



THE MIX



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Janet Galos

The human face 2

Will Meecham

The 'how' and 'why' of mystical experience 3

Veronica Lawson

What does it mean to be prophetic today? 4

The bible

The prophet at home 6

The tradition

The prophetic vocation 6

Our Say – Sins of omission

Sometimes the things we leave out are, in fact, the really important bits, the bits that could make the difference. The Irish statesman, Edmund Burke, declared that all we need for evil to triumph is for enough good people to do nothing. Martin Luther King Jnr, in his 1958 book, *Stride to Freedom*, picked up the same theme: "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it." The old adage about heresy applies: Heretics are generally correct in what they affirm, wrong in what they deny. And so, in the *Confiteor*, each of us is repeatedly reminded that sin may be "in what I have failed to do."

The judgments we pass on others – in the name-calling, the harsh criticisms, the gossip, the petty malice that accompanies news of their misfortune – almost certainly is fuelled by sins of omission. Is it not generally true that when we are speaking of our friends we tend to speak of their good

qualities and omit their bad qualities, and when speaking of those we do not like we tend to speak of their bad qualities and omit their good qualities? Such omissions imply that life is black and white rather than ambiguous. Of course it is much easier to manage when it is black and white.

Omissions can be especially destructive when it comes to the complex business of promoting good conversation. The omissions can be made when speaking about others or when responding to others or when speaking of oneself or one's associates and colleagues.

Consider the dynamics of prejudice. When prejudice drives us we tend to condemn *the person* rather than this or that characteristic of the person that we, for whatever reason, object to. Prejudice tends to be blind to any redeeming features in the other. Prejudice is first of all a sin of omission.

Such omissions show a lack of faith. Those who profess to be followers of Jesus

Christ must, at the very least, be committed to seeking out the truth wherever it is. The truth will set us free (see John 8:32).

The willingness to leave out of the picture anything that might complete or at least add to the truth of that picture is the very antithesis of a commitment to seeking the truth in all things.

Good conversation cannot develop where sins of omission go unchallenged. Good conversation requires the participants to be ever alert to the genius we all have for self-deception. It is attentive to both questions: "What *is* being said?" and "What *is not* being said?" The latter can be just as significant as the former.

We may not deliberately omit things. That must surely be taken into account. But we must also accept our responsibility to face what must be faced and say what must be said and acknowledge the possibility that, in the end, we just might not have seen everything there is to be seen. ■

This journal is one of the works of
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The following is its Mission Statement:

We are believers who are attempting to establish a forum for conversation within the Catholic Church of Australia. Our aim is to prompt open exchanges among the community of believers, mindful of the diversity of expression of faith in contemporary Australia. This springs explicitly from the spirit of Pope John XXIII and Vatican II: "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case". (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.92)

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

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

My name is Janet Galos. I was born on Australia Day in 1953 and raised in Bundaberg, Queensland. I've come to see my life as a series of intersections – with people, events and institutions. In the world of my youth, your identity was, in a large measure, determined by your religious denomination. Of course, Catholics were an unknown and regarded with suspicion. My parents had a vague religious commitment – they had pretty effectively given up – though they believed it was important for children to be instructed in religion. I was involved with youth activities in the local Presbyterian church until I went off to Queensland University in 1970.

That was a heady time of Vietnam protest marches and Women's Lib – not really conducive to involvement in the church in my case. I met my future husband, an engineering student, in my last year of study. He went to work for BHP while I went "bush" teaching for a year. We were married in January 1975 and set up home in Wollongong. Eventually I got a job at the Sisters of St Joseph's Holy Cross College, Bellambi – now Holy Spirit College. I am still involved as a parent and relieving teacher there, and continue to have tremendous respect and admiration for the Sisters of St Joseph. They were great mentors both for the students and young lay staff.

This was when I first considered joining the church of my husband's family, since I had grown away from the church of my youth. I did miss the practice of Christian faith and sense of belonging to a church community. When we moved back to Queensland for a few years I even began instruction. But the circle of me and the circle of church just didn't intersect. Then Matt was born in 1985 and Joel in 1989. This was a great joy but also challenge for a "career" person such as myself. Yet it was the start of an enjoyable period of life as I had always determined to be a stay-at-home mum.

Probably the biggest "paradigm" shift of my adult life occurred with the birth of my last child, Megan in 1990. She was born with a neurological disability. Raising a child with disability is like walking through a door into another land. Priorities change, the way I regarded who and what was important certainly changed. It has been a privilege to know (and be inspired by) the wonderful people who raise and work with the disabled – and the kids themselves. They all continue to teach me a lot about love, compassion and the triumph of the human spirit. In a world of fake heroes, they are real heroes. They have made a

beautiful, colourful mark on the mandala of my life.

As a teacher, I determined to find out more about this new landscape from the education perspective, and completed a M. Ed. in Special Education at Wollongong University in 1999. Around this time and with growing children we found ourselves participating more in the local church and I decided to try again to join. Luckily there was enough overlap of circles this time – had we both grown bigger? – and I thank Fr Paul and the community of St John Vianneys Fairy Meadow for welcoming me at Easter in 1999. A Grad Cert in RE from ACU completed the transition.

Becoming a Catholic is a bit like giving birth – neither party ever really knows what they are going to get! I have found an enriching, nurturing and, at times, extremely frustrating home. I often boast that being a Catholic with no "baggage" is great and it does leave me – I think – with a very broad-ranging perspective. But, of course, that gets me into difficulties at times. I often wish for more circles and fewer triangles in the church. A caring sense of community and effective liturgy to me requires interaction and sharing rather than passivity.

Now that my children are older, I am again setting out on a path of new discoveries. I am enlivened by Spirituality in the Pub conversations at the Jamberoo Pub, and enjoy discussing contemporary religious thought with the local Eremos book group. I continue to be inspired and challenged by the diverse courses and speakers at Aquinas Academy, and always feel encouraged by friends and fellow travelers there. Occasional retreat weekends seem to bring the transcendent close. No da Vinci – luckily – and full of wonderful and puzzling patterns, my life is certainly still a work in progress.



Janet Galos

Your Say – The ‘how’ and ‘why’ of mystical experience

Will Meecham

Five years ago my life fell apart. To explain it briefly, illness forced me from my career as a surgeon, and I found myself living in a new city that was quite different from my home in San Francisco. Other large problems added to these stressors. I remember telling a friend about my “infinite tolerance for stress,” since I seemed to be doing so well despite massive life changes. Talk about hubris!

A few weeks later I was hospitalized for a major mental breakdown, and I stayed there for a month. You might think this was a horrible time, and you’d be right. But in the midst of it all I found a pearl of the Divine. God literally touched me. One night I was in abject despair, and praying to a God I didn’t really believe in. I was just so desperate for help that I prayed, “God, you have to exist, you have to help me, or I can’t go on.” I repeated this over and over all night long.

When morning arrived, a whole series of fantastic coincidences and visions occurred around me. This went on for days, but at the most profound moment, my eyes opened up to a shimmering window of light, and a penetrating calm swept over me, leaving me awed and at complete peace. I knew that God was there. God existed, God cared, and I was going to make it through these hard times.

What about my objectivity as a physician? What would I say about a psychiatric patient who announced such experiences? I realize now, though it didn’t occur to me then, that I was experiencing the classic symptoms of a temporal lobe seizure. Hyper-religiosity, ideas that even the most mundane things hold important, vital meaning and feelings of deep and spiritual calm are all hallmarks of this brain condition. The disturbed brain waves during such an event can be measured objectively. This is something that does not require forces outside the mind. Or does it?

How do we know when God is working in our lives? I suppose the answer to that is unique to each person. We all look at the world in a certain way, and look for the Divine in a manner that matches our disposition, beliefs, upbringing and so on.

Some people look for fortuitous coincidences, some focus on the circle of love around them, some find God through deep prayer and meditation. No doubt the Divine can manifest in many ways. Can God, then, come to a person through a disordered brain? Mystics and spiritual leaders throughout history have described experi-

ences that sound a lot like my visions. What happened to St. Paul when he was struck on the road to Damascus? Was his brain normal at that moment? What is normal?

The advances in knowledge about the brain make it easy to ascribe all mental states to patterns of neuronal activity. Conditions that might once have been interpreted as matters of faith are now explainable and repairable in material ways. Depressed? There may be a disorder in serotonin modulation. Is your child too dreamy? Maybe we can fix that with Ritalin. God manifests before you? There must be a problem in your temporal lobe.

What does this do to our concept of the Divine? Is there a place for the Spirit separate from the ceaseless electrical activity in the brain?

These are questions I have asked myself ever since I was struck down and then lifted up. Following my visions, my faith in God was absolute. I had no doubts whatsoever. I went from a state of studied agnosticism to complete surrender to the Divine. My gratitude for these gifts was all-consuming. I felt unworthy of such grace. I felt like a reflection of St. Thomas since I needed God to appear concretely before my own eyes in order to believe. The Almighty did appear. I was blessed.

Sadly, or predictably, over time my conviction wavered. The questions started crowding in. I wish I could report that my spirituality remained deep and abiding. I would like to tell you that I am now able to guide others who are searching for God. I have not been that strong. Doubts sometimes trouble me, and despair is no stranger. It is all too easy to write off my experiences to messed up brain chemistry. But on the deepest level, I know that within me there is the seed of something grand and all-powerful. I admit that this seed may only reflect a briefly disordered mind, but I’ll take my chances.

So what have I done since those odd and powerful days? Have I grown at all as a person? I suppose you’d have to ask my wife and circle of friends. The direct fruit of my passage through this profound period was my conversion to Catholicism. My wife, a lifelong Catholic, elicited a commitment to Jesus during the time of greatest confusion, when I was convulsed with God’s love and aching for direction.

I kept to that promise, and within a year went through the catechumenate program,

and took my first holy Communion during Easter of 2001. My resulting relationship with Christ has given the trials of five years ago inexpressible importance. My life fell apart, but when it came back together I was in the company of God. ■

Will Meecham is a physician in Novato, California

LETTERS

Congratulations on a publication that continues to bring life and hope to my desk. I find it so helpful for ministry and continue to recommend its spiritual value. Blessings on all you do for ‘future Church.’

Bridie O’Connell, Burwood, NSW

Today as I took time out for prayer, I read Fr Michael Whelan’s article, ‘Conversation as Presence’ which I received in my recent edition of *The Mix*. I am most impressed with the content of the article. Fr Whelan writes with clarity and the reader quickly realizes the richness and blessings that come with conversation through loving intent. One of my duties as Parish Associate here at St John’s is to co-ordinate the production of our parish magazine which we produce three times a year. I am requesting permission from you to print ‘Conversation as Presence’ in our Spring Edition. The article will bring thought-provoking interest and much reflection to our community. Congratulations on your widely read and well produced *The Mix*. I gain so much from each edition. I truly value the magazine and your good work. Well done. Congratulations to all those who contribute articles to *The Mix*.

Sr Josephine Weatherhead, Plympton, SA

[Editor: Permission to reproduce Fr Michael Whelan’s material is freely given. Please acknowledge the source. And encourage others to subscribe to *The Mix*!]

You will never know the inspiration you give and the positive, inclusive spirit – not ‘spin’ – you engender that brings hope and confidence to many of us battlers. It’s a privilege and a joy to be associated with you in whatever humble way. Press on regardless. Your brother and battler.

Peter McGrath, Frenchs Forest.

Essay – What does it mean to be prophetic today?

Veronica Lawson

This is the text of a presentation to the Combined Gathering of Bishops and Leaders of Religious Congregations held in North Sydney, May 6, 2006. Veronica Lawson is Congregational Leader of the Sister of Mercy from Ballarat in Victoria.

'If you look as you have never looked before

You will see the morning begin to lace the darkness.'

These words from Peter Steele's poem, *Resurrection*, were the first that came to mind when I was invited to make this brief contribution to today's discussion. Much of the time, most of us look without seeing and listen without really hearing, not for lack of good will, but rather because of our limited capacities to enter into the experience of others. Now and then, we look as we have never looked before and indeed we do come to see the morning begin to lace the darkness.

A precondition for this is to see the darkness in our world and the condition of some of its inhabitants. There are some who have taken the trouble to expand their capacities to see habitually beyond the immediate and to hear 'the cry of the poor' in ways that stir their whole being to mobilise themselves and others to action. These we tend to designate as prophets in our midst.

In 1962, the great Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel published his two volume commentary on the prophets of Israel, a work that was quickly to become a classic in its field. Heschel was viewed in his time as a prophetic figure, marching alongside Martin Luther King, Jr. in the famous protest marches of 1965 that led to the enactment of the U.S. Voting Rights Act. According to Heschel's own account of their protests, their legs were their prayer.

Out of the well of his immense scholarship, Heschel described prophecy as 'the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of our world'. (Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, Vol. 1, Harper & Row, 1962, 5.)

The final words of this description, 'the profaned riches of our world', call to mind the words of Hosea in the face of Israel's failure to live the covenant: 'even the land mourns' (4:3). It is on this aspect that I would like to focus the first part of my reflection on the prophetic voices in our world. The second section will consider prophecy as the voice that God has lent to the plundered poor. Finally, I address the

question: what does it mean to be prophetic today?

The riches of our world are the riches of God's creation, inherently sacred yet profaned by logging and land clearing and over-fishing and pesticide abuse and CFCs and so on, in other words by greedy exploitation of our resources and by practices that endanger the health of all earth's inhabitants.

In our times, one of the earliest prophetic voices that God lent to the silent agony of the earth was that of Rachel Carson, famous scientist, author of *Silent Spring* (1962), and recognised founder of the contemporary environmental movement in the late fifties and early sixties. (<http://onlineethics.org/moral/carson/7-silentspring.html> – accessed 04/05/06). *Silent Spring* was written to inform the public of the potential harm of certain chemical pesticides. Carson indicated the need for more research on the effects of pesticides on all life forms, and put a case for the application of alternative methods of pest control.

John F. Kennedy and others took Rachel Carson seriously. The same cannot be said for the chemical companies which immediately instigated a campaign against her and her ideas. One government official used an age old trick and turned defence into a personal and unseemly attack, saying, "I thought she was a spinster. What's she worried about genetics for?" Carson stood her ground and is now honoured as one who cared for the earth to the point of personal ridicule, even persecution. She raised ecological consciousness in relation to chemical pesticides almost a decade before the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer.

.... Heschel described prophecy as 'the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of our world.'

The three premises underlying Carson's environmental ethics as found in her writings are noted by Philip Cafaro: 1) to protect human health, 2) to preserve other than human life and 3) to promote human happiness and flourishing. The corollary of the second premise was human responsibility towards other than human beings. (<http://oeccombo.cwru.edu/moral/carson/cafaro.html> – accessed 04/05/06.)

Rachel Carson was an accomplished scientist and a principled woman whose life

story has all the elements of prophetic insight and courage. A friend who knew her well claimed that her views were those of a deeply religious person though it seems she had no particular religious affiliation. Although her contribution is not always acknowledged, her seminal work provided a sound basis for and an impetus to countless faith-based ecological movements and organisations in the latter part of the 20th century and the beginning of the new millennium.

(For a current example of a growing movement that is not specifically faith-based, but could provide inspiration for faith-based groups, see John Vidal's article, 'Seizing the Sustainability Agenda' in *Guardian Weekly* April 28-May 4, 2006, p. 5. What the US government has refused to do by way of curbing environmental degradation, Mayors Climate Change is effecting quite dramatically-with a little help from Robert Redford-in 230 US cities with populations totalling 110 million.)

Let's turn from Rachel Carson to someone closer to home, and yet worlds away from the experience of many of us in this room, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920-1993), indigenous poet, artist, actor and political activist, formerly known as Kath Walker. Her poem, *Municipal Gum*, written in 1960, encapsulates the prophetic message that she brought to the world at a time when her people were not even counted in the census, let alone recognised as human persons with rights equal to those of non-indigenous Australians:

Gumtree in the city street,
Hard bitumen around your feet,
Rather you should be
In the cool world of leafy forest halls
And wild bird calls
Here you seems to me
Like that poor cart-horse
Castrated, broken, a thing wronged,
Strapped and buckled, its hell prolonged,
Whose hung head and listless mien express
Its hopelessness.
Municipal gum, it is dolorous
To see you thus
Set in your black grass of bitumen—
O fellow citizen,
What have they done to us?

(<http://www.poemhunter.com/p/m/poem.asp?poet=33262&poem=393831> – accessed 05/05/06.)

Alongside the prophetic voice of Oodgeroo Noonuccal is that of her close contemporary Judith Wright (1915-2000). The haunting words of *Bora Ring* (1946) have echoed through the decades, yet to be really heard in the corridors of power:

The song is gone; the dance
is secret with the dancers in the earth,
the ritual useless, and the tribal story
lost in an alien tale.

Only the grass stands up
to mark the dancing-ring; the apple-gums
posture and mime past corroboree,
murmur a broken chant.

The hunter is gone; the spear
is splintered underground, the painted bodies
a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot.
The nomad feet are still.

Only the rider's heart
halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word
that fastens in the blood of the ancient curse,
the fear as old as Cain.
(<http://www.poetry.com/opoem/33235>
accessed 05/05/06.)

The voices of these and other prophetic figures have helped to sustain the struggle for indigenous rights in this country. Like the struggle for ecological sanity, this struggle has been espoused by many faith-based groups and embraced by the likes of Ted Kennedy, parish priest of Redfern for some thirty years, whose memory lives on as one who constantly and faithfully laid down his life for his people.

Rachel Carson, Oodgeroo Nunuccal, Judith Wright—living voices still, though gone to God; voices God has lent to the silent agony, voices to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the earth.

Many other voices come to mind, but none so insightful and effective as that of Geoffrey Robertson QC, eminent human rights lawyer and relentless advocate for the humanity of all the peoples of the earth. Geoffrey Robertson stands for sound judgment based on accurate information and meticulous attention to the facts wherever they can be established. He stands for elimination of 'spin', for integrity, wholeness, recognition of the rights of all human persons.

In *The Justice Game*, first published in 1998, he offers a riveting personal account of his commitment to reducing the gap between justice and the law. The pages of his book resonate with echoes of Israel's prophets and their cry for *mishpat*, justice in the gates, the ancient courts of law. Robertson cautions against advocacy characterised by over-emotional outbursts based on sentiment and inflation rather than reasoned attention to demonstrated realities. (Geoffrey Robertson, *The Justice Game*, Vintage, 1998.)

Robertson does not stand alone, although at times his may have seemed to be a solitary voice. Inspired by the work of Robertson and others, in 1993 a young Sydney lawyer, Kate Eastman was instru-

mental in setting up, with one of her friends, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, as a network of lawyers practising and promoting awareness of international human rights standards in Australia.

Many of you would be familiar with the work of this association, particularly in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, and to its promotion of a Bill of Rights. Members of its executive have given of their expertise and time to Mercy Refugee Service and other Church based organizations for no remuneration. Their *pro bono* work is witness to their deep and abiding commitment to justice.

I have named some few voices that seem to me to be the voice of prophecy in our contemporary world. If Nabokov is right that 'prophecy is the wit of a fool', then these women and men are or were foolish indeed. They look not to their own selfish interests or their own income. They are deeply in touch with the pain of the earth and the pain in the hearts of the plundered poor. They take the trouble to be well informed as to the causes of such pain. They offer a vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth' though generally not in biblical or religious language. They spawn movements and groups of people who take up the challenge and give of themselves in the pursuit of justice.

The riches of our world are the riches of God's creation, inherently sacred yet profaned by logging and land clearing and over-fishing and pesticide abuse and CFCs and so on, in other words by greedy exploitation of our resources and by practices that endanger the health of all earth's inhabitants.

So what does it mean to be prophetic today? For communities of baptised Christians, I suggest that the challenge is to listen and to look attentively at what is happening in our world, to do so critically through the lens of the poets and thinkers of our time, and to bring our insights into serious dialogue with our sacred story and to act fearlessly in the light of our theological reflection.

Finally, it is to do all of this in the belief that the power of the re-creative Spirit of God that rests upon those who gather in the name of Jesus of Nazareth can bring healing to a fractured world. That, I think, is what it means for Christians to be prophetic today. ■

"As is usual in the Kingdom of Heaven, by giving up what I wanted I ended up having more than what I had thought of wanting.

"When your tongue is silent, you can rest in the silence of the forest. When your imagination is silent, the forest speaks to you, tells you of its unreality and the Reality of God. But when your mind is silent, then the forest suddenly becomes magnificently real and blazes transparently with the Reality of God. For now I know that the Creation, which first seems to reveal Him in concepts, then seems to hide Him by the same concepts, finally *is revealed in Him*, in the Holy Spirit. And we who are in God find ourselves united in Him with all that springs from Him. This is prayer and this is glory!" (Thomas Merton, Journal entry of March 17 1952 in *Entering the Silence*, edited by Jonathan Montaldo, Harper Collins, 1997, 471.) ■

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"Like everyone else I live under the bomb. But unlike most people I live in the woods. I know there are trees here. I know there are birds here. I know the birds in fact very well, for there are exactly fifteen pairs of birds living in the immediate area of my cabin and I share this particular place with them: we form an ecological balance. The harmony gives 'place' a different configuration.

"There is the deep vegetation of that more ancient forest than mine: the deep forest in which the great birds Isaias and Jeremias sing. When I am most sickened by the things that are done by the country that surrounds this place I will take out the prophets and sing them in loud Latin across the hills and send their fiery words sailing south over the mountains to the place where they split atoms for the bombs in Tennessee.

"There is also the non-ecology, the destructive unbalance of nature, poisoned and unsettled by bombs, by fallout, by exploitation: the land ruined, the waters contaminated, the soil charged with chemicals, ravaged with machinery, the houses of farmers falling apart because everybody goes to the city and stays there. . . There is no poverty so great as that of the prosperous, no wretchedness so dismal as affluence. ...

"I live in the woods out of necessity. I get out of bed in the middle of the night because it is imperative that I hear the silence of the night, alone, and, with my face on the floor, say psalms, alone, in the silence of the night." (Thomas Merton, Journal entry of May 1965 in *Dancing in the Water of Life*, edited by Robert E Daggy, Harper Collins, 1997, 240.) ■

Words for a Pilgrim People

“And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is only despised in his own country among his own relations and in his own house.’” (Mark 6:5)

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“Once, I remembered, I had detached a chrysalis from the trunk of an olive tree and placed it in my palm. Inside the transparent coating I discerned a living thing. It was moving. The hidden process must have reached its terminus; the future, still enslaved butterfly was waiting with silent tremors for the sacred hour when it would emerge into the sunlight. It was not in a hurry. Having confidence in the light, the warm air, in God’s eternal law, it was waiting. But I was in a hurry. I wanted to see the miracle hatch before me as soon as possible, wanted to see how the body surges out of its tomb and shroud to become a soul. Bending over, I began to blow my warm breath over the chrysalis, and behold! A slit soon incised itself on the chrysalis’ back, the entire shroud gradually split from top to bottom, and the immature, bright green butterfly appeared, still tightly locked together, its wings twisted, its legs glued to its abdomen. It squirmed gently and kept coming more and more to life beneath my warm, persistent breath. One wing, as pale as a budding poplar leaf disengaged itself from the body and began to palpitate, struggling to unfold along its entire length, but in vain. It stayed half opened, shrivelled. Soon the other wing moved as well, toiled in its own right to stretch, was unable to, and remained half unfolded and trembling. I, with a human being’s effrontery, continued to lean over and blow my warm exhalation upon the maimed wings, but they had ceased to move now and had dropped down, as stiff and lifeless as stone. I felt sick at heart. Because of my hurry, because I had dared to transgress an eternal law, I had killed the butterfly. In my hand I held a carcass. Years and years have passed, but that butterfly’s weightless carcass has weighed heavily on my conscience ever since..” (Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, Faber, 1965/1989, 465-66.)

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On the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), we meditate on Mark’s account of Jesus’ return to Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6. See also Matthew 13:53-58 & Luke 4:16-30). This passage contains one of the most frequently cited pieces of Scripture: A prophet is not recognised at home. It is probably repeatedly referred to because it is repeatedly borne out by experience. What is happening here? Is it something about being a “prophet”? Is it something about what happens when we are “at home”? Is it something about the combination of being a “prophet” and being “at home”?

In the history of Israel, there are at least two outstanding characteristics of the prophets. Firstly, they must remind the people of what they have forgotten. In particular, the prophets call the people – and most especially the rulers – back to the Covenant and the responsibilities of being chosen by God. Secondly, the prophets must speak on behalf of the voiceless, they relay the cry of the poor. The prophets ensure that the pain that is caused by the forgetfulness of the people is faced and dealt with.

Prophecy is necessarily a work of confrontation, though it is not necessarily confrontationist. The prophets are always sent by the grace of God and generally find themselves as more or less reluctant agents of the (normally) unwelcome truths that must be spoken. Not infrequently, when such truths are spoken – no matter how gently and lovingly – those to whom they are addressed resist more or less energetically. Sometimes the resistance is violent. One way to maintain the forgetful status quo and avoid all this discomfort that the prophet inevitably brings is to attack the prophet. The prophet is a living reminder of what we have a vested interest in forgetting.

And what happens when one is called to remind those “at home” of things they have forgotten, and to speak on behalf of those who are suffering because of this forgetfulness? The very nature of “home” suggests the comfort of routine and predictable expectations. Systems – “homes” – tend to defend themselves against admitting serious error and the need for substantial change. ■

The Tradition – The prophetic vocation

Speaking specifically of the lay faithful, the Vatican II document, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” says that “through baptism, they are made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ, and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world” (*Lumen Gentium* 31).

Again: “Christ, the great prophet, who proclaimed the kingdom of his Father both by the testimony of his life and the power of his words, continually fulfills his prophetic office until the complete manifestation of glory. He does this not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and with his authority, but also through the laity whom he made his witnesses and to whom he gave understanding of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and an attractiveness in speech (cf. Acts 2:17-18; Rv 19:10), so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life. They conduct themselves as children of the promise, and thus, strong in faith and in hope, they make the most of the present (cf. Eph 5:16; Col 4:5), and with patience await the glory that is to come (cf. Rm 8:25). Let them not, then, hide this hope in the depths of their hearts, but even in the program of their secular life let them express it by a continual conversion and by wrestling ‘against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness’ (Eph 6:12)” (*Lumen Gentium*, 35). ■

“They conduct themselves as children of the promise, and thus, strong in faith and in hope, they make the most of the present ... and with patience await the glory that is to come ...”

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-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 Gardeners Inn July 12 “Equality in an Unequal World” Dr Sabine Erika & Mr Shan Ali (Info: Elizabeth 4787 6198).

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

◦ **Braidwood** Servicemen’s Club August 21 “What are Australian values?” Geraldine Doogue & Wendy McCarthy (Info: Pauline 4842 2829).

◦ **Campbelltown** Campbelltown Catholic Club August 9 “The Divorced and Remarried in the Church” Fr Frank Moloney sdb (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

◦ **Engadine – Note New Venue - Sutherland RSL Club**, 7 East Pde, July 19 “How alive is Love in our church?” Roy Rigotti & Lyn Watson (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

◦ **Goulburn** Soldiers Club July 11 “Changes in Religious Life” Sr Beverley Corkery rsm & Fr Hugh Murray cm (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

◦ **Inner West – Passion Note new venue: The Pine Inn, 19 Parramatta Rd, Burwood** July 26 “Jews & Christians – Wow – the possibilities!” Trish Madigan op & Josie Lacey op (Info: James 0418 242 932).

◦ **Jamberoo** The Jamberoo Hotel July 10 “Dare to Live and Dream your Vocation – Making sense of a ‘Priestly’ calling: from two different perspectives” Fr David O’Brien & Teresa Pirola (Info: Gabrielle 4232 2735).

◦ **Kincumber** The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive August 1 “Reaching Out” Sr Enid Doherty & Sonia Gidley-King OAM (Info: Carmen 4367 2743 or Sue 4334 3174).

◦ **Newport** – Newport Arms Hotel August 24 “Ethics and Wealth Creation” Robert Fitzgerald & Sandy Cornish (Info: Terry 9973 1192).

◦ **North Sydney – Be Attitudes Vs Me Attitudes** Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney, July 17 “Do I put limits on my generosity?” Donna McKenzie

& Shane Hogan (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

◦ **Paddington - The Getting of Wisdom** Bellevue Hotel August 2 “The getting of wisdom: Ethics & life” Kate Englebrect & Simon Longstaff (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

◦ **Penrith** Golf Club August 23 “Renewal in the Church: to be and not to be” tba (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

◦ **Rouse Hill** The Mean Fiddler on Windsor Rd (Info: Maria 9680 2220 (H))

◦ **St George** Kings Head Tavern South Hurstville July 26 “Exploring the Faith Realities” John Mooney & Susan Modell (Info: Greg 9546 2028).

◦ **Waitara – We must choose to matter - In the part of the world we touch?** The Blue Gum Hotel July 19 Ralph Kershler & Greg Brown (Info: Carole 9869 1036(a/h)).

Victoria

◦ **Alphington** Tower Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm July 19 “Building a dialogue with Islam: Where do we start?” Waleed Aly & John Dupuche (Info: Charles 0417 319 556).

◦ **Ballarat North** Midlands Golf Club, Heinz Lane, Second Wednesday each month 12.00-2pm (Info: Kevin 5332 7451).

◦ **Bendigo** Foundry Arms Hotel 8pm-9.30pm September 6 (Info: Helen 0409 212 009).

◦ **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm July 18 “Language and Spirituality” Pastor Bill Stern & Margaret Mooney (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

◦ **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel July 19 “Music Ministry with Youth” John & Marcella Crowley Marguerite Ryan (Info: Paula 5231 3376).

◦ **Darebin – Spirit of Life – Shades & Colours** Olympic Hotel, Cnr Bell & Albert Streets, Preston September 13 “Attentive Spirit – Mindful Spirit” Tim McCowan & Maria George (Info: Gordon 9895 5836 & Margaret 9471 1410).

◦ **Fitzroy** Pumphouse Hotel, 128 Nicholson St, 8pm-9.30pm (Info: Denise 9816 3001)

◦ **Goulburn Valley** Terminus Hotel (Shepparton) 7.30pm-9pm July 28 Dinner at Makaby’s Restaurant “Nothing so Beautiful, Nothing so Ugly!” Paul Collins (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 August 23 “Effective Dialogue with other Faiths: Religion in contemporary society: Freedom, acceptance, respect” Sherene Hassam & Joe Camilleri (Info: Kevin 9776 2705).

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

◦ **Woodend** Holgate Brewhouse-Keatings Hotel July 25 “Taking it to the Streets – Street Ministry” Fr Wahid Riad (Info: Marg 5429 5907).

Other States

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

◦ **Hobart North** Moonah Café Bar & Bistro (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 August 8 “The John Roffey Lecture” Dr Barbara Hardy OA (Info: Gerald 8388 5957).

Other Matters and Events

◦ **St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, July 10-16 guided retreat; 21-23 prayer weekend; July 29-Sept 1 Ignatian Exercises; directed retreats July 31-Aug 8, Aug 9-17 & Aug 18-26 (Info: 02 4630 9232).

◦ **George Shipp Memorial Lecture** to be given by Robert Tilley BA MA MD(Hon) PhD on “The Measure of a Civilised Society” 12.30pm – 2pm Wednesday, August 23 at Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, 280 Pitt St, Sydney. Admission by Donation \$5. Highly Recommended.

◦ **Online Catholics: An independent Australian e journal: News – Opinion – Discussion** A weekly summary of news event; Informative book reviews; Reflective writing of spirituality; An occasional good laugh; Independent analysis of issues in the Church. Enquiries: (03) 9755 5944 www.onlinecatholics.com.au

REFLECTION MORNING

Marist Centre
1 Mary St, Hunters Hill
Saturday August 19
With

Fr David Ranson

‘Praying as a Man, Praying as a Woman’
9.30am – 12.30pm

All welcome. Entry by donation.
No Reflection Mornings in June & July.

Reflection Morning Victoria 2006
At Currajeen,

811 Bridge Inn Road, Doreen
“The Spirituality of our Lives”
Maria George

9.30am – 12.30pm

September 9

Info: Margaret 9471 1410 (Bus hours)

or Maria 0409792168

Entry by donation

Recommended

Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire. The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church*. Harper & Row, San Francisco. 1990. ISBN: 0-06-254636-8. pb. Notes and index, 133 pages.

This is a text for the serious reader both of history and Church history in particular. Pelikan, a respected writer, has taken Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as his yardstick. He investigates the reasons for the fall and what could be generalised from it. What was the decline and fall of one was the rise of the other: the Church, especially was this, he claims, a social triumph. Pelikan writes of the gift of Rome to future generations – law, language and religion, especially the latter. Gibbon wrote with a hostility to the monks and monasticism, describing what he thought was their merciless zeal, indifference, and religious hostility while at the same time acknowledging that they preserved the monuments of Greek and Roman literature and cultivated the ecclesiastical and to them, profane sciences. He gives a very readable account of the hallmarks of the Church's "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic" nature. Even though written fifteen years ago, the book presents ideas which are still challenging, and for some, possibly quite new. The segments on Augustine and his famous *City of God* and his analysis of another great saint of the Church, Athanasius, make for interesting reading. The book is certainly one for serious readers who are keen to know this version of two histories, the secular and the sacred. The Church triumphed, using the best of the Roman culture.

Rowan Williams, *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another*, New Seeds, 2005. ISBN 1-59030-231-1. hb, endnotes, 174 pages.

In 2001 the World Community of Christian Meditation held its John Main Seminar in Sydney. One of the presenters was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. This book is the developed version of those presentations. The subject matter is the desert and what it has given the Christian tradition. Rowan Williams writes of those early men and women who sought out the desert as Jesus had done: "Those monastic oddballs of an unimaginably different and ancient world may indeed hold a secret for our modern world that no economist, sociologist, politicians or religious leader can match. The desert wisdom teaches rather than preaches. Its authority is experiential, not theoretical. The upshot of this is a phenomenon that many modern people, disenchanted with religious institutionalism, will find unusual – a religious group that is grasped by the absolute experience of God and is uncompromising in its desire to be one with that experience while remaining humorous, humble, and, above all, not condemning of those of other beliefs or practice." This is a book for all. The renewal of the Church will not come through more precise dogmatic definitions or stricter application of law but through an experiential recovery of the mystical heart of our faith. Therein lies the source of our energy and our joy. Keep a copy of this book for yourself and get one each for your teenage children.

Mary Batchelor, editor, *The Lion Book of Christian Poetry*, Lion Hudson, 432 pages, notes on poets and index, 2005 edition, ISBN 0 7459 5183 X, \$24.95.

Poets see the world in different ways; they draw the reader to insights about their life, their relationship to others, to notice the world around us, and to God in particular. Divided into nine sections, this anthology will interest all readers of poetry and even those who have never liked poetry under any guise, often a result of poor schooling. The poets are English and American in the main and offer insights for all to contemplate. They include Walter Raleigh, Peter Abelard, Oscar Wilde, Rossetti, George Herbert, R S Thomas, Edmund Spenser Emily Dickinson and many more great writers from across the centuries. The nine sections include In touch with God, Jesus the Christ, The Holy Spirit and the Church, Daily Life, Person to Person, Time and Eternity, The World we Live in and others. We often dismiss things in our immediate vicinity and fail to relate them to the creator God. These poems are brief, are simple to read, and offer a great deal to reflect on as the Christian poets explore their relationship with God. There are poems for all readers and occasions that draw us closer to prayer and the joy of reading good literature. This is a good read, inexpensive, and can be read a little at a time to digest and reflect on. It is especially challenging for all who think that God can only be approached through the great and well known spiritual writers; these poets are reflecting on their relation with their God, something we all do.

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"What is best
is
What is not said ..."

[Journal entry of Thomas Merton, February 19 1967 in *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton, Volume Six 1966-1967*, edited by Christine Bochen, Harper Collins, 1997, 200. Merton is here recalling a comment made to him by the Sufi mystic, Sidi Abdeslam, in a letter of February 14, 1967. The idea is not entirely new to Merton. For example, in a Journal entry on December 14, 1940, he reflects on poetry and the writings of St Bonaventure and speaks of "keeping hid that which cannot be told." (*Run to the Mountain: The Story of a Vocation – The Journals of Thomas Merton, Volume One, 1939-1941*, edited by Patrick Hart, Harper Collins, 1995, 279.)]