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Continuity demands discontinuity if living is to remain rich and purposeful.

We must constantly be questioning and discerning the best ways to facilitate what matters in the end, to see what is important and what is not, what is indispensable and what is not. This also demands an ongoing process of letting go and moving on. Each individual should do this. It is also something we should be doing together.

The Jewish writer, Elie Wiesel, speaks simply and concisely about this process:

In the word question, there is a beautiful word – quest. I love that word. We are all partners in a quest. The essential questions have no answers. You are my question, and I am yours – and then there is dialogue. The moment we have answers, there is no dialogue. Questions unite people. Answers divide them. (Elie Wiesel, Tanner Lecture on Human Values at Snow College, 22 May 2006.)

Is not the Catholic Church a special instance though? In the Catholic Church, where there are truths that are regarded as

essential to our identity, might not an encouragement to conversation be deformative rather than transformative? Might not conversation undermine orthodoxy? Should we, for example, forbid conversation on certain topics?

Maybe Pope John XXIII was addressing the thinking that gives rise to these sorts of questions when he said, in his Opening Address to the Council, on October 11, 1962, that history is “the teacher of life.” In the same place he also said:

The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.

This last statement provoked a good deal of controversy at the time. However, from the vantage point of more than forty years of hindsight, we would say it is merely stating the obvious. No individual or group or generation will ever be able to end the human quest to know more. We can and must learn from history. More

importantly, for us as believers, we all have the responsibility to engage the great truths of our faith – individually and communally – in such a way that we are transformed in and through that engagement.

This is why good conversation must be promoted as of the very essence of the Church's life.

Conversation is a process whereby we engage the inexhaustible intelligibility of life. The process may be internal – with oneself – or external – with others. Its driving force is the desire to be transformed. Conversation is betrayed when it is used as a means to have one's agenda accepted. Whatever the justification for that, we should not call it conversation.

The thing to fear is not conversation but lack of it. But currently we do not have good models for conversation in either the Catholic Church or the wider society. We have to invent them. We have to be pioneers of conversation. ■

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

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

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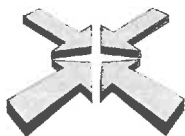
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The Four Arrows and the Cross symbolise diversity giving rise to communion in and through the Paschal Mystery. Those who are diverse by nature and culture, in and through Christ find life-giving unity.

Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated publishes *The Mix* as one of its forums for conversation. All reasonable expressions of opinion relevant to the renewal of the Church are welcome. The Editor reserves the right not to publish a submitted text. Names must be supplied though, for good reason, the Editor may publish a submitted text without the writer's name being made public. Not all the opinions expressed in *The Mix* are those of Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated.

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THE HUMAN FACE

My name is Anne Maree Higgins and I grew up in Castle Hill, Sydney. My earliest significant memories of church were my first communion day, solo singing at school masses and regular visits from Br McGrath who was the director of St Gabriel's Deaf School next door to our local high school. Br McGrath was always ahead of his time and brought many laughs to our dinner table. My parents had sponsored a young deaf boy to live with us to enable him to attend the school because his family lived too far away. It was my first awareness of helping someone other than your friends or family.

Then in early primary school, I clearly remember the day when three young Vietnamese children arrived in the classroom. I was asked to 'look after' the oldest girl and we became friends. I told mum when I got home that day that I met a beautiful painted doll who couldn't speak English. Their safe arrival in 1978 from war-torn Vietnam was partly a result of a generous couple in the parish who had begun to sponsor Vietnamese refugees and find them places to live. Thirty years on they received a medal from the Queen.

As I reached year five my parents had another interesting visitor. He was a Jesuit priest who had been a missionary in India for the past 20 years. He needed a place to stay and so I met Fr Barry. The school fete was approaching so he took me over to Gilroy College and we won a little puppy dog on the chocolate wheel. He said that when I grow up I should bring it to India and give it to Mother Teresa for her orphanage in Calcutta. At the time and for many years, I thought he was joking.

Then my teenage years brought boyfriends, cars, a part time income and a hectic social life. I think those experiences were generally positive and I learnt to stick up for myself and state my case especially when it came to the church. I was heavily involved in Antioch and developed many great friendships in the NSW Antioch Leadership Team. It was a dynamic group for dynamic times. Sharing our own lives through the eyes of Scripture was incredibly prayerful and promoted strong healthy friendships. The outreach component of the weekend retreats were always my favourite. It gave me the confidence to be myself and invite others with a natural enthusiasm to share their faith. I was also becoming continually intrigued with India and had been in regular writing contact with Fr Barry.

So when I left school I made the journey to India. At the time I was 21 and had been working for the Christian Brother's Retreat Team in Mulgoa. Then, it wasn't very

common for students to go to developing countries as an immersion experience but it's good that it's a lot more popular now. The night I arrived in Calcutta I was met by Fr Barry and a whole van of sisters of charity. We stayed at their convent overnight and Barry asked if I wanted to meet Mother Teresa tomorrow morning. After my initial shock, it was an incredible feeling to meet her and an experience I'll never forget. So I did end up taking my old soft toy along to the orphanage and she thought it was a funny story.

I guess after those experiences you change for life. I became intrigued with spirituality and finished an Arts degree in Theology and Philosophy but with still no real plan. I think in some ways God has wanted me to work in the church because I have been gracefully guided into great jobs in youth ministry on both parish and diocesan levels.

So many times, I have really questioned God, 'Lord why am I here? Why can't I be normal and be in some marketing job or be some rich accountant?' I'm not a nun or a priest or really fit anywhere - I'm not even a youth anymore. But at the same time, not fitting into the box is exciting and unpredictable and you can follow your passion. As a result I am now a songwriter and currently recording an album of contemporary music, both for church and secular clients and I'm learning from my producer about the industry. It is a dream come true and something I believe God has been instrumental in.

My husband and I are also now assisting two Sudanese refugees and they are living with us at the moment. We are learning so much and I believe somehow this is the next chapter in our lives as Catholics. It feels like we are living a bit on the edge, leaning on the side of the poor which is somehow a truly authentic faith experience. And we have two new friends.



Anne Maree Higgins

Your Say – About the resurrection

Paul Coleman and Betty Moriarty

I read the views of Denis Snell with great interest. I found it refreshing to find that the insights of modern biblical scholarship were being used to illuminate and deepen the understanding of one's faith. Many of us are all too ready to take scriptural texts at their face value. At the same time, I do hold some reservations about Denis's claim that in many instances the gospels are not literally true. I think that claim requires some clarification. It does not do justice to scriptural scholarship nor to the nature and function of the gospel texts.

As part of sacred scripture the four gospels function as texts for prayer, meditation and worship. They are documents of faith that have been generated by, and for, communities of faith. Most scholars recognize that function and evaluate them accordingly. Although they are not factual accounts in our modern sense of history they do stand as true and accurate records of the beliefs of early Christian communities. Those communities clearly believed in the resurrection, an event that scholars now recognize as meta-historical, or outside history. There are a number of historical indicators that support the belief of those communities. The tradition of the empty tomb is historical. The fact that Christ died as a disgraced criminal is historical. The fact that he had been deserted by his followers is historical. The fact that something happened to inspire those same followers to suffer persecution and death for their beliefs is historical. Most scholars agree on those facts.

...the message ... is one of inestimable hope, that in Christ we really and truly encounter God, the God of history, and the God of the whole human race.

Paul's witness antedates the gospels and it is important for a proper understanding of the resurrection narratives. Paul did much more than just pass on to us the beliefs he had received from the first Christians. He made the resurrection the central issue of a passionate conviction, "If our hope in Christ is for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people". The Catholic Catechism is completely faithful to Paul's preaching to the Corinthians when it teaches, "Christ will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, into a spiritual body".

There exists a wide variety of opinion amongst scriptural scholars and there are different schools of thought. In 1993 one such school, which included Dominic Crossan, published a book with the title, *The Five Gospels*. In the introduction to that book the figure of Jesus is described as "an imaginative historical construct" based on an "enigmatic sage of Nazareth". I do not accept that the majority of theologians would support that view. If the Jesus of the gospels is merely an imaginary figure it is difficult to account for the extraordinary influence it has exerted on the course of world history. It follows that there must be a strong vein of truth underlying the literary conventions of the gospel narratives, a vein which needs to be discovered, not simply dismissed on the say so of rationalist historians or 'enlightenment' thinking. After all, the message that comes down to us from Paul and the four evangelists is one of inestimable hope, that in Christ we really and truly encounter God, the God of history, and the God of the whole human race. ■

Paul Coleman, North Sydney, NSW

The Gospels are, in many instances, not literally true". Do we leave it at that? The Gospel is the living Word of God. The Creed challenges us to dig deep. "He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." The Incarnation, the birth of Jesus, is the Father's gift to each one of us. "This is My beloved Son. . . ." Mary pondered the wonder of the Gift, and we are challenged to do the same, no matter whether the stories around this Birth are literally true or not.

To simply close the study of the Gospel by saying, "In many instances (the stories) are not literally true", can leave us without the challenge to ponder those wonderful events, as Mary did, and discover the mystery of God's love and care for us, which is at the heart of the Good News. Apply some of the questions to our own life: What are you looking for? Who do you say I am? Where is your faith? How long do I have to put up with you? What do you want me to do for you? The Gospel did not happen merely 2000 years ago, the grace from it is alive and living down through the ages, in our own life, today.

The Passion narratives "were not intended to be an historical account". In the Creed we say: "He suffered under Pontius Pilate, suffered, died and was buried". Only with the heart can we see Jesus during His

Passion, only then can we recognize the God who is love itself. We need to ask God to replace our hearts of stone with a heart of flesh, a heart capable of seeing the grim reality and terror of Christ's death – "unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground, dies" – the Wheat of the Eucharist flowing through the ages, giving us life and love.

To simply close the study of the Gospel by saying, "In many instances (the stories) are not literally true", can leave us without the challenge to ponder those wonderful events ...

"On the third day He rose again". The reality is that he rose from the dead. In the stories of the days before the Resurrection, we see Jesus guiding the church in preparation for the fulfilment of the promise of the Holy Spirit. He knew that the apostles needed Him especially at that moment in the growth of the infant church. "Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful, enkindle in them the fire of thy Love. . . and thou shalt renew the face of the earth." His work had only begun as we see in the Acts. The Gospel is truly the Good News. ■

Betty Moriarty rscj, Kensington, NSW

My life goes in fits and starts, but judging by the excellent June issue of *The Mix*, it is in good hands, together with *Catalyst for Renewal*. Sometimes I find the essay feature a bit rambly but that was not so with *this* month's installment. It flows very well. (I surmise that it has not been chopped up very much.) "In reconciliation lies hope," reads well. Very well in fact.

Solid work behind the July issue. Thank you for it.

Also it's good to have a (short?) break from the turgid grandstanding that inevitably breaks out within *The Mix*. (See past issues. I can't quote, but some letters included border on the strange. Sure, everyone is eligible to comment, but does every comment have to win a place in copy!?)

This month's "Your Say" had a stamp of authenticity about it. *This* is the sort of material we should be reading, not "just anyone's" "strange lopsided views from outer space." ■

David Lynch, Lane Cove NSW

Essay – Social justice and charity

Tim O'Hearn

This is the major part of the text of a talk given at Spirituality in the Pub, Rouse Hill, June 2006.

When the commentators responded to Benedict XVI's encyclical *God is Love*, they expressed pleasant surprise about the first section and were far more guarded about the second. They commented that the language of the former seemed soft and human, something they were not expecting from the former Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict. Tonight I want to comment about the second section, *Caritas: The Practice of Love by the Church as a "Community of Love"*.

There are many ways to express the central commandment of a Christian believer. A shorthand way would hear us say: love God, love one's neighbour as oneself. The encyclical makes it clear that the love of neighbour applies at three levels: that of the individual, (namely, it applies to me and my relationship with every other human being); that of the local Church (as a member of a Church group, in the parish, diocese, for example); and thirdly, at the level of the whole Church (the Catholic Church is to be a witness of love of all people, regardless of who they are and where they live.)

Hebrew scripture, especially the writings attributed to the prophets, exhort the believers to be conscious of and generous to the needy. They were excoriating of those who neglected the downtrodden, the poor, the widows. Christian scripture gives us examples of love at each of these levels. Christ tells us the story of the Good Samaritan and contrasts this person with practicing religious people. He tells the rich young man to go and sell all that he has, give it to the poor, and then be ready to follow Christ's example and life. He tells us the story of the widow's mite being more pleasing than the gift of the wealthy person.

The *Acts of the Apostles* tell us that the early Christians lived a communal life, sold their possessions and donated the money to those in need. Early Church history tells us that this loving community was one factor that distinguished people's perceptions of the early Christian communities.

This early Church history suggests that the Christians were noted for their assistance given to the poor. The groups identified were the widows, orphans, prisoners, the sick, the needy, and later, the foreigners.

More recent history of Christianity, at the individual, local and Church level too,

demonstrates the application of the moral principle, "love your neighbour as yourself". It has to be added that the report card is far from perfect, but to focus on the downfall by individuals, local and whole Church, and to neglect the good that is done is to present an incomplete picture.

I mentioned the issue of language, and I want to turn to this now. There was, and for some, still is, a respect for "charity". It was the giving from those who had, to those who did not have. The gift was often money, clothing, housing, security, and was usually given anonymously. This still happens.

The French Enlightenment, and later Marxism especially, introduced an element to the relationship with one's fellow citizens that challenged the way charity was exercised. You will recall that the battle cry of the French revolutionaries: *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*. People are free, they are equal and they are brothers and sisters. Why? The answer was both philosophical and political. What is important is that the concept is secular. Justice for the people, the downtrodden, the poor was a political fight. The concept of equality and fraternity was taken up by the Marxists. They too wanted a just society, albeit a secular society.

The term "social justice" has always had to contend with this association with the Enlightenment and Marxism. Many, especially the Catholic hierarchy, find the term secular and reject it in favour of "charity".

The tension was played out in Sydney especially, but Australia more generally, when the Saint Vincent de Paul Society argued that members ought focus on the factors or social structures that keep people poor in preference to constantly giving.

The argument – and this is very general – was that giving will keep people where they are forever, whereas trying to change social structures that have them poor might be a preferable way forward. It is a bit like the argument that the Vatican ought sell all its art works and property and give the proceeds to the poor; the counter argument is that there will still be poor people when that money runs out and there will be nothing to give to the next wave of poor, the needy, the widows, and so forth.

Social justice – charity: What does the encyclical say? It comes out strongly in favour of "charity". The argument is that the Church can try to persuade politics but

has no right to interfere in the political process. (At this point you might want to consider whether the Church always follows this line on issues such as gay marriage, abortion, or related matters of sexuality.)

The argument of the encyclical is that the just ordering of society is the business of the political establishment not the direct duty of the Church; the Church's role is to try to persuade; the responsibility of the Church is to care for souls. The role of the individual citizens is to be the persuaders, the ones to try to gain a just society and at the same time to practice charity to one's fellows.

Charity, according to Benedict, is to be concerned to relieve the situation of the poor, the defenceless and the lowly. Those who offer that assistance to their fellows ought do so as an activity of their faith rather than as a political activity.

Charity: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting the prisoners and so forth is the responsibility of the Church at individual, local and international levels.

Benedict rejects the "social justice – change the structures that cause the poverty, the sickness, the imprisonment, the detention centres, and so forth - argument". He also rejects the "charity for souls" approach. Those who carry out the Church's charitable activity on the practical level, in the words of Benedict,

... must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love. . Consequently, more than anything, they must be persons whose hearts Christ has conquered by His love, awakening within them a love of neighbour.

We perhaps can see why language is significant and why many see no conflict between social justice and charity; why others see a gulf between the two; why the term "Christian Mission" when applied in the context of charity might be problematic; and finally, why the second half of the encyclical was less enthusiastically received than the first section. Finally, I have to say that I do not believe that the social justice/charity/mission/service issue is going to go away as a result of this encyclical. ■

Tim O'Hearn is Dean of Students at Australian Catholic University.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

David Holdcroft SJ

This is the major part of the text of a talk given at Spirituality in the Pub, North Sydney, June 19, 2006.

About two years ago, the Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, speaking at the Playford lecture, stated:

I will always defend the right of the Churches to enter the political debates of our time. But they have special responsibilities – to the facts, to their congregations, and to their faiths. Too often it seems to me the Churches seek popular political causes or cheap headlines – and this tends to cut across the central role they have in providing spiritual comfort and moral guidance to the community.

I remember the speech partly because of the qualified endorsement given it by the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell. At the time there was a view that the Church was splitting into two camps, one seeking a return to a more piety based expression of faith, another seeking to promote activity based social justice agenda. Some used the Cardinal's comments to validate this analysis.

I do not agree with the "two camps" hypothesis and I will argue that it represents a false dualism. The Church needs and indeed embraces both attitudes as necessary, interdependent expressions of faith.

The Vatican clearly and consistently calls for a just social order as one of the main pre requisites for authentic democracy. Only last week Pope Benedict, speaking in Rome, called for a "tenacious, lasting and shared effort for the promotion of social justice" on behalf of lay people.

I see plenty of anecdotal evidence that says the social aspect of our faith is alive and well. Nonetheless, I agree that there does seem to be a call for stronger institutional expressions of faith. Some young people are more conservative in Church matters, particularly those who still regard themselves as Church members.

Of course my use of terms such as conservative and social is simplistic. Nevertheless it may be helpful to look at the Christian and Catholic social agenda as we constructed it in the years following Vatican 2. In my experience it was based upon three assumptions:

- a. The pre-existence of a firm religious identity among the young faithful. I talk of the baby boomer and earlier generations who had the confidence to explore the margins of their cultural and religious identity without imagining that, in doing so, they would seriously damage it. I question whether later generations have grown up with this optimistic and adventurous spirit. Their re-

ligious and cultural identities have been formed in new ways and in response to a far more complex social environment. At the same time they have much less investment in institutions.

- b. That participation in public political debate has been and is the only, or the main, way of "doing" social justice in the Church.
- c. That we live in a benign politico-theological environment that imagines a value-free public space in which a society can conduct reasoned discourse about policy matters.

This last assumption is potentially most significant. Here I acknowledge the work of American historian, William Cavanaugh, who asserts that in the west we live within the "nation state myth", based on the premise that, in response to the conflict within/between the churches in 17th century Europe, the Church gave over its temporal power to secular rulers. These rulers guaranteed security and peace in return for Churches looking after people's spiritual life.

... if you think you have the solution then you are definitely part of the problem!

According to Cavanaugh, this led to the creation of privatised spirituality and an individualised identity construct. We self-identify primarily as individuals and at the same time imagine the existence of civil society as a free public space in which debate about values can flourish.

However what governments do is to attempt to keep us behaving as individuals. They work to limit our trust in each other. Governments preserve political power by pushing the myth of religion's potential violence, its inability to keep the peace. The Church's power to gather people and nurture true expressions of human freedom is severely compromised.

My brother-in-law, Stephen, once described to me the Christmas celebration in the Cathedral in post-war Hanoi. It was one of two Christian celebrations allowed in immediate post-war Vietnam. Thousands of people came: the Cathedral itself filled hours before the service, while the plaza outside also filled with a huge crowd. Through their participation in the Church's Christmas liturgy, the people expressed their God-given freedom and dignity as human beings in the face of a repressive and secularist government. Stephen saw here the realisation of the power contained in the Church's communal worship.

I find Cavanaugh's thesis attractive as it helps explain to me why the same Catholics who largely ignored the consistent Vatican

policy opposing the Iraq war acknowledge the Church's position on issues of life and death, such as abortion and euthanasia. Could it be that the decision of some Western countries to go to war touches the myth that the prime task of secular rulers is to ensure external security? Religion is relegated to a private realm with questions over life and death, surely crucial to a society's future, similarly cast as "private matters" of morality.

As Church we need to recover some of the social aspects of our tradition and heritage. As people interested in the social agenda we need to begin to re-imagine ourselves as a Church community doing social justice.

Firstly we need to re-imagine ourselves not at the centre, with others on the margins, but sitting together and listening. Many of our comments feel as though they come from the centre; they presume "I can make a difference". It's as if we have the solutions to the world's problems. Many of us do have the opportunity to change things for the better but I would rather that we first listen and collaborate. Most marginalised people know the solutions to their problems. They invite us, the powerful, to listen and learn from them.

Secondly, to listen to others and to try to love them neither makes us the same as them, nor impels us to adopt their values. We can both engage with the marginalised and be faithful to our own religious traditions, especially its communitarian aspects.

Thirdly there is a call to make our institutions more just and at the same time reflect a preferential option for the poor. This does not make them social work institutions but it makes them more just institutions.

Fourthly, we need to re-imagine our religious institutes as partnership between lay and religious. Within these partnerships are different charisms, including religious and lay, married and single. We are called to collaborate and to use the unique gifts that each person brings. The challenges we face in ministry invite a more collaborative approach.

I am not sure who said if you think you have the solution then you are definitely part of the problem! We need finally to remember that hospitality is the basis of all social contracts and relationships. My work in Jesuit Refugee Service takes me to many parts of the world and I am constantly astonished how genuine welcome breaks down cultural, religious, linguistic and other differences and enables us to move forward.

Our religious tradition teaches that we are destined for communion. Instead of seeking always to make a difference let's work to understand, listen to and work with difference as a way of discovering our deepest reality as individuals and as a community. ■

Words for a Pilgrim People

“This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.” (Mark 9:7)

□□□

“I feel that no human being anywhere can answer for you those questions and feelings that deep within them have a life of their own; for even the best err in words when they are meant to mean most delicate and almost inexpressible things. But I believe nevertheless that you will not have to remain without a solution if you will hold to objects that are similar to those from which my eyes now draw refreshment. If you will cling to Nature, to the simple in Nature, to the little things that hardly anyone sees, and that can so unexpectedly become big and beyond measuring; if you have this love of inconsiderable things and seek quite simply, as one who serves, to win the confidence of what seems poor: then everything will become easier, more coherent and somehow more conciliatory for you, not in your intellect, perhaps, which lags marveling behind, but in your inmost consciousness, waking and cognizance. You are so young, so before all beginning, and I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.” (Rainer Maria Rilke, **Letters to a Young Poet**, trans M D Herter Norton, W W Norton, 1962, 34-5.)

□□□

“The parables of Jesus seek to draw one into the Kingdom, and they challenge us to act and to live from the gift which is experienced therein. But we do not want parables. We want precepts and we want programs. We want good precepts and we want sensible programs. We are frightened by the lonely silences within the parables.” (John Dominic Crossan, **In Parables - The Challenge of the Historical Jesus**, Harper and Row, 1973, 82.)

On the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), we meditate on Mark’s account of Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:2-10. See also Matthew 17:1-8 & Luke 9:28-36). In the previous eight chapters of Mark’s Gospel, there are accounts of many cures and other miracles. On one occasion, Mark simply says: “...he cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another; he also cast out many devils ...” (1:32-34). This little passage concludes with a statement of one of Mark’s recurring themes: “... he would not allow (the devils) to speak because they knew who he was.” Jesus is on a particular journey, he has not come simply to be a miracle worker in their midst. He is here for the world, indeed, he is here for the whole of creation. He is on the road to Jerusalem to live his Passover. In that he will liberate the whole of creation. His Passover is our Good News.

The transfiguration gently but firmly re-focuses our attention.

After the transfiguration there are only two accounts of miracles – the cure of the epileptic immediately following the transfiguration (see 9:14-29), coupled with the second prophecy of Jesus’ Passover, and the cure of the blind man of Jericho. In this last cure, Jesus asks a seemingly unnecessary question: “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus’ question forces us to look deeper. The last sentence of this little story is then highly significant: “Immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road” (10:52).

The story of the transfiguration stands like a beacon in the centre of Mark’s Gospel. At Jesus’ baptism we hear: “You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you” (1:11). At the transfiguration we hear: “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him” (9:8). At the crucifixion we hear . . . the awful silence of God. Jesus cries out: “My God, my God, why have you deserted me?” (15:34).

Things had gone very well in the early phase of Jesus’ public life. The transfiguration reminds us that there is more yet, much more. The real triumph of Jesus’ life, his reason for living, is not to be found in the miracles. (Just think of the health care system he might have set up!) The transfiguration gently but firmly re-focuses our attention. By partaking of the Light, we are at once reminded of our destiny and sent forth into the world. The transfiguration urges us not to settle down, that there is no ultimate “home” here. It tells us to move on towards our ultimate goal. Our life is a journey through Him, with Him and in Him. We too must live our own passover, a participation in his Passover. ■

The Tradition – From seeming to being

In St Peter’s First Letter there is an enigmatic reference. Specifically, he is giving practical advice to wives, urging them not to get lost in “dressing up for show” (3:3). However, he then writes: “... all this should be inside, in a person’s heart (literally: “*should be the hidden self of the heart*”), imperishable ...” (3:4). This recalls St Paul’s words to the community in Ephesus: “Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his spirit for your hidden self to grow strong” (3:16). It also puts us in mind of the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the pure in heart ...” (Matthew 5:8). Thomas Merton seems to have been pointing in the same direction when he wrote, not long before his death in 1968: “Our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts. Never was it more necessary for us to respond to that action. I pray that we may all do so generously. God bless you.”

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Apart from being geniuses at self-deception – and maybe because we are such geniuses – we are easily distracted. We turn means into ends and we absolutize the relative. We are constantly missing the point. Too often, we just do not get it. What matters in the end? The tradition reminds us that our substance as human beings comes from our interiority, “the hidden self of the heart.” The demands of social interaction and the vagaries of our own psychological inclinations, to say nothing of our propensity to sin, can have us drifting towards seeming to be, rather than actually being. The journey towards adulthood must involve a movement from seeming towards being. ■

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 Gardners Inn (Info: Elizabeth 4787 6198).

◦ **Bowral** The Grand Bar and Brasserie August 23 “Communities of Faith – The role of Chaplains” Ruth Dudley & Sr Loretta (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, August 16 “How well does our society Love? How well do we respond to needs of others?” Christine Gilfeather & Dom Van Gestel (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

◦ **Goulburn** Soldiers Club September 12 (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

◦ **Inner West – “Passion” Note new venue: The Pine Inn, 19 Parramatta Rd, Burwood** August 30 “Marginalised communities – answers please!” Anne Cummins & Sarah Kelly (Info: James 0418 242 932).

◦ **Jamberoo** The Jamberoo Hotel September 11 “Dare to Live and Dare to Dream – Working together for the common good” Colleen Malone & Rev Bill Crews (Info: Gabrielle 4232 2735).

◦ **Kincumber** The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive September 5 “Finding the Gifts” Libby Harvey & Fred & Laurel Leslie (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, August 21 “Do I love without a hidden agenda?” Cameron Cutts (L'Arche) & Justice Jenny Boland

(Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

◦ **Paddington – The Getting of Wisdom** Bellevue Hotel September 6 “Wisdom and the Arts” tba (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 August 23 “Living Simply” Anne McGuire & tba (Info: Greg 9546 2028).

◦ **Waitara – We must choose to matter - In the part of the world we touch?** The Blue Gum Hotel August 16 Jim Carty sm & Maree Harris rsj (Info: Carole 9869 1036(a/h)).

Victoria

◦ **Alphington** Tower Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm October 18 “What the Church says and what it does!” Jan Gray (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 September 19 “Buddhism” Venerable Vigitah Thero & tba (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

◦ **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel August 16 “What on earth does the Pub have to do with Spirituality?” Fr Andy Hamilton (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 September 6 “Without Creed and Ritual: The Quaker Tradition” tba (Info: Denise 9816 3001)

◦ **Goulburn Valley** Terminus Hotel (Shepparton) 7.30pm-9pm September 11 (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 September 5 “Why Marriage?” Jonathan & Karen Doyle (Info: Marg 5429 5907).

Other States

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

◦ **Hobart North** Moonah Café Bar & Bistrotro Early September “Spirituality and the Culture of Community” Mayor Adriana Taylor & Mayor Tony Foster (Info: Tony 6273 8590).

◦ **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; September 5 “The Poor in Spirit” Nicholas Kerr & Penny O'Hare (Info: Gerald 8388 5957).

Other Matters and Events

◦ **St Mary's Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, Aug 9-17 & Aug 18-26 directed retreats; Sept 15-17 prayer weekend; Sept 19-25 Spirituality of Ageing; Sept 29-Oct 5 guided retreat (Info: 02 4630 9232).

◦ **Readers** are encouraged to visit website:

www.schoolofstjude.co.tz/default.asp

It will lift your spirits.

◦ **Retreat St Clement's Galong** with Fr Michael Whelan sm September 8-11 “Mysticism is being one with the One” (Info: Sr Frances 02 6386 7214).

◦ **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. 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.

Recommended

Stephen Miller, *Conversation. A History of a Forgotten Art*, Yale University Press, 2006, hb, 335 pages, Bibliographic Chapter, Index, ISBN: 13:978-0-300-1130-2, \$US27.50.

Stephen Miller traces the history of conversation from the Greeks and Romans, to the British clubs and the French salons of later centuries. He then moves to modern-day America. His argument is that conversation – the mutual deference, the concealing of authority, and the attention to each in turn without vehemence, interruption, eagerness of victory or airs of superiority – is vital for society. He adds the importance of raillery as a factor that advances good conversation. He is particularly scathing of modern film and music; the latter in particular, which seems to get its life from anger and abusive language. He turns on what he refers to as the modern enemies of conversation: ersatz conversations of reality television and talkback radio, conversation-avoidance devices of modern technology (ipods, video games, VCRs in particular). He argues these are destroying our chances of speaking with each other about things that matter. For many of us, the inability of people to maintain a conversation, is bleak. Thus the importance of *Catalyst* and *SiP*. These are not just fads; they are vital ways of ensuring that we speak at length with each other about the significant matters of our lives. While his focus is America and the worst of modern technology, readers here have to ask themselves whether the same is happening in Australia and to what effect. Expensive but an important book.

Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, Canongate Books, 2005, Hb, 159 pages, ISBN: 1-84195-716-X, \$US18.

Karen Armstrong is certainly not everyone's cup of tea. She is a former nun who has written extensively on matters of God, religions, and not always in ways that present ideas that are thought to be orthodox. In this book she turns her attention to myth. The book is the first in a forthcoming series that will re-write many myths from a different perspective – Homer's odyssey will be written from the perspective of his wife. She rails against modern culture that treats myth as unimportant; she maintains that we need these stories that seek to make meaning of our existence. She particularly argues that stories that make us face up to death or the fear of extinction, and which force us to go beyond our everyday experiences, are particularly important in modern culture which shies away from such themes. We like to see ourselves in charge of our existence: myths take us into the unknown and into another world. There will be parts that many readers will refuse to accept: was the *Genesis* story a myth? What about original sin and the myths surrounding the crossing of the Red Sea? Her text forces the reader to examine assumptions, to be clear about matters of faith, and, at the same time, to see that there is a mythology associated with religion. This is an easy read and one that forces us to be aware of story in our lives, story that makes sense of our existence and which we need to celebrate joyfully with ritual practice. We must also destroy destructive myths.

Michael Casey, *Strangers to the City. Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict*, Paraclete Press, 2005, 212 pages, notes, pb, ISBN: 1-55725-460-5, \$US15.95.

The city of this earth and the city of God; we are to be strangers to the former to become citizens of the latter. Michael Casey writes from the Benedictine tradition to help all to become citizens of the kingdom. This book is for all who would seek the wisdom of that long and fruitful Benedictine tradition. At no point does Michael hide the realities of human failure and weakness; they are all present in the peoples of both worlds. The challenges are there for all who seek the kingdom. There are gems in this very clearly written book. For example, eight qualities that lead to a more personal love of Christ; the section on holiness, the importance of reading, especially *lectio divina*; and the chapter on community that is pertinent to all groups in the Church, the importance of leisure, subtle references to helping one's companions on the journey, insights into some of the secular world's traps. All these are dealt with bluntly and yet with compassion. For those with an interest in the Benedictine tradition, Michael Casey draws on the great writers and gives the reader a clear picture of their holiness and their humanness. These were not fools. They were people who understood human nature. Their wisdom is still relevant to our generation where the monastic tradition in matters such as mutuality, holiness, contemplation, chastity are pertinent to us all.

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**“In both Church and Society,
a lot of people
would utterly suppress abuses,
but they are moved
more by glacial impatience
and a bitter zeal for justice
than by the tender zeal
that comes from love.”**

(Pierre Favre, Memoriale, 1545)

[Cited by David Holdcroft SJ in his SIP talk at North Sydney, June 19, 2006. See page 5 of this issue of *The Mix* for a copy of David's talk.]