info: Susie 9859 6184).

° **Mornington** The Royal Hotel, Victoriana Room, 770 The Esplanade, 8pm-9.30pm, (Info: Colleen 9775 2163 or Carole 5976 1024).

° **Southern** Finbar’s Irish Pub, Cnr Bay & New Streets, Brighton, 7.30pm-9pm June 23 “Primacy of Conscience: Whose Voice do we Listen to?” Terry Monagle & Eric Hodgens (Info: Kevin 9776 2705).

Other States

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

° **Hobart North** Moonah Café Bar & Bistro July 27 “The spirituality of service” Sherrin Jackman & Andrew Maver (Info: Gwaine 6228 2679).

° **Brisbane (QLD)** – Currently suspended – awaiting the formation of a new committee. Anyone interested contact Terry above.

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

° **Mylor (SA)** Warrawong Earth Sanctuary, Stock Rd July 6 “Insights into Healing & Business” Tony Anderson & Pamela Thrift (Info:).

Other Matters and Events

° **The Aquinas Academy** adult education centre, 141 Harrington St Sydney, programs day and evening, special emphasis on spirituality. Michael Whelan SM Director (Info: Sue on 02 9247 4651).

° **St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, June 18-20 prayer weekend; June 25-27 men’s retreat; July 2-8 guided retreat “Images of God: wisdom, water, fire”; July 9-15 guided retreat “Praying our Experiences” (Joseph Schmidt fsc); July 23-25 Mid-years Spirituality (Info: 02 4630 9159).

° **Mount St Benedict Centre** Pennant Hills September 19 – 26 “Seasons of Hope” guided retreat for those 70 years of age or over (Info: 9484 6208).

° **St Kevin’s College Parent Enrichment Program** “Spirituality as Living Relationships” Michael Whelan sm College Pavilion July 20, 7.45pm \$10 (Info: Anne 03 9508 1375).

° **Eremos Forum** with John Cleary, ABC, & Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon, June 19 7.30-9.30pm, ACU Auditorium, Strathfield (Info: 9683 5096).

° **Seminar – Finding the Catholic Social Conscience for Today** – Towards a New Pentecost in Australia, June 10, Ryan Auditorium, MacKillop campus, ACU with Stefan Gigacz & Fr Frank Brennan sj (Info: ACMICA.mnguyen@acmica.org).

NEXT REFLECTION MORNING

Saturday August 21, 2004

Fr Michael Whelan sm

“Rediscovering the Mystical Heart of Our Faith”

9.30am – 12.30pm

Marist Centre, Hunters Hill

Recommended

J-M. R. Tillard, *I Believe, Despite Everything, Reflections of an Ecumenist*, John Garratt Publishing, 2003, 64 pages, pb, \$16.95. (Tel: 1300 650 878)

The late Jean Marie Tillard, a Canadian Dominican, writes with passion: "The division of Christians is for me probably the greatest scandal of the Church's history. I am convinced that it is . . . the great obstacle to evangelisation. I see there the mark par excellence of the power of the Evil One, whom the scriptural texts call the Adversary". This book teems with ideas and personal reflections. He writes of the importance of silence and a crisis "of spiritual inwardness"; he warns the laity from becoming "clericalised", of having to choose between the authority of the media and that of the pulpit; he doesn't see the reforms of Vatican 11 having yet been fully implemented, partly because of the compromises made in the Council's documents. He explores the special role of Rome, he seeks more effective regional synods, better application of collegiality, and a more fulfilling role for bishops and priests in the local church. Tillard believes deeply in the presence of Christ to guide the Church through every crisis. The brief responses to questions - interviews in winter - which is this book's structure makes for easy reading yet serious reflection. Tillard is optimistic as would be any reader of this profound book, one that is excellent for personal reflection for those who experienced pre Vatican 11 and the hopes of the Council's reforms.

Hoge, Dean and Jacqueline Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood. Changes from Vatican 11 to the Turn of the New Century*, John Garratt Publishing, 2003, appendix, index, 226 pages, pb, \$45.95. (Tel: 1300 650 878)

This book highlights the central proposition of *Catalyst for Renewal*, namely, the need for ongoing conversation: in this case between older and younger priests and between priests and the laity. The study that forms the basis of this book was a repeat of earlier analyses of priests' views of a number of issues conducted in 1970, 1985, 1993 and now 2000. Many a reader might be put of by the statistics, the sociologist's tools of trade. The best sections are, however, the extracts of priests talking of their lives, hopes and dreams. The authors found a growing conservatism amongst the younger clergy ("cultic priests") and the older more liberal priests ("servant-leaders"). The differences between them and between the diocesan and religious priests centre on the nature of the priesthood, attitudes towards the Magisterium, liturgy and devotions, theological perspective and celibacy. The study also found a growing disparity in outlook between young clergy and young laity. They give a chapter to evidence of a homosexual subculture, particularly in seminaries, and the effects on Church life. This is an important book, and although American, it needs the reader to consider its applicability to Australian clerical life. The priests' recommendations are most interesting.

Christopher Gleeson, *A Canopy of Stars: Some Reflections for the Journey*, David Lovell Publishing, 2003, 158 pages, pb, \$22.50.

This is a book of reflections, principally for older adolescents and their parents, by Australian Jesuit Christopher Gleeson. Christopher reflects on his experiences of being headmaster for nearly twenty years and now presents his synthesised wisdom. There are eight themes, labelled "stars" which are a mix of personal reflection, guidance, extracts from this self-confessed "professional and prolific scavenger of others' insights and ideas". The chapters have many of Christopher's own extracts from school newsletters and addresses, poems and reminisces. The chapter introduces Christopher's thoughts on a theme, for example love, success, living on the move, and then has a series of extracts, poems, ideas, newspaper items, homilies, and what are best described as a pastiche that the reader can spend time with. The extracts are familiar to readers of "Thought for Today" on www.pray.com which has been using sections of this delightful text for some months. This is the book's strength: seemingly simple ideas that open the doors for long contemplation, refection, personal challenge and prayer. Whilst written from a perspective of a school and adolescents, this book offers all readers on the journey thoughts to ponder and reasons to pray. It is optimistic and useful for both personal and group reflection on God's goodness to His people.

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