



# THE MIX



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## Our Say – The silence of God

The Boxing Day tsunami, apart from being an indescribable tragedy, evoked some amazing responses and reactions around the world. The Australian public, for example, donated almost \$250,000,000 to assist those affected by the tsunami. This is unprecedented. The event also raised some important and even unnerving questions and challenges for us.

For example, why did this particular tragedy evoke such a public outpouring of solidarity, grief and generosity, in contrast to the way we have treated a handful of desperate asylum seekers in our own midst? What are we to make of the rituals of mourning, remembrance and shared grief by people who, for the most part, reject our Church rituals and liturgy? And is there something about the sheer public-ness of the outpouring of grief and generosity, and the fact that it is expressed on a mass scale, that ought to catch our attention? What is happening?

Amidst all the human responses and reactions, there is probably one that we should pay particular attention to. The question arose, in different ways, and was variously answered:

here was God? On the lips of some it may have been a mocking question. We cannot assume that all or even most asked the question in

that way. The tsunami confronts the believer with the most tormenting and challenging of all the themes of human history: The silence of God in the face of human tragedy.

The Oxford-based scientist, atheist and public antagonist of religion, Richard Dawkins, wrote a letter to the *Guardian* (December 30, 2004) criticizing some of the comments made by religious people after the tsunami. He expressed disgust for the “absurdity” of the “religious mind.” “Religious explanations for such tragedies” Dawkins wrote, “range from loopy (it’s payback for original sin) through vicious (disasters are sent to try our faith) to violent (after the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, heretics were hanged for provoking God’s wrath).” He concludes: “Let’s get up off our knees, stop cringing before bogeymen and virtual fathers, face reality, and help science to do something constructive about human suffering.”

We could respond to Dawkins with rational argumentation. We could, for example, note that he is assuming that “science” is the best way to deal with human suffering. Is it? Certainly, the

human family has benefited much from science. But is there not more to suffering than a series of functional problems to solve? We could also note that Christians are very much in favour of science. In Catholic hospitals throughout the world, for example, you will find not only the best science available, you will also find compassion and commitment and a level of care that goes with people in pain where science cannot go. And I do not know any Christians who would oppose the idea of spending money on an early warning system for the next tsunami.

And if the truth be told, the people already on the ground in the places where men, women and children have been most hurt by the tsunami, include many Catholic priests, brothers, nuns and laity. And they are there because that is where their faith has led them – to be with the poor and dispossessed of this world.

Science is a functional instrumentality, not a metaphysical one. The scientist might be able to tell us how and why the wave came. It cannot tell us why there is suffering. Neither can the believer. We believers must not evade this. The silence of God is a horrible gift we must bring to the world. ■

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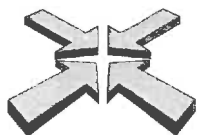
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**The Four Arrows and the Cross** symbolise diversity giving rise to communion in and through the Paschal Mystery. Those who are diverse by nature and culture, in and through Christ find life-giving unity.

Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated publishes *The Mix* as one of its forums for conversation. All 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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## THE HUMAN FACE

**M**y name is Kevin Bates. I grew up in Geelong, in a family that was deeply involved in local parish life, and in a parish that had lots of warmth and life about it. It was just before TV arrived, so parish concerts, talent quests, liturgical events, Saturday night Confessions after the footy, and Sunday night Benedictions punctuated a village-like community's life.

I knew, though no one specifically told me, that we were the right Church and the others were on the wrong track. We were pretty self-contained in our correctness and security. The Church could do no wrong, and was the bulwark against all else that was wrong.

We were strongly associated, as a Church community, with the DLP, and were staunchly anti-communist. Bob Santamaria was a locally endorsed guru, whose views were blessed by Archbishop Mannix.

Moderating all this, we had a parish priest who was human before he was anything, and he had an important influence on my early faith formation, along with the Marist Fathers who arrived in Geelong to start the new Chanel College there.

I remember mostly my early faith journey as being one of warmth, closeness to God and a time in which prayer came as naturally as barracking for the mighty Geelong Cats. In my late fifties now, both these rituals still occur regularly!

I was ordained a priest in 1972, just as the energy of Vatican II was starting to take hold. I sensed this great energy in the Church at the time as we sought to engage honestly in the conversations that were shaping our society, and to contribute what we could to those conversations.

There was great opportunity to create Liturgies that would respond to our people's hungers with a new sense of immediacy. There was an excitement about the emerging ministry of the laity, foreshadowed in Pius XII's "Mystici Corporis", and by the inspiration of John XXIII.

There was a sense of lay Catholics beginning to have a voice in areas of Church life that had previously been thought to be beyond their ken.

Women were emerging as theologians, spiritual leaders and teachers, and their role in the Church's life and mission was expanding and much debated.

As time has moved on, our wounds as a Church have been mightily exposed, and this has brought a deeply painful, but important new honesty to our life as Church.

This too has been, in part, a consequence of our involvement in the wider social conversation.

When I am in conversation, of course, I need to listen, to be humble, and in a real way, surrender control to the process of the conversation. For some, this process seems too much, and so we struggle now to keep the conversations alive.

The pain and honesty of the conversation process can lead us to retreat to safe ideological ground, the piety of a foregone era, and an imagined "tradition", in which we hide and reassure ourselves that all is well with us.

I hope we can grow past this point of cultural retreat, so that we mature as a community with each generation, to the point where we allow our wounds to breathe, to be open to healing, and to deal with the issues of our day with honesty, imagination and total trust in the Spirit—who has breathed faithfully through the Church in every era.

The gospel is the best alternative I know to any of the ideologies in which we seek security and a false sort of certainty. I hope that we can seek out our truer Tradition, which is as Jesus insisted, all about a God of the Living!

I hope that a certain fear which still marks the faith and conversation of many in the Church can be transformed into a level of trust where the real and deep renewal of Vatican II can still be brought towards a new rebirth.

I hope that we can learn more and more to recognise God's abundant gifts, given for the life and growth of the Church, and that these can be honoured, wherever they are found.

I hope that in the midst of all our struggles and ambiguities, we can still give birth to something new and profoundly satisfying, pretty much as Mary did so long ago.



Kevin Bates, sm

# Your Say – Palaeoanthropology and the Garden of Eden

John Simon

**The Editor found this piece provocative. It may be valuable as a conversation starter, even if the reader disagrees with the writer or simply does not understand position being put.**

When I was in first grade I recall hearing part of Genesis from the lips of a nun, a good and gentle teacher. During that lesson she made no comment on the reading. I also recall being very disturbed as, like most children of that age, being a literal thinker, I immediately noticed that the story had some internal contradictions and therefore could not be factually accurate.

In those days a six year old did not stand up in class and tell a nun that the bible was wrong, so I contented myself by resolving that I might understand it better when I became a bit older. Then, many years later, along came palaeoanthropology (the study of human ancestry) which tended to make me more, rather than less, confused.

However, things took on a different perspective when I realised that the age of the earth is measured in billions of years, *homo sapiens* has existed as a species for a maximum of about 200,000 years and that the compilers of Genesis were therefore a long way removed from the events described therein.

As Christians, we believe that the bible contains divinely inspired religious truths even if, from scientific and historical viewpoints, it may not be strictly accurate.

Nevertheless some recent happenings have led me to believe that the biblical story of the "Garden of Eden" is much closer to the actual truth than I had formerly accepted.

The 'happenings' to which I refer include a TV program regarding a study of human traits displayed by chimpanzees (our nearest genetic relatives) and an article on "Conscience" in the December 2004 issue of 'The Mix'.

The chimpanzee program set me thinking about what makes us uniquely human. Is it the fact that we belong to the species *homo sapiens*? The answer is, 'probably not!' The Neanderthals had 'human' traits beyond those shown by the chimpanzees. They used fire for warmth and other purposes, practised ritual burial and cared for sick and disabled community members. Their skeletal remains show evidence of serious injuries, severe enough to have disabled the individual for a time but which had subsequently healed.

Another individual who lived to a reasonable age had deformities which would

have precluded him from hunting or taking part in strenuous activities. No animal could have survived with similar injuries or deformities. Survival for injured and disabled individuals required some medical knowledge within their society and the 'humanity' to care for them.

Neanderthals lived contemporaneously with *homo sapiens* until about 30,000 years ago when they became extinct. They were not merely a different race but a distinct species, as different from us as a tiger is from a lion. It appears that humanity may not have been confined to our species, hence Genesis and the Garden of Eden could refer to incidents affecting our progenitors, not necessarily just ourselves.

A study of human DNA reveals that we are probably descended, on the female side, from a single individual who lived about 200,000 years ago. That individual, described in scientific terms as the 'mitochondrial Eve', was the first to carry the genetic mutation that differentiated *homo sapiens* from *homo erectus*.

Superficially, and probably in reality, "Eve" would not have appeared any more different from her parents than we are from ours. However, the genetic mutation that she carried made her descendants more 'survival fit' than her immediate ancestors; her descendants prospered and multiplied while her antecedents gradually declined.

This raises the question whether "Eve's" parents were human. Possibly they were. It depends upon the definition of "human". Therefore if, as it seems likely, being a member of the species *homo sapiens* is not the most important prerequisite for being considered "human", what is the most important factor?

A quote from the late Pope Pius XII (from the MIX article) seems to sum it up, "Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a human being. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our depths".

Therefore, it is not the shape of our body or the organisation of our brain that makes us human; it is the possession of a conscience. Therefore the first humanoid became human when he/she became aware that he/she had a conscience. This awareness may have taken place as part of the philosophic development of a mature individual or during the flowering consciousness of a growing child. This individual would have shared his/her thoughts with others, thereby facilitating the same arousal of consciousness in others.

To make the analogy to the 'Garden of

Eden', conscience is the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. Once one individual developed an awareness of conscience, innocence was lost and man attained the capacity to sin. The 'Garden of Eden' could represent the area inhabited by the tribe whose members first became aware of conscience.

However, everything would have remained in equilibrium until one individual acted on a decision that was contrary to his/her conscience. ... Once an individual gave in to temptation and committed the first sin, either singly or at the urging of his/her mate, the family could have been literally expelled from the tribal area (banished from the Garden of Eden).

A quote from another pope explains the conversations that Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel were having with God in Genesis. Pope John Paul II said, "The importance of this interior dialogue of persons with themselves can never be adequately appreciated. But it is also a dialogue of the person with God, the author of the law, the primordial image and final end of the human person". They were wrestling with their consciences!

In the fundamentalist 'direct creation' model, Cain would have had no descendants as Eve was the only woman on earth. However, in the scenario outlined herein, there would have been other marriageable women available.

The 'mitochondrial Eve', mentioned earlier, may not have been synonymous with the Eve of the bible. ... The 'mitochondrial Eve' is believed by some scientists to have been the first representative of our species, *homo sapiens*. However, the Eve of the bible may, or may not, have been a member of our species.

For those curious to know the geographical location of the Garden of Eden, which in the foregoing scenario means the home area of the first persons to have a conscience, it's most likely location would have been somewhere in Africa, where the oldest human fossils have been found.

The reader may ask why it is necessary to examine our religious beliefs in terms of science? The answer is simple. God is the original scientist – God is the essence of logic. Although humans do not have the capacity to understand fully God's works, those works cannot be contrary to true logic or true science. If we are to follow Christ honestly we have to be comfortable with this proposition! ■

# Essay – Does prayer make a difference?

David Ranson

**The following is the text of a talk given at Spirituality in the Pub at “The Mean Fiddler” Hotel, Rouse Hill NSW on 7 September 2004.**

This, I have to say, is a great question in every sense of the term!

It is a great question not simply because it can generate a good conversation, but because it is the question that each of us must face in our journey of faith at some stage or other. In fact, it is the question that becomes an ‘appointment-awaiting-us.’ It is the question that must almost haunt us because it is the question in and through which our faith grows or dies.

Sooner or later in our relationship with God this is the question we must confront because it raises all our presuppositions about the nature of prayer and about the nature of God. It forces us to ask what is the essence of prayer, and who is God. And these kinds of questions bring us to forks in the spiritual road that lead either to stagnation or to new horizons.

How often did I witness people struggling with this question during my time as a hospital chaplain in Melbourne! Let me share with you a story that had a hundred and one variations but all of which carry the same theme. A young girl of 16 on her way to work suffers a freak car accident and is brought into intensive care with little chance of survival. As her anguished family arrives, it becomes apparent that she is medically dead. The medical technology keeps her breathing and her heart pumping but her brain activity has ceased. In their anguish, her distraught family prays with all their heart for the girl to recover. To the observer it is clear that she won’t. It is only a matter of time before the family will be asked to agree to turn off life support. And the time comes.

What had happened to this family’s prayer? Had it made a difference? This is the question that many of them struggled with. For some of them, it made no difference to the situation though it made a huge difference to them. Some of them could no longer believe in a God who might allow such an innocent person to suffer. Other family members continued to believe but the silence of God was interpreted as God being non-caring or even as punishing.

In this situation, and in hundreds of others I witnessed, people’s painful experience of life was outstripping their understanding of God. Their imagination of God could no

longer be contained in their experience of life. Their experience of life was shattering their understanding of God and there was nothing to replace it with. Many of them left the hospital resentful and bitter, and perhaps they still are.

Though hopefully we might be spared this kind of trauma, nonetheless, sooner or later each of us must face the same question even if in less dramatic circumstances. Life’s experiences keep pushing the boundaries of our images of God, keep forcing us to confront the images of God we have had in our life, keep testing their adequacy. And as our images of God are tested so is our understanding of prayer. For our practice of prayer flows directly from our imagination about God.

If we imagine God, even subtly, in mechanistic terms, as the divine operator, presiding in control over the universe and its laws, and who, by persuasion, can manipulate creation, then our prayer becomes one of continuous intercession and expectation, with either delight at the achieved results or resignation at the failure to achieve what we so desperately need. Even after years of Christian catechesis many of us can nostalgically hanker for this kind of God and moments of crisis hurl us back to entertain this conception of God.

## **The God whom we see revealed in Jesus is not powerful but powerless and vulnerable. We believe in a crucified God...**

But the God who is revealed to us in Jesus is not like this. This is the shocking thing for us – so shocking we struggle to ever fully acknowledge it. For in Jesus, our God is not powerful in the sense of being in control and having domination over all in such a way that he lives, remotely, on the precipice of intervention if only our calls are loud enough or sufficiently persistent to reach him.

Quite the opposite! The God whom we see revealed in Jesus is not powerful but powerless and vulnerable. We believe in a crucified God: not a God who is above us in our suffering and in our anguish but a God who is with us in our pain and torment.

I would like to say that I have come to believe the one answer we are given in our prayer – the single reply – is the image of the Crucified One. Or, as John Paul II

would say, “suffering love is the answer given to anxiety suffered.” This is a profound mystery that makes all the difference.

In sharing this once with a woman in the hospital, she replied, “Well, what good that to me? I feel so powerless and helpless. I need someone who has more power than me, who can deliver me from my helplessness. If God is as vulnerable as me, what hope do I have? I am just left where I am.”

To be honest I would have to answer yes – with this reply to our prayer we are left where we are in some ways. What has changed, though, is that in this extraordinary reply to our prayer we are no longer alone. An Other is with us in our suffering, One is with us in companionship and compassion. It is this that makes all the difference.

When we know we are not alone, when we know an Other is with us, *for* us, we experience our deepest dignity. In this dignity, we are given the courage to make those decisions we, ourselves, need to make. We are given the hope to realize that there is always another horizon, a new beginning even in death. We are given the inspiration to continue to go out in love. As Moltmann would explain, with this reply to our prayer God is no longer the remote force of destiny that we must call out upon but now God is now one with us in our suffering and so we are enabled to continue loving even in the midst of our suffering. It is this that makes all the difference to us and to our world.

So often our prayer can be a way of escaping the acceptance that life is unpredictable and, at times, even harsh. At times, our prayer can be an abdication of what should be our own responsibility, an avoidance of our own legitimate authorship of life.

The single reply of the Crucified One to our prayer disallows us those luxuries. It forces us back into life – as it is – and to what decisions and actions properly belong to us. But in the intimacy that we now have, all manner of things become possible.

Having said this, do I pray *for* anything? Of course I do! Prayer becomes the space in which I give voice to my hope and to my desires. This has never changed. It is the ‘to whom’ I express my deepest needs that has changed.

But what of miracles? What of the situation in which we have prayed so earnestly – and beyond reason something has actually changed positively for us?

I would like to make two comments

about this.

Firstly, I would not want to deny either this possibility nor its reality. The relationships which interpenetrate ourselves and our world are not all open to rational reflection and many remain intuited but not able for analysis. Yes, prayer can bring about what first seemed impossible.

Yet, secondly, here I would like to be somewhat controversial for I wonder if this has more to do with the power of our solidarity with each other than with a God who has the strings of creation at his disposal in a mechanistic kind of way. When someone falls sick or is in need there is within us an instinctive need to pray for this person. This is to be deeply respected and engaged. We ask others to pray for us when we are in need or others ask us to pray for them.

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### **Prayer becomes the space in which I give voice to my hope and to my desires.**

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I fully believe there is power in a community's prayer – and that community need not simply be one we see but also involve the communion of saints. There is strength in our solidarity with one another, living and dead. When we come together in our hope, I believe the strength of our bonds has an effect in ways that are not open to rational reflection.

When we do come together in this way, we do so, however, always before the Crucified One. The One to whom we so ardently express our hope remains the One who is with us in our pain and not above it. Prayer makes a difference because it grounds us in a Mystery that overturns all we ever thought of God and of ourselves and opens up for us a possibility that we never dared imagine.

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### **VATICAN II'S DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: SOME EXCERPTS**

*(The Second Vatican Council published sixteen major documents. Among them were three "declarations" – one on Christian education, one on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions and the third on religious freedom. Many obstacles were put in the way of this document even though discussed at the Council. The heart of the matter is the heart of Catalyst for Renewal's reason for existence: Conversation. The Catholic Church was not accus-*

*tomized to promoting conversation within its own structures, among its own faithful, let alone conversation with those "outside" the Church. Here the Council Fathers were being asked to affirm the Church in an entirely new stance. A commitment to conversation remains today one of the most urgent needs of the Catholic Church. Such a commitment necessarily includes a commitment to the Church's affirmation of the primacy of conscience. With regard to the latter issue, the two statements on conscience made by the Council are in this "Declaration on Religious Freedom" (#3) and in "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (#16 & #17). Excluding footnotes, the Declaration is just over 5000 words.)*

**From paragraph #2: "... the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his or her very nature."**

"It is in accordance with their dignity as persons--that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility--that all human beings should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth. However, people cannot discharge these obligations in a manner in keeping with their own nature unless they enjoy immunity from external coercion as well as psychological freedom. Therefore, the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his or her very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it, and the exercise of this right is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed."

**From paragraph #3: "... inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue ... we are bound to follow our consciences in order that we may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that we are not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to our consciences."**

"Further light is shed on the subject if one considers that the highest norm of human life is the divine law--eternal, objective and universal--whereby God orders, directs and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community by a plan conceived in wisdom and love. Human beings have been made by God to participate in

this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, we can come to perceive ever more fully the truth that is unchanging. Wherefore each of us has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious in order that we may with prudence form for ourselves right and true judgments of conscience, under use of all suitable means.

"Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and our social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which people explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth.

"Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that people are to adhere to it.

"On our part, we perceive and acknowledge the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all our activities we are bound to follow our consciences in order that we may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that we are not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to our consciences. Nor, on the other hand, are we to be restrained from acting in accordance with our consciences, especially in matters religious. The reason is that the exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts whereby human beings set the course of their lives directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind. (Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963)) The social nature of the human person, however, itself requires that we should give external expression to our internal acts of religion: that we should share with others in matters religious; that we should profess our religion in community. Injury, therefore, is done to the human person and to the very order established by God for human life, if the free exercise of religion is denied in society, provided just public order is observed."

**From paragraph #6: "... government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens ..."**

"The protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of man rank among the essential duties of government. (Cf. *Pacem in Terris*) Therefore government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means."

## Words for a Pilgrim People

*"You are the light of the world."*  
(Matthew 5:14)



*"Everyday life must itself become our prayer. But it can become prayer only through unselfishness and love. If we are willing and understanding disciples, we cannot find a better means of growing in spirituality than through our everyday life. There are the long monotonous hours of work, for which often no recognition is given, the continuous and painful struggle which receives little reward, disappointment and failure, adversity and misunderstanding. .... There are such things as physical discomfort, the inclemency of the elements, the friction of human contacts. Through these and a thousand other trials in which everyday life abounds, we can learn to become calm and unselfish, if we only understand these task-masters, mundane and yet providential. We must willingly accept them, rather than try to ward them off .... In this way, we can use everyday life to fight our selfishness, slowly but certainly, since the guidance showered upon us by God in daily life is always certain and sure. In this way, the love of God will grow of itself in our hearts, a love both calm and chaste. In everyday life we can mortify ourselves without vanity and without ostentation. Nobody will notice our efforts, and we ourselves will be scarcely aware of our mortification; yet, through the myriad occupations of our daily life, one defense after another will be thrown down, behind each of which our selfishness had entrenched itself. At last, when we have ceased to put up new defenses, when we have learnt to accept our precarious human situation and rely on the grace of God, we will notice suddenly and almost cheerfully, that those defenses were quite unnecessary. .... Through everyday life, we are taught that we become rich in giving, that we advance spiritually through holy resignation, that we are blessed in sacrifice and that we find love when we give love to others. Thus a person becomes unselfish and free. ....". (Karl Rahner, **On Prayer**, Paulist Press, 1958/68, 53-55.)*



## The Bible – Where is the light?

A central theme in the Gospels is "Jesus as the light". In Matthew 4:16, the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1 is fulfilled in Jesus: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." In Luke, Jesus is the rising sun who brings light to those in darkness (see Luke 1:78 & 2:32; see also, for example, Acts 26:23; 13:47 & 26:18; 1 Peter 2:9; Colossians 1:12 & Ephesians 5:8.) Each of the three Synoptic Gospels tells at least one story of Jesus healing the blind (see Mark 10:46-52 & 8:22-26; Matthew 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43).

Of the many uses of the metaphor of light, none is more delightful and evocative than that of John's story of Jesus healing the man who is born blind (see John 9:1-42 – the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year A). Here is the real "light of the world" (see John 1:6-9). Error is transfixed in his light like a rabbit in the glare of the spotlight: "Who sinned, this man or his parents ... ? ... Neither he nor his parents sinned" (v3). And the religious authorities complain: "That man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath" (v16). Talk about condemning yourself with your own words! There is no escaping the light. Why would you want to? Why would *I* want to?

The healing as told by John is an enlightenment. The man is enlightened by the action of Jesus Christ in him. The man speaks in simple and honest statements: "Yes, I am the one" (v10). "He put paste on my eyes, I washed and can see" (v15). This man speaks with confidence and without any egotism. His confidence comes from his experience of Jesus. He becomes a man of light and enlightenment in his world because of what Jesus has done.

And all this unfolds because "he saw a man who had been blind from birth" (v1). Jesus takes the initiative. Enlightenment is gift. It is also co-operation: "Go and wash in the pool of Siloam" (v7). And the medium is the earthy human reality: "He spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man ..." (v6). Being a follower of Jesus is living in expectation that we will one day be enlightened. In the normal course of events, apart from being pure grace, it will probably come in the form of spittle and dirt. Nothing too spectacular really. ■

## The Tradition – Letting the light out

Adrian van Kaam represents the tradition well when he writes: "Spiritual formation cannot be forced, only prepared for. Hence its means cannot be those of conquest, but only of facilitation and preparation." Sadly there is much evidence in our history to suggest that we have too often forgotten this truth. In the spiritual life, we tend to end where we begin. If we begin with self and what we must do for God, that is where will end. This is the willful, mastery approach, one that has more in common with Stoicism than the teachings of Jesus and what is on offer through Him. If, on the other hand, we begin with God and God's gracious love, we end in the endless Light and Life of the Trinity. We will know then, and only then, that although the emergence of the Light in our lives has not come without effort and indeed pain, it has come as pure grace.

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**"Spiritual formation cannot be forced, only prepared for. Hence its means cannot be those of conquest, but only of facilitation and preparation."**

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The 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century German Dominican, Meister Eckhart, is wise and blunt: "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." Eckhart indicates, quite rightly, that this process is one of emergence, not imposition. The gift of Light is given. Our task is to live in such a way that the Light might get out. We must get out of the way, says Eckhart, and "let God be God in us." Typically, the Light shines in our lives without our permission or perception. R S Thomas has a lovely little poem called "Counterpoint." It sums up beautifully the movement of grace and the emergence of the Light in our lives: "When we are weak, we are/ Strong. When our eyes close/ On the world, then somewhere/ Within us the bush/ Burns. When we are poor/ And aware of the inadequacy/ Of our table, it is to that/ Uninvited the guest comes." ■

# Bulletin Board

## 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](mailto:terry_catalyst@hotmail.com)

<http://groups.msn.com/SpiritualityinthePubNSWandACT> – 7.30-9.00pm unless specified:

° **Albury** New Albury Hotel, Kiewa St **Survival Today** April 12 "Hope & Meaning" Fr Terence Mahedy & Gail Whiteford (Info: Joan 6021 6880).

° **Batemans Bay** Mariners Hotel June "Where is God in Suicide?" Neil Harrigan & tba (Info: Viviane 4471 1857).

° **Bowral** The Grand Bar and Brasserie (Info: Julian 4861 4649).

° **Campbelltown** Campbelltown Catholic Club March 9 "My Journey in Faith" Fr Frank Fletcher & Pastor Graham Charlesworth (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

° **Engadine** – Engadine RSL March 16 "Our Church – Our Future" Fr John Crothers & Jane McDonald (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

° **Five Dock** The Illinois Hotel, Cnr Paramatta Rd & Arlington St **A Just Society** March 30 "Spirituality of Justice" Fr Michael Whelan sm (Info: Susanna 9571 7769).

° **Goulburn** Soldiers Club **Love your Neighbour as yourself** March 8 "Money, Materialism & Meaning" Clive Hamilton & Francis Sullivan (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

° **Jamberoo** The Jamberoo Hotel March 14 "Muslims & Christians – Can we move forward together" Trish Madigan & Dr Munir Hussain (Info: Gabrielle 4232 2735).

° **Kincumber** The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive **From Small Beginnings...** April 5 "Light in the Darkness" Rev Dr Geoffrey Lilburne & Rev Dr Julia Perry (Info: Clair 4333 7117 or Sue 4334 3174).

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

° **Newport** – Newport Arms Hotel March 10 "Powerless in a Free Society" Phil Glendenning & Marea Donovan (Info: Terry 9973 1192).

° **Northern Sydney** Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney March 21 "The Prodigal Son – Setting the Scene" Michael Whelan sm & Antoinette Collins (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

° **Paddington** Bellevue Hotel April 6 "Spaces, Places & Faces" Bevan Cassady & Marie Kennedy rscj (Info: Marea 9387 152).

° **Penrith** Golf Club April 27 "Realising the vision & living the reality: SIP Ten

years on" Bishop Geoff Robinson & Ruth Glover (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

° **Rouse Hill** The Mean Fiddler on Windsor Rd March 8 "Women of Spirit" Sr Michelle Connolly & Carolyn Thornley (Info: Maria 9680 2220 (H)).

° **St George Kings Head Tavern** South Hurstville March 23 "Awe & Wonder – God is Everywhere" Paul Durkin & Trish Hindmarsh (Info: Ken 9580 1183).

° **Waitara** – The Blue Gum Hotel **"I have a dream. I have a dream today..?"** March 16 Fr Michael Whelan sm & Lois Finn (Info: Carmel 9477 4824).

### VIC:

° **Alphington** Tower Hotel, **Marketing Jesus** 8pm-9.30pm April 13 "The Theology of Rene Girard" Fr Kevin Lenehan (Info: Susie 9859 6184).

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

° **Bendigo** Foundry Arms Hotel 8pm-9.30pm March 23 "Who is my Neighbour?" Brenda Keenan & Donna Widdicombe (Info: Helen 0409 212 009).

° **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm March 15 "Injustice & Spirituality" Michelle Gierick (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

° **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel March 16 "Gospel Women – believing, loving, proclaiming" Sr Catherine McCahill (Info: Clare 5236 2091).

° **Darebin** Olympic Hotel, Cnr Bell & Albert Streets, Preston March 9 "The Human Person struggling with contradictions" Frank Little & Mary Conlan (Info: Gordon 9895 5836 & Margaret 9374 1844).

° **Echuca** Bar at the Star Hotel (Info: Carmel 5482 1342).

° **Fitzroy** Pumphouse Hotel, 128 Nicholson St, 8pm-9.30pm April 5 (note change to Tuesday!) tba (Info: Denise 9816 3001).

° **Goulburn Valley** Terminus Hotel (Shepparton) 7.30pm-9pm (Info: Kerry 0408 579 904).

° **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 April 27 "The Gift of speaking freely" Terry Kean, Clare Griffin & Michael Wood (Info: Kevin 9776 2705).

° **Western** Victoria on Hyde, Yarraville March 8 "Spirituality without Religion?" John Stuart & Rose Marie Prosser 7.30pm (Info: Anne 9312 3595).

° **Woodend** Holgate Brewhouse-Keatings

Hotel (Info: Marg 5429 5907).

### Other States

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

° **Hobart North** – **Health of Body, Mind & Spirit** Moonah Café Bar & Bistro (Info: Mary-Anne 6228 6000).

° **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 **Relationships in the Contemporary World** April 26 7.30-9.10pm (Info: Deborah 0419 939 864).

° **Adelaide (SA)** Criterion Hotel, 137 King William Street (Info: Michelle 8278 6353).

° **Mylor (SA)** Warrawong Earth Sanctuary, Stock Rd (Info: Gerald 8388 5957).

### Other Matters and Events

° **St Mary's Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, Prayer weekends March 4-6, 11-13, 18-20; Guided retreats 4-10, 11-17 (MSC Spirituality), 20-26 (Holy Week); Directed retreat 18-26; April 1-3 Mid-years spirituality; 8-14 Guided retreat; 15-23 Directed retreat, (Info: 02 4630 9159).

° **Mount St Benedict Centre** Pennant Hills March 10-16 "Season of Hope" with Yvonne Parker sgs; March 21 – 27 "From Darkness to Light" with Monica Brown & Hilary Musgrave (Info: 9484 6208).

° **Catholic Institute of Sydney** Certificate IV course Parish Ministry & Pastoral Liturgy March 5-6, April 30-May 1, May 28-29; Edith Stein "Knowledge & Faith" with Gerald Gleeson April 27, May 4, May 11, May 18, June 1 (Info: 9752 9500).

° **Intensive Journal Workshop** April 9-10 Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney (Info: Kate 8912 4812).

° **The Jamberoo SIP Committee & the Council of Christians and Jews** in promoting Interfaith Dialogue invite you to a Demonstration Passover Seder on March 31, 7.30pm at St Matthew's Church Hall, Jamberoo with Rabbi Richard Lampert. Entry by donation. (Info: Gabrielle 4232 2735).

### AQUINAS ACADEMY Diamond Jubilee 1945-2005

We are keen to contact all those who have had any association with Aquinas Academy over the last 60 years.  
**Please call Sandra on 02 9247 4651**  
Email: [sandra@aquinas-academy.com](mailto:sandra@aquinas-academy.com)

## Recommended

Helen Garner, *Joe Cinque's Consolation: A True Story of Death, Grief and the Law*, Picador, 2004, 329 pages, pb, \$30.

This is a murder mystery, chillingly and brilliantly told. The sad thing is, it is a true story. Joe Cinque was a young man, whose girlfriend, Anu Singh, a law student, injected him with lethal doses of Rohypnol and heroin in Canberra in 1997. A mentally disturbed young woman, Singh had talked about her plans with a friend and fellow law student, Madhavi Rao, who obtained the Rohypnol for her. They invited other students to a "murder-suicide party" although none seemed to take Singh's threat seriously. Singh and Rao were charged with murder among other offences. Singh was acquitted of murder on the ground of diminished responsibility but convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to ten years with four years non-parole. Rao was found not guilty on all charges. The author writes well. She is also insightful. This book raises serious questions about our culture and the limits of the law, about psychopathology and forgiveness, about personal responsibility and the nature of evil. Garner suggests a serious challenge for us all when she says of Singh, having read some of her letters from the lockup: "She seemed to lack a language deep enough for the trouble she was in, a language fit for despair." Garner forces us to ask: how do we deal with "wickedness" in the light of our inability to determine accountability? What does "justice" mean when it is confined to matters of law and court processes? Garner gives us much to think about. Highly recommended!

Chris McGillion, *The Chosen Ones: The Politics of Salvation in the Anglican Church*, Allen & Unwin, 2005, 248 pages, pb, index, endnotes, \$29.95.

Chris McGillion has followed up *A Long Way From Rome* – a series of reflections on the Catholic Church in Australia – with *The Chosen Ones* – an extended essay on the Anglican Church in Sydney. The latter book is not just for Anglicans. Catholics and others should read it carefully. There is no finger-pointing here, no cynicism, cheap shots or gloating. This is a substantial book, one in which McGillion sustains an even-handed and insightful exploration of the Anglican Church in Sydney, particularly under the influence of Archbishop Peter Jensen and his supporters. It plots a significant instance of a worldwide phenomenon: the emergence of a new wave of conservatism in religion and politics. This conservatism has some typical characteristics. One of those characteristics is a difficulty in being genuinely open to other possibilities. McGillion cites the "low priority (given) to ecumenism" in the Sydney Anglican Church. Readers are forced to ask questions of their own attitudes to "others" and "difference." It is a crucial pointer to the maturity – or lack of maturity – of our own commitment. *The Chosen Ones* also reminds us that the 16<sup>th</sup> century did not end in 1600. Most will be saddened by that thought. If it does nothing more than urge us to focus again, together, on the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, this book will have achieved much. Chris McGillion tells a salutary tale with good grace.

Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Koran*, Other Press, 2003, 117 pages, hardcover, \$25 from Aquinas Academy. Tel: 02 9247 4651.

This beautifully presented little book contains two short stories. The first "Monsieur Ibrahim and the Flowers of the Koran" – is very good, the second – "Oscar and the Lady in Pink" – is a gem. Both are about little boys. In the first, a Jewish boy, Momo, living in Paris, is abandoned by his family. The mother leaves the father and eventually the father commits suicide. Momo is befriended, and eventually adopted, by an old Muslim man who runs the local corner store. Significantly, the old Muslim's name is Ibrahim. The story is tragic and comic. At no point does it lose its grasp on reality. It is the sort of story Jesus might have told had He been living today. The second story is about Oscar, a young boy in hospital, dying of leukaemia. Oscar writes to God, "though I don't even think you exist." His family comes to visit from time to time, but clearly he is a burden to them. He meets Mamie-Rose, "a good buddy of (God's) already." Mamie-Rose is "the oldest of all the ladies who wear pink and who come from the outside to spend time with the children who're sick." Oscar's letters take the reader on a journey that is at once fanciful and utterly real, tragic and comic, sad and profoundly hope-filled. These two stories belong to that rare genre of literature that has almost no age limit. Momo and Oscar bear within themselves so much that we instantly recognise as common to us all. An excellent gift for anyone!

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### **DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

It will be forty years this year since the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*, December 7, 1965): "The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power" (1). "This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits" (2). The document represent a radical development of Catholic teaching. "Error has no rights" had been a guiding principle for some 1500 years. People had been variously constrained, tortured, even executed under that principle. The concept of "religious freedom" was not seriously contemplated until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The late John Courtney Murray SJ probably did more than any other Catholic thinker to promote this development of consciousness within the Catholic Church, though he himself argued that this consciousness had been developing through the writings of Popes Leo XII and Pius XII. *Dignitatis Humanae* focuses on the dignity of the human person and the rights arising from that, including the right to be in error. With a few minor exceptions, this document reads with extraordinary freshness and vitality to this day. It is well worth re-reading.

Michael Whelan SM