



THE MIX



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Our Say – What's in a name?

When Catalyst for Renewal chose to promote conversation in 1994, the idea of focusing on conversation was not common. Yes, we used the word as we had always used it. But it was used interchangeably with words like talk, discussion and even debate and argument.

There has been a shift. Joan Kirner, in a recent interview with Fran Kelly on Radio National (March 10 2006), on at least five occasions urged the leaders of the Labor Party to “have a conversation” in order to stop the blood-letting and promote renewal within the Party. Institutions like *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the BBC are inviting people to “join the conversation.”

This is probably both bad news and good news. C S Lewis once observed that nothing will destroy the power and usefulness of a word more effectively than popularity. The word conversation has become popular and that may be bad news! It is now doubly important that we reflect carefully on what we mean when we speak of

conversation. Indeed, it will also be important to reflect on what others mean when they speak of conversation.

The good news, however, may be that more and more people are beginning to appreciate the importance of conversation.

One of the tasks we have set ourselves in Catalyst is to continue probing the experience of conversation. What is it? What makes for good conversation? Why might it fail? Some factors struck us immediately. For example, conversation assumes a willingness and ability to listen. It also assumes, at least implicitly, the belief that it is worth the effort. Some people are willing and able to listen, others are not. Some believe it is worth the effort, others do not.

We also came to see very quickly that conversation is primarily about process, rather than content. This is a difficult lesson for many of us to learn. We like our agenda to win! Good conversation, of

course, typically has good content. But if the content is the primary focus, it is more likely to be a debate or an argument.

In the concrete, the experience of promoting conversation as a way to renewal, has made us aware of just how transforming conversation can in fact be. When people of good will encounter each other in genuine conversation – as distinct from mere talk, discussion, debate or argument – the outcomes can be very positive.

This has prompted us to reflect, furthermore, on the connection between conversation and conversion. Etymologically the words are linked. However, our experience inclines us to believe the link is more than merely etymological.

The process of conversion actually lies at the heart of conversation. There can be no genuine conversation where there is no desire for conversion or at least the openness for it. Conversation becomes conversion when we commit ourselves to personal transformation through the encounter with the other. ■

This journal is one of the works of
Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated.

THE HUMAN FACE

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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)

The Patrons are:

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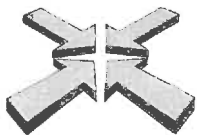
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The Four Arrows and the Cross symbolise diversity giving rise to communion in and through the Paschal Mystery. Those who are diverse by nature and culture, in and through Christ find life-giving unity.

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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My name is Ross Martin. I was born in Brisbane into a middle class family. Mum and Dad both held core Christian values, however the family were not church-goers. My parents had witnessed ugly incidents associated with "religious sectarianism" while growing up in Australia of the 20's and 30's.

My school life in various non-denominational schools, offered no RE exposure. However, organized religion still managed to touch my school life. One memorable incident was when I was about 13, and my best friend Michael asked me to his "mitzvah" party. Both Michael and I were very surprised when his invitation was subsequently vetoed by his Dad – Michael was told that "non-Jews cannot participate".

Michael and I remained school friends, and we are still in periodic contact some 40 years later. However, this "tribal" behavior, set in the context of my parents' wariness of organized religion, left its mark on me – I became even more suspicious of joining any form of organized religion.

Luckily, my life kept throwing up further "faith-catching-opportunities" for me. By sheer good luck, a well-churched catholic girl, my future wife Mary, came into my un-churched life. Mary had a deep love of Jesus which (then and now) shone through her every action, and had a deep loyalty to the Catholic Church, a loyalty that insisted she be married in the local parish church. I was quietly pleased to be getting married in a church (Catholic or otherwise) – and Mary and her family were clearly pleased that I was happy with a Catholic wedding ceremony – so the first up-close-and-personal Ross/church contact was a pleasant experience for both the Church and me.

However, it was the "dark" parts of the Mary/Church relationship that had the biggest bearing on my initiation into the catholic faith.

As a "cradle catholic" growing up in the 50's and 60's, Mary had been taught long lists of sins and I quickly realized this brought some dangerous undercurrents.

Following our marriage, about once a month, Mary would grapple with the dilemma of whether or not she should attend the Sunday mass. At these times, the church-loyalty forces within Mary would go to "war" with her "burden of sin" forces. For many months, the church-loyalty forces lost out to the burden-of-sin forces.

In the end, I got sufficiently annoyed that I announced I would be going to the Catholic service next Sunday, and insisted Mary come along with me. This is where the story switches away from Mary –

happy story ending for Mary who got back into regular relationship with the church – and the story becomes a most unexpected starting point toward my initiation to the faith.

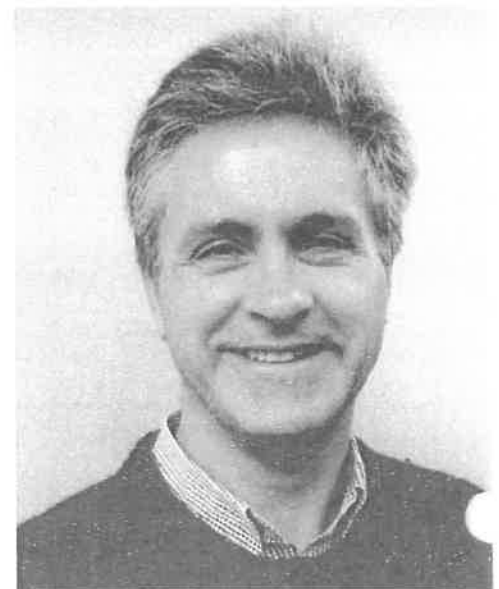
To my surprise, I found I was getting a lot out of these weekly mass attendances. I found the structures of the mass, and the rhythm of the mass, very appealing – it both felt right and the weekly gospel readings and homilies made a lot of sense.

Our parish was greatly blessed with an excellent homilist, Fr Hilton Roberts. Over a period of a year or so, somehow Hilton got inside my brain with his weekly homilies, and my "search for meaning" began in earnest. I wanted to know more of what Fr Hilton knew.

In due course, I was asked to join an RCIA program. I was ambivalent (that old suspicion of formalized religion), but Mary insisted (thank you Mary) and I enrolled. Once again, my preconceptions were challenged big time. I started to find out more about the historical Jesus and his life. And there it was ... the people Jesus had the most problem with were the leading representatives of organized religion. I knew then that I was hooked.

So here I am – 25 years into the faith and still loving it. One thing I particularly love is the few minutes of shared prayer that my wife and I have each morning before I head off to my work. It is one of the constant highlights of my day – a shared time, a time of great peace and it helps put the coming day into a Catholic context.

Thank you church for providing the framework, thank you Mary, priests, religious and fellow parishioners, thank you Holy Spirit, thank you one and all.



Ross Martin

Your Say – Islam and Christianity: common beliefs

Kerri Hashmi

Kerri Hashmi is an Australian Muslim. She has been Muslim for 23 years and is a primary school teacher, ex diplomat, the author of a children's book, a naturopath, and she frequently speaks about Islam to groups, schools and public gatherings. The following is an adaptation of an address given by Kerri to the Goulburn SIP.

Islam, Christianity and Judaism share a common belief in the same God. He is worshipped by all of us, but He is known by different names in different languages, *Allah* in Arabic. We Muslims believe that there is only one God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, who sent His message to mankind through many different prophets on many different occasions. Among those prophets were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon them all), as well as many others whose stories are told both in the Old Testament and the Holy Quran. In the Holy Quran, God states:

"The same religion have We
Established for you as that
Which We enjoined on Noah -
which We have sent
— inspiration to thee —
And that which We enjoined
On Abraham, Moses, and Jesus:
Namely, that ye should remain
Steadfast in Religion, and make
No divisions therein" (42,13)

God teaches Muslims in the Quran that there will be a Judgement Day when the world is destroyed, and on that day each individual will have their good deeds measured against their sins. There is life after death. Each person will be rewarded with Heaven or punished with Hell, as deserved, according to how he or she has lived.

The way we earn our reward in Heaven is also similar, as it is in most of the world's religions. The concept of "goodness" is universal, and includes qualities of caring for others, justice, compassion, truthfulness, honesty, generosity, patience, chastity and forgiveness, among others.

There is no redeemer in Islam. A Muslim is judged on his or her own faith, character and actions. There also is no priesthood which intercedes between a person and God. God alone knows what each person has done, or intended. When individuals commit sins, they should sincerely repent and seek forgiveness directly from God, who is repeatedly described as being "All forgiving, Most merciful."

Christianity and Islam recognise the same deeds as being sins. The ten commandments, as given to Moses, are valid for Muslims too. The killing of innocents, cruelty to others and committing suicide are all forbidden. Muslim dietary law sticks fairly closely to the law of Moses; pig meat is forbidden, so also is alcohol. Usury is forbidden to Muslims, as is gambling and greed is a sin.

The word "*Islam*" comes from the Arabic word "*salaam*" meaning "peace", and strictly speaking "*Islam*" means "entering into peace". Muslims are taught that by submitting ourselves to the Will of God, we can find peace and contentment. All the other creatures of this world, and infants, exist according to the Will of God. Only mankind, who has free will, can choose whether or not to live a good life in accordance with God's Will.

While we worship the same God, our concept of God differs, however. In Islam, God is absolutely One and indivisible. There is no Trinity, nor is God anthropomorphic. He is neither male nor female and is an entity well beyond our understanding. This is why Muslims are forbidden to make any images of God. It is said that understanding the following chapter of the Quran is pivotal to understanding Islam:

"Say, He is Allah, the One
Allah is Eternal and Absolute
He begetteth not
Nor is He begotten
And there is none like unto Him." (Surah 112)

The Quran is full of many beautiful descriptions of God, and Muslims are encouraged to know God through His works. As well as being the Author of all Creation and the force which put into effect all the scientific laws, God is also deeply personal and "*is nearer to you than your jugular vein.*"

Islam teaches that Jesus was a messenger of God, a prophet, but not the son of God, nor God himself. The Quran agrees with Christian teaching however in confirming that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived, that Jesus performed many miracles and that he will return on the Last Day to help God judge mankind. Muslims hold Jesus in great regard.

Muhammad, however, was the last prophet. God gave His message to Muhammad in the Holy Quran, which was recited to him by the Angel Gabriel. The Quran is believed to be the final message of God to mankind. Muhammad himself was

an outstanding individual, whom Muslims hold in the highest respect. We do not worship him, however; he was an ordinary man with a normal birth and death.

Muslims believe that life is a test for us. Whether we live in poverty or wealth, whether we suffer losses in our lives or live in comfort, whatever the circumstances of our lives, we should still submit to God. Islam has no concept of the thought "if God exists, why does He let bad things happen?" Our reward comes in Heaven and not this life.

Islam does not condone asceticism, celibacy or life as a monk. The challenge in Islam is to live a normal life, with family and work, in accordance with the values that our religion has taught us. The success or failure of our lives is not judged by the success of our career or the amount of money or fame we acquire, but our kindness and care for others, and faith in God.

Islam also teaches the absolute equality of all individuals before God. Be we female or male, black or white, Arab or non-Arab, rich or poor, and speaking whichever language, God judges us not on the circumstances of our lives, but on our faith, deeds and intentions.

These are the basic beliefs of the religion of Islam. There are over a billion Muslims practising Islam worldwide, and there are very many local and cultural variations in how it is practised. Muslims in Australia come from over fifty different countries and are hugely diverse, but do share the beliefs outlined above in common. Any understanding of Islam needs to start with these points.

Muslims and Christians share much, and we should be celebrating what we have in common. ■

O Mystery

*Slow me down
Turn me round
Love Profound
Still my heart
Bring me round
Love Profound
Anchor me down
You are Ground
Love Profound
Gentle silence abound
Perfect Sound
Love Profound*

Peter Devenish-Meares

Essay – Meeting the resurrected Christ

David Ranson

This is most of the text of Fr David Ranson's talk at the Aquinas Academy/Catalyst for Renewal Reflection Morning, March 19 2005.

The Resurrection is a topic not without a little complexity and dare one say, even danger! Oddly, public addresses on such a central theme in our Christian life can be surrounded by an unfortunate fear: the fear of misinterpretation, the fear of not sustaining sufficient orthodoxy.

Yet whatever the danger in an open discussion on this theme, the topic demands attention for it constitutes our very identity as Christians. And further to this, as disciples of the Risen Christ, we should be both able and ready to offer a personal account of what the Resurrection signifies. Would it not appear odd indeed that when it came to the cornerstone belief in our faith that all we could offer was a muted response? On such a pivotal belief we need to take the scriptural admonition to heart:

“ . . . and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have. (1 Pet3:15)

I say that the Resurrection is the cornerstone belief. "If Christ has not risen from the dead our faith is in vain," as St. Paul declares.

If there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself cannot have been raised, and if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is useless and your believing is useless (1 Cor 15:14f)

The Christian is the one who believes that Jesus, the one from Nazareth, has risen from the dead. This affirmation is the irrevocable foundation of Christian existence.

But what does this mean? And how are we to unpack the affirmation, beyond the repetition of theological cliché, in such a way that its promise and potential can be enjoyed in our own time, and our own place? How can we understand this affirmation such that our celebration of Easter becomes a profound experience of both memory and imagination?

All this was brought home to me late last year in a sustained exchange with a friend about the Resurrection. How is it to be understood? Is it to be grasped literally or mythologically/physically or spiritually/historically or symbolically?

My friend, at the time, wanted to argue for an exclusively symbolic reading. The resurrection accounts are not literal he demanded but “entirely spiritual in nature. It is a fantasy to think that Jesus rose physi-

cally from the dead. I for one,” he pronounced, “would have no difficulties if the bones of Jesus were discovered today.”

How many of us would be disturbed by the discovery of Jesus' bones? Hypothetically, would we go on living and worshipping just the same, continuing to be inspired by Jesus' teaching and Christian principles but largely undisturbed? Would this not reveal that, though we consider Jesus to be a profoundly significant ethical master, we did not determine his significance from the perspective of his divinity?

I am happy to admit, for me, such an archaeological discovery would shatter my Christian identity for I do believe in the Resurrection as both an historical and a physical event whilst at the same time drawing from its deeply symbolic and spiritual dimension.

To hold one without the other, of course, is to open our interpretation of the Resurrection to distortion.

Of course, it needs to be maintained right from the outset that resurrection is not resuscitation. We are not those who believe in resuscitation from the dead but in resurrection. The gospel texts are clear about this in so far as they present a dawning recognition of the resurrected Christ. So we understand that resurrection is a more complex reality. Yet its more complex reality does not thereby remove its bodily, physical reality. The gospel texts are likewise clear about this in the way they present the Resurrected Christ as one seen and touched.

The gospel texts assert, precisely in their ambiguity, that the Resurrected Christ remains incarnate, albeit in a new way.

Christ lives and bodily, though the body of Christ is not an earthly one – as yours and mine – but a sacramental one. Nonetheless, we touch the Risen Christ not simply in a spiritual – or subjective way – but, in a physical way – albeit sacramentally. The body of the Risen Christ is the physical reality of the community of his disciples, the Church – sacrament of the Risen Christ. And the life of the Risen Christ is touched and enjoyed in the very physicality of the sacramental life.

The Church and the sacramental life are therefore intrinsic to an affirmation of the Resurrection. To believe in the Resurrection is, at the same time, to believe in the Church and in its sacramental life. We touch the risen Christ in the Church and in its sacraments. We therefore cannot have a deepening belief in the Resurrection without a growing appreciation of the Church and the sacramental life.

The great sacramental theologian Chauvet, puts it profoundly this way:

The Absent One is present in his ‘sacrament’ which is the Church: the Church rereading the Scriptures with him in mind, the Church repeating his gestures in memory of him, the Church living the sharing between brothers and sisters in his name. It is in these forms of witness by the Church that Jesus takes on a body and allows himself to be encountered.

Chauvet goes on to say very significantly, that it is precisely in the integration of these three elements in which we touch the risen Christ. Where we try to capture him in only one of the three we end with an “illusory and fatal capture of the Living One.”

Herein, however, lies the problem. For we know that the experience of both Church and sacramental celebration is an ambiguous one.

This is, one might be so bold to suggest, the scandal of the Resurrection: the Risen Christ incarnates, enfleshes in an historical reality that can be experienced with such ambiguity.

This scandal can be too confronting for those who want a Risen Christ presented in an immediate, . . . ‘unblemished’ way. If we want to touch the Risen Christ we must be prepared to confront an all too human reality: the present community of disciples, the Church. Again, the gospel texts are clear: the Risen Christ remains the Crucified One, the Wounded One.

We can experience the Risen Christ in a number of ways, personally and uniquely but we can do so only by virtue of the existence of the Church. The Church remains the *a priori* foundation for the possibility of our encountering the Risen Christ. Such a route cannot be ‘by-passed’ – even though, in our own personal experience, the Church may not seem to be particularly present in any immediate way. Chauvet again:

faith has a body, it adheres to a body. . . . divine Providence, by a wise pedagogy, has made available to human nature which cannot accede to the intelligible without passing through the sensible . . . one stumbles then, on the sacrament, as one stumbles on the body, as one stumbles on the institution, as one stumbles on the letter of the Scriptures – if at least one respects in its historical and empirical materiality. One stumbles against these because one harbours a nostalgia for an ideal and immediate presence to oneself, to others and to God. Now in forcing us back to our corporality the sacraments shatter such dreams . . . They thus indicate to us that it is in the most banal empirical details – of a history, an institution, a world, and finally, a body – that what is most ‘true’ in our faith thrives.

This, indeed, can be a difficult word for those of us who may have personally experienced the Church, institutionally, not as a conduit for a discovery of the Risen Christ but rather as an obstacle. Yet, theologically, this stumbling, stuttering, motley group of people, full of idiosyncrasy, vulnerability and ambiguity remains the sacrament of the Risen One. Thus, our desire to greet the Risen One meets a challenge: can we love the Church in all its paradox?

This paradox has been powerfully expressed in a number of ways. Bishop Geoff Robinson once declared "Nothing is more beautiful, nor more ugly than the Catholic Church." The great social reformer of the 20th century, Dorothy Day, wrote "The Church is a whore, and she is my mother." Such declarations can be shocking. They are meant to shock us, jolting us from the illusion that the Risen Christ meets us without ambiguity.

Belief in the Resurrection thus entails belief in the Church. To deepen our sense of the Resurrected One let us therefore pray for a deepening love of the Church.

In assuming this social foundation we are thus free to ponder more personally the way in which the paschal mystery unfolds in our life – the journey from death to life. We meet the Risen Christ in the physicality of the Church and its sacramental life. Yet, encounter is always an invitation to move from death to life.

How is death already present in our life? It is present in all those deathly experiences: the experiences which numb us, paralyse us, render us inert, passive, only half-living, half-dead. our fears, our angers, our bitterness and resentments, our cynicism. Christ stands before us and calls us out of death into life. He calls us out of the experience of fear into its opposite which is love, out of bitterness into forgiveness, from despair into hope, from shame into dignity

As we move from those experiences which typify death in our life to their opposite then we are caught up into the paschal movement disclosed to us most fully in the story of Jesus Christ himself.

The New Testament and the Christian tradition imagine this paschal movement, the movement from death to life, in a number of ways. In the gospels themselves, the movement is imagined as the movement from darkness to light (St. Paul), from hardness of heart to receptivity, (the gospels) from slumber to wakefulness, from to love (St. John)

In the Christian tradition the same movement is spoken of in slightly other ways: the movement from unlikeness to God to the likeness of God (Augustine) or

in more recent writers (Merton) for example, from the false self to the true self

But there is, I believe, a way of imagining the paschal movement that lies underneath all these various expressions, or perhaps more accurately lies at the very heart of them.

However the side of 'death' is imagined, whether it be in fear, bitterness, resentment, despair, darkness and so forth the end result of that side for us is isolation and fragmentation. Fear, bitterness, despair all work to isolate us, to marginalise us, to estrange us, to keep us locked up in the dark room of only ourselves. And, the more isolated we are in life, the more fragmented we become, the less whole we experience ourselves.

The risen Christ calls us out of isolation. The risen Christ calls us into the experience of communion, of relationship. This experience of communion, of hospitality, of relationship is the fruit of all those things which are characteristic of life in the paschal mystery: love, hope, forgiveness. Love, hope, forgiveness, for example, all create a new and profound openness in our life, a capacity to be with others, and to be for others. They bring us into a deeper sense of relationship with others. The more related we are, the more whole we experience ourselves, the less fragmented we experience ourselves.

Perhaps, then, one of the principal ways in which the paschal movement is imagined is, precisely as this movement from isolation to community, and the transformation of fragmentation into wholeness that such a movement occasions.

As Christians, as disciples of the risen Christ, we are those who have a responsibility to enable this paschal movement to occur in our world. We are those who are called to identify the places of isolation, and in, with and through the light of Christ, to transform these places into ones of community and of new relationship.

Where and how do people experience isolation today? Where and how are people marginalised today? Who are those who are isolated in my own family, my own community, our own society? Where do I experience a sense of isolation in my own life? Where does fragmentation exist awaiting a new sense of wholeness and integration?

These are the questions placed before us in an awareness of the Risen Christ who calls us into the mystery of life out of death.

We struggle to resolve these questions not just personally but also socially, as Church. The Church becomes, therefore, not just a bearer of Resurrected Life sacramentally, but also pastorally.

In his book, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, Robert

Schreier outlines the way in which Christian communities can grow in their capacity to be pastoral bearers of resurrected life. He takes the gospel text of John 21 to illustrate this. It is the familiar scene of Jesus meeting his disciples by the sea as they fish. The story begins in a climate of rupture, in an experience of alienation and fragmentation. In their disenchantment with all that has occurred through the apparent failure of Jesus, the disciples are attempting to return to the normalcy of their life but without success. They try to fish but nothing works. They continue to carry the heavy burdens of the past.

But it is here where the Resurrected Christ meets them. Such a stance of Jesus suggests, according to Schreier, that the ministry of resurrected life begins with our readiness to be available to people where they are, to journey with them in whatever place of hurt and exclusion they may be experiencing. This kind of accompaniment is marked by a listening patience that allows the other to reveal that which is a burden even when the person might not be articulate about what that burden is and why it weighs so heavily.

But the Resurrected One doesn't simply meet the disciples. He goes much further. He cooks breakfast for the disciples. ... This hospitality carries with it a sense of both graciousness and spaciousness – an abundance that will act in time to invite a new way of thinking about possibilities.

The hospitality that the Risen Jesus extends creates a new space in which Jesus can question Peter. The questions that Jesus poses, (thrice asking, "Do you love me?") act to re-connect Peter to himself and his story. They provide Peter with the space by which a confession can be given – albeit implicitly in this particular story. But importantly, such a confession in this case, recalls the past in such a way as that it might be remembered in a new way. After each confession of Peter, Jesus replies, "Feed my sheep."

The confession, enabled by the space Jesus creates, ends the isolation experienced by Peter and suggests a previously unimagined possibility. In reconnecting Peter to the whole story, Peter is thus commissioned in a new way.

Reconciliation is, thus, the fruit of resurrection: it is most deeply enabled when we believe in the power of life over death, in the power of embrace over exclusion, in the power of hospitality over isolation.

In the Church and in our ministry of reconciliation we touch the Risen Christ. ■

Fr David Ranson is a priest of the Broken Bay Diocese and he lectures in Spirituality at the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

The Bible – The story of the passion

Words for a Pilgrim People

“And they led him out to crucify him.” (Mark 15:20)

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“The real miracle of Christ’s death resides precisely in this: death, which can be experienced only as the advent of emptiness, as the dead-end of sin, as the darkness of eternal night ..., and which could be suffered, even by Christ himself, only as a state of being abandoned by God, now, through being embraced by the obedient yes of the Son, while losing nothing of the horror of divine abandonment native to death, is transformed into something completely different: into the advent of God in the midst of that empty loneliness, into the manifestation of a complete, obedient surrender of the whole person to the Holy God at the very moment when the person seems lost and far removed from him The trinity of Faith, Hope and Charity makes death itself the highest act of believing, hoping, loving, the very death which seems to be absolute darkness, despair, coldness itself.” (Karl Rahner, **The Theology of Death**, Herder and Herder, 1961, 78-79.)

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“All the ends of the earth, all the kingdoms of the world would be of no profit to me; so far as I am concerned, to die in Jesus Christ is better than to be monarch of earth’s widest bounds. He who died for us is all that I seek. He who rose again for us is my whole desire. The pangs of birth are upon me; ... for only when I come thither shall I be truly a man. Leave me to imitate the passion of my God.” (St Ignatius of Antioch, **Letter to the Romans**, 6, in Maxwell Staniforth, translator, *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, Penguin Books, 1968, 105. See also: “What, then, would anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life?” (Matthew 16:26); “If God is for us, who can be against us? Since he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for the sake of all of us, then can we not expect that with him he will freely give us all his gifts?” (Romans 8:31-32)

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Holy Week opens with the proclamation of the Passion. This year it is taken from the Gospel of Mark (14:1-15:47). The significance of the title should not escape us. The word Passion comes from the Latin root, *pati* meaning “to suffer” or “undergo.” It is related to other English words such as “patient” and “passive.” And when we are “passionate” about something, we are, as it were, taken hold of and driven or led by deep feelings. When you read the Passion narrative, listen to the number of times Jesus is spoken of as object: He is “abandoned,” He is “kissed,” He is “handed over,” He is “led,” He is “crucified.” Then there is the ultimate moment of this Passion: “(Pilate) granted the corpse to Joseph.”

This language points to immense desolation. A slow and degrading journey into nothingness is summed up in Jesus’ last words, the Aramaic words introducing Psalm 22, the prayer of the righteous man who suffers: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

We should linger over the implications of this, if we have the courage to do so. And we linger, not because we like pain but because the pain is still with us. It is the pain of abandonment and loneliness, the pain of the world when nothing makes sense, the pain of God’s absence. Holy Saturday is therefore a most extraordinary day in the life of the community. We dare to take time to acknowledge that we mostly live by fictions, that our lives are thin veneers of pretence for the most part, beneath which pretence is an abyss. Only when we can face the abyss will our faith begin to mean anything of substance, then we will be able to speak cogently to our generation of grace and salvation.

Put yourself in the position of those first disciples. What did they experience on that first Saturday? You may depend it was a later generation that called it “Holy.” To those first men and women, that day would have been horror, sheer horror. (See, eg Luke 24:21.) The emptiness and annihilation of that Saturday still haunts the deepest recesses of all of us. If we do not ritually face it in faith, in union with our Paschal Lord, we will never know the triumph and joy of the resurrection. ■

The Tradition – The greatest paradox

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) had an admiration for Fr Damien De Veuster (1840-1899), the leper-priest of Molokai. Some other people of that time, who knew of Fr Damien’s life and work with the lepers, despised him. On the wall in the clinic on Kalaupapa – the peninsula on Molokai which served as a natural prison for the lepers – there is a copy of a poem written by Stevenson after visiting the leper colony in 1888: “To see the infinite pity of this place./ The mangled limb, the devastated face,/ The innocent sufferers, smiling at the rod;/ A fool were tempted to deny his God;/ He sees, and shrinks, but if he look again,/ Lo, beauty springing from the breast of pain,/ He marks the sisters on the painful shores,/ And even a fool is silent and adores.”

The Protestant writer, Douglas Hall puts the paradox bluntly but well: “We shall be in a position to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd only when we have stopped using the Christian

religion to shield us from the realities of our lostness and our night. Jesus will become alive to us only as we are denied access to a Christ who functions as sanctuary from the world. The Lord who lives and speaks can only be met in the real world, in the ‘swamp’ of the fallen creation. This is where he came. This is where he is still to be found.” (Douglas J. Hall, “Rethinking Christ: Theological Reflections on Shusaku Endo’s *Silence*”, in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, XXXIII (1979), 267.)

Definitions of success or failure, can be misleading. The Christian always thinks with a paschal consciousness, and that consciousness takes us into the heart of the greatest paradox of all: Through the dying we come into the living. There is no other way. ■

The emptiness and annihilation of that Saturday still haunts the deepest recesses of all of us.

“We shall be in a position to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd only when we have stopped using the Christian religion to shield us from the realities of our lostness and our night.”

Bulletin Board

Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

SIP Meetings

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

Email: terry_catalyst@hotmail.com

[www.catalyst-for-](http://www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/news.htm)

[renewal.com.au/news.htm](http://www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/news.htm)

NSW and ACT – 7.30-9.00pm unless specified:

◦ **Albury** New Albury Hotel, Kiewa St (Info: Joan 6021 6880).

◦ **Blackheath Spirituality – The Australian Connection** The Gardners Inn (Info: Elizabeth 4787 6198).

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

◦ **Braidwood** Servicemen’s Club (Info: Pauline 4842 2829).

◦ **Campbelltown** Campbelltown Catholic Club April 19 “What does Resurrection mean to me?” Martyn Farrar & Michael Foley (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

◦ **Engadine** – Engadine RSL April 19 “Truth in Society” Hugh McKay & tba (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

◦ **Five Dock - Passion** The Illinois Hotel, Cnr Parramatta Rd & Arlington St April 26 “Youthful Passion & its Consequences” Michael Ormerod & Stephanie North (Info: James 0418 242 932).

◦ **Goulburn** Soldiers Club May 9 “Washing up or wooing the world; women, family and work” Clare Barbato & Pia van der Zandt (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

◦ **Jamberoo** The Jamberoo Hotel May 8 “Dare to Dream – Recapturing our Culture” Gail Wallace & Megan Picket (Info: Gabrielle 4232 2735).

◦ **Kincumber** The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive May 2 “Come as you are” Rob Edmonds & Fr Peter McGrath (Info: Carmen 4367 2743 or Sue 4334 3174).

◦ **Newport** – Newport Arms Hotel (Info: Terry 9973 1192).

◦ **North Sydney – Be Attitudes Vs Me Attitudes** Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney, April 10 “Standing up for my truth” Anne Austen & Br Michael Flanagan (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

◦ **Paddington - The Getting of Wisdom** Bellevue Hotel May 3 “The getting of wisdom: Life choices & relationships” Mary Shanahan rscj & Richard McLachlan (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

◦ **Penrith** Golf Club April 26 “Sitting on the fence or stepping out?” Sr Margaret Hinchey & Fr John Crothers (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

◦ **Rouse Hill** The Mean Fiddler on Wind-

sor Rd (Info: Maria 9680 2220 (H))

◦ **St George** Kings Head Tavern South Hurstville April 26 “Relationships & Sexuality” Fr Chris Sheehy & Pam Williamson (Info: Greg 9546 2028).

◦ **Waitara – We must choose to matter - In the part of the world we touch?** The Blue Gum Hotel April 19 Joanna Coleiro fsp & Francis Sullivan (Info: Carole 9869 1036(a/h)).

Victoria

◦ **Alphington** Tower Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm May 17 “Family – Youth – Church: What is Happening?” Marie Joyce & Ruth Wagner (Info: Charles 0417 319 556).

◦ **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 June 7 (Info: Helen 0409 212 009).

◦ **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm May 16 “The Power of the Personal Human Story” Michele Gierick & Martin Flanagan (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

◦ **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel April 19 “Working with homeless kids” Tim Perkin (Info: Paula 5231 3376).

◦ **Darebin – Spirit of Life – Shades & Colours** Olympic Hotel, Cnr Bell & Albert Streets, Preston May 3 “Suffering Spirit – Grieving Spirit” Peter Norden & tba (Info: Gordon 9895 5836 & Margaret 9471 1410).

◦ **Fitzroy** Pumphouse Hotel, 128 Nicholson St, 8pm-9.30pm May 3 “Economists are the Priests of our Time – Economics, Religion & Public Policy” Kenneth Davidson (Info: Denise 9816 3001)

◦ **Goulburn Valley** Terminus Hotel (Shepparton) 7.30pm-9pm May 15 (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** The Dev Hotel, Cnr Bay & New Streets, Brighton, 7.30pm-9pm April 26 “The meaning of the Eucharist: How do we understand it today: Meal, community, presence, sacrifice?” Frank O’Loughlin & Maria George (Info: Kevin 9776 2705).

◦ **Western** Victoria on Hyde, Yarraville 7.30pm (Info: Anne 9312 3595).

◦ **Woodend** Holgate Brewhouse-Keatings Hotel May 23 “Spirituality – What turns Youth on?” 4 young local people (Info: Marg 5429 5907).

Other States

◦ **Devonport (TAS)** Molly Malone’s Irish

Pub, (Info: Graham 6424 8286).

◦ **Hobart North** Moonah Café Bar & Bistro June 28 “Viewing with Spirit” Joclyn Cooper & Maz Gil-Harper (Info: Mary-Anne 6228 6000).

◦ **Perth (WA)** The Elephant and Wheelbarrow, cnr Francis & Lake Sts, Northbridge 7.30-9.10pm (Info: Deborah 0419 939 864).

◦ **Verdun (SA)** Stanley Bridge Tavern, Onkaparinga Rd May 2 “Introducing the Spirit: A Parent’s Role” Margaret Rohan Kelly & Fr Andrew Mintern (Info: Gerald 8388 5957).

Other Matters and Events

◦ **St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, April 7-9 & 28-30 prayer weekends; 7-15 & 18-26 directed retreats; 9-15 guided retreat (Holy Week); 28-30 Mid-years spirituality; May 2-31 sabbatical retreat “Life’s Journey Experience”; 3-11 “Spirituality for Intimacy” retreat/directed retreat; 12-20 Life’s Healing Journey/directed retreat; 22-30 directed retreat (Info: 02 4630 9232).

REFLECTION MORNING

Marist Centre
1 Mary St, Hunters Hill
Saturday April 29
with
TBA
9.30am – 12.30pm
All welcome. Entry by donation.

SIP Days for Organisers of Spirituality in the Pub:

An opportunity for SIP people to come together to share insights and successes, pray together and talk about future plans.

This is an ideal opportunity for anyone who is thinking about starting a new SIP or joining an existing local committee.

Sydney:
Saturday, July 1st
Ballarat (for all Victorians):
Saturday, July 22nd.

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O’CONNOR, CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER,

in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, August-September 2006

Info:
02 9247 4651
sandra@aquinas-academy.com

Recommended

Chris Brennan, editor, *St Paul Sunday Missal 2006*, St Paul Publications 2005, 384 pages, pb, \$14.95. ISBN 1 921032 01 4.

Evelyn Underhill noted that worship needs two things: habit and attention. Without habit, attention tends to become distracting self-consciousness and without attention, habit tends to become soulless routinism. The reform of the liturgy in the Catholic Church has struggled with both these things over the last forty years. Many of those rituals and symbols that aided both habit and attention, are no longer there. It is time to reclaim some of those symbols. Herein is one of the values of this inexpensive Sunday missal. The format is user friendly, with the Order of the Mass clearly marked at the front – including a Latin text if you want it! – followed by the individual readings and prayers for each of the Sundays and major liturgical feasts. These carry helpful little reflections at the beginning and end. A section at the back contains devotional prayers. (This reader would have liked to see included one of the beautiful traditional prayers of abandonment – eg by Ignatius of Loyola or Charles de Foucauld, but that is a minor point.) In a world of change, a Sunday missal can be a symbol of continuity and stability. There is something very personal in having your own missal. There is also something very useful about it – you can reflect on the text of the liturgy, especially the Gospel, before you go to Mass.

Michael J Buckley, *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism*, Yale University Press, 2004, 173 pages, hb, endnotes, index of names and subjects, \$35US + post from Amazon. ISBN 0-300-09384-5.

This is a sequel to Michael Buckley's acclaimed 1987 book, *At The Origins of Modern Atheism*. Based on the D'Arcy Lectures, given by the author at Campion College, Oxford University in 2000, this dense book invites careful study of one of the most significant issues of our time: The rise of atheism. Buckley develops the argument of his earlier book, that "theism or religious apologetics in early modernity had ... (implied) that the uniquely religious – in all of its experiential, traditional, institutional and social forms – was cognitively empty ..." Buckley points out that "the most compelling witness to a personal God must itself be personal." It is a tragic irony when "theology subverts itself." Buckley offers the serious reader much to think about here. He takes us into the world of "negative or mystical theology as the fulfilment of religion." In the mystical path our secret games and pretences are laid bare. Maybe as Christians our most destructive opposition comes not from others but from ourselves. In matters of belief and unbelief, all is not what it seems. Karl Rahner's observation is relevant: "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he/she will not exist."

Cardinal Edward Clancy, *God's Trailblazers: Great Figures of the Early Church*, St Pauls Publications, 2005, 112 pages, pb, \$15.95. ISBN 1 921032 06 5.

Cardinal Clancy shares something in common with a number of those people featured in this book: He has been Shepherd of the flock. The "trailblazers" all lived in the 4th century and include St Athanasius, St Anthony of Egypt, St Basil of Caesarea, St Ambrose, St John Chrysostom and St Augustine. An opening essay gives a thumbnail sketch of that complex time. It was a most significant period, one in which the Church began to settle upon the theological and structural template that guide us still. The author notes: "The fourth century has proved to be one of the greatest and most fruitful in the Church's long history, and we have much to learn from it – how *not* to conduct ourselves in some cases, but in general the lessons are positive." In a time of immense change, such as we see today, it is as well for us to examine our history, avoiding any simplistic parallels, recognising the integrity of each age, but recalling the ongoing subterranean stream of humanity and grace flowing from the Incarnation and intermingling in our own beings. Cardinal Clancy gives us a very readable little reference work in *God's Trailblazers*. Among other outcomes, it might encourage the reader to learn more of the rich traditions of Catholicism.

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ATHEISM AND CONTEMPLATION

"The point here is not to persuade anyone that the theogenesis, 'the becoming God by participation,' is correctly schematized by John of the Cross, a schema that is finally no schema. The point is that the foundational persuasion of the need for this kind of purification coincides with the radical criticism of religious belief in our own day. Ludwig Feuerbach and Sigmund Freud on one side and John of the Cross on the other are persuaded that much projection lies at the heart of our relationship with and conceptualization of God. For the former, the response is to deny the reality of God; for John, it is to insist that the evolution or personal development of faith must pass through the contradictions that are the desert and the cross.

"In this purification of desire and of awareness, the critical influence for John is Christ. The active night of the senses begins with the immersion into the Jesus of the Gospels. The intelligibility of the night of the spirit is essentially found in him: 'Because I have said that Christ is the way and that this way is death to our natural selves, in the sensory and spiritual parts of the soul, I would like to demonstrate how this death is patterned on Christ's. For he is our model and light' (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk 2, Ch 7, 9). And the completion of the mystical union is achieved through being touched by him and absorbed into him: 'You subtly penetrate the substance of my soul, and, lightly touching it all, absorb it entirely into yourself' (*Living Flame of Love*, Bk 2, 17)." Michael Buckley, *Denying and Disclosing God*, 118-119 – see review this page.