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Tony Doherty

The human face 2

Islam and Christianity revisited

M Wahaby and Kerri Hashmi 3

Margaret Goggin

Life as witness 4

The bible

Be opened! 6

The tradition

Sacramentality 6

Our Say – Inner and outer conversations

Oscar Wilde once remarked that our judgements of others are always autobiographical. Whether he intended it or not, he was actually highlighting a critical principle that underlies human relationships in general and good conversation in particular. The principle is this: My relationship with myself – my inner world – is inextricably bound up with, for better or worse, my relationships with other people, events and things – my outer world.

The great 12th century guide, St Bernard of Clairvaux, was aware of the same principle. In his remarkable little treatise on humility, he distinguishes three intertwined and necessary steps in our pursuit of truth. Ultimately we seek the Truth in itself, but we cannot attain this unless we seek truth in others, which truth we cannot attain unless we seek the truth in ourselves. True humility is “the ability of persons to see themselves as they really are and so discover their own unworthiness.” Bernard asks: How can you have

compassion for another if you have no compassion for yourself? And you will not come to compassion for yourself until and unless you stand naked before the overwhelming mercy and compassion of God, without pretences or lies to hide your radical neediness. Then, and only then, will you know true compassion for your brother or sister who shares that same condition.

The most practical and fundamental question I can ask at any time is, “What’s happening?” The intent of that question must be to listen, to pay attention to what is going on in me and between us. In other words, the fruitfulness of the outer conversation depends on the honesty and effectiveness of the inner conversation.

You do not have to be a trained psychologist to realise that conversations can be profoundly affected – for better or worse – by the dispositions of the participants. False assumptions, unreal expectations, prejudices, unresolved

conflicts, grudges, resentments, chronic anger, and the like, especially when they are not acknowledged, can quite literally make good conversation impossible. In fact, they can turn an encounter, otherwise based on good intentions, into a destructive event.

On the other hand, when I face these inner realities honestly and effectively, they can, paradoxically, become a most fruitful and constructive part of the encounter. They can give birth to compassion rather than alienation.

This does not necessarily mean that we emotionally disrobe in public. Occasionally someone may do that. They should be treated with the utmost compassion. What it does mean, is that good conversation with others depends on my pursuing good conversation with myself. And that inner conversation must be persistent and honest. I will thus be less vulnerable to the destructive games of defensiveness and point scoring and so on when I come to the outer conversation with you. ■

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 Tony Doherty. 'Three feet of ice are not frozen in one day,' the Chinese say. Nor are seven decades easily summarised in one page. But here goes.

Let me begin with a few scattered memories: our Lane Cove family home being threatened by the '38 bushfires; being taken to a school air-raid shelter when the midget subs attacked Sydney; seeing Frank 'the dancing man' McAlary walzing down Martin Place at war's end; trying to stay awake during the sermon of the impossibly old, white-haired Monsignor on a steamy Sunday morning; rattling across the Harbour Bridge in a toast rack tram with the conductor hanging perilously on the outside – how I dreamed of being a risk-taking conductor one day; a train trip to Springwood in the mid-fifties with a new group of friends not quite matching the classical image of students studying to be priests; Cardinal Gilroy coming back from the first session of the Vatican Council saying 'nothing will change'; roaming the wards of North Shore Hospital getting the feel for the magic of pastoral work with the ill and the dying; preparing state school catechists for their exacting work and learning more about the gospel from them than I ever taught; living in New York city in the mid-seventies and meeting giants of the gospel – Dorothy Day, Dan Berrigan, Gustavo Gutierrez.

And that's just the first four decades.

In many ways my life has been shaped by several yet unanswered questions. What does it really mean to be an adult? What does it mean to be Catholic? How do you break open the gospel for contemporary Australians?

Back in the late seventies, Cardinal James Freeman, concerned that many parents were being confused by the life-centred religious education being taught to their children, invited me to commence a programme of adult education for the Sydney church. The trouble was that there were close to a million Catholic adults speaking more than fifty languages – and scarcely any funds. It was an absorbing ride. The initial question: was the task that we were to undertake simply a matter of bringing grown-ups back to the religion classes? Or was there another approach: helping Catholics to experience an adult faith, and to build a 'flatter', more community-centred, less paternalistic adult church.

Faced with what was considered a fairly daunting task, we attempted all sorts of ways and means of reaching a maximum number of people with paper-thin resources. Bringing people together in small groups seemed a good idea and was supported by

contemporary thinking in adult learning. Thus, at the height of the Lenten programme, there were probably in excess of 20,000 people engaged in reflecting on the gospel.

Also, we began setting up courses training people in various ministries, where they would learn more about the contemporary church by doing. Many forms of media were employed – print, radio, video, television – as best we could, to maximise the reach of our modest education centre. For example, we published material such as MSC priest Michael Fallon's record-breaking commentary, 'The Four Gospels'.

Later it seemed important to experiment with the way local pastoral structures worked with programmes such as 'Parish 2000 – making good parishes better' and the RCIA, raising the critical relationship between issues of social justice and the gospel.

The Adult Education centre also brought overseas speakers to Sydney such as Dom Helder Camara, Walbert Buhlmann, Dolores Curran, Richard McBrien and any other voices that we could find to introduce the Catholics of Sydney to the fresh air of the Vatican Council.

Over the last decade I have moved on to other ministries but the questions of those days still haunt my imagination. What does an adult Catholic church look like? How can we bring the exciting insights of the gospels to life for a wide range of people? How do we build parish communities where people feel that their contribution counts? What are the risks we need to take if the church is to take on a new shape?

Besides the questions, the cycle of the years mellow one's view. Today, for some reason or other, I feel far more sympathy for white-haired Monsignors searching for pulpit words on steamy Sunday mornings.



Mons Tony Doherty

Your Say – Islam and Christianity revisited

M Wahaby and Kerri Hashmi

In reference to your journal of *The Mix*, April 2006, in particular the article "Your say – Islam and Christianity: common beliefs," by Kerri Hashmi.

I should like to congratulate Kerri for her peaceful thoughts and her acknowledgment that Jesus was born of a virgin. I do agree with the writer that Muslims hold Jesus in great regard. It is mentioned in the Koran that Jesus is God's spirit and God's word. If Jesus was born of a virgin, presumably that means there was divine intervention in his conception. If not divine then who? I find her admitting Jesus' divine conception and then contradicting herself.

I should also like to correct the writer that Muslims say we all believe in the same God. I stress Christian God is very different from the Muslim God. Please refer to the article by Cardinal George Pell, "Islam and Western Democracies". http://www.svdnev.catholic.org.au/Archbishop/Addresses/200627_681.shtml

I should also like to point out the mistake in interpreting the meaning of "Islam," even if it sounds better to say that Islam means peace (Salaam). However, if you speak and have knowledge of the Arabic language you would know that Islam in Arabic means "to surrender," not "peace." In other words, "to become a Muslim" is "to surrender" in Arabic. Therefore, it appears that Kerri Hashmi does not speak the Arabic language or is trying to hide from the fact that Islam means "to surrender."

One last point I should like to make. Kerri says that Islam teaches absolute equality. If that is the case, why are Christians in Muslim countries considered second-class citizens and are persecuted and even killed for being Christians? If these countries are not following the Muslim teachings, Kerri should put her efforts to defending non-Muslims in Muslim countries for equality.

It might be Kerri's wish to think that Islam is peaceful and offers equality yet if you actually read the Koran there are verses that preach inequality and discrimination, especially for women and non-Muslims. For example:

▪ Why is a man allowed to marry four wives in Islam? A woman is not allowed to marry four men. Where is the equity here? In addition, I should add Mohammed the prophet had nine wives at one time, one of which was nine years old. Why do Mus-

lims hide this fact?

▪ A man can divorce his wife by saying, "I divorce you", while a wife cannot divorce her husband.

▪ Male siblings inherit double the female siblings.

▪ A Muslim is asked in the Koran not to befriend or do business with a non-Muslim (The Table: sura 5 verse 51- 54: "O ye who believe take not the Jews and the Christians as your helpers, for they are helpers of one another").

▪ In the early years of Islam there were battles between the tribes. For example, The Battle of "Badr" in 624 AD. That is how Islam started to spread. Muslims were allowed to make slaves of women and children after each tribal war and loot the losers' camp. Where is the equality here?

If the writer feels so strongly about what Islam should be (i.e. peaceful and equal among all people) instead of what Islam really is, the writer should direct her efforts to try and change the behaviour of all Muslims who act non-peacefully and discriminate against non-Muslims because they are simply following the Koran teachings.

I find it dishonest and ignorant for someone who is an ex-teacher to have her facts wrong, and to hide the facts about how Islam started to spread, yet to go around our schools and spread incorrect teachings.

The writer did not represent the Muslim religion fairly. She represents her views and her thoughts, but not the Koran teachings. The writer should go and give talks to all the Muslims who are trying to force their views onto the world in a non-peaceful manner.

God bless Kind Regards,

M Wahaby, Strathfield NSW

The Editor invited Kerri Hashmi to respond to the foregoing letter:

M. Wahaby has raised many common misconceptions about Islam, some from misreading my original article, and some from disinformation about Islam itself. Unfortunately there isn't enough space to reply to each in detail. The Holy Quran itself was my guide in writing my article. I have not misrepresented it.

Firstly, it is a fundamental tenet of Islam that Jews, Christians and Muslims worship

the same God. The Catholic authority is Pope John Paul II who declared that to be true, in Morocco in 1985. Our concept of God is different, however. In Islam God is a Unity, in Christianity a Trinity.

As I wrote, all individuals are equal before God, and there are many passages in the Quran stating that all good Jews, Christians and Muslims will be rewarded by God, regardless of race, gender or language.

The word "Islam" is indisputably cognate with "salaam" – "peace". It is a verb, meaning "entering into peace". The closest English translation is "to submit", making a Muslim "one who submits himself to God".

When Islam was revealed 1400 years ago, no civilisation gave women any rights. Islam gave women the right to own and inherit property, earn money, run businesses and divorce bad husbands. Women converted in large numbers because it was liberating. Western women did not get these rights for another 1300 years. Until the last century the West was critical of Islam because it gave women "too many rights". For more on this, see Mehmet Ozalp's book *101 Questions You Asked About Islam*, written for fellow Australians.

M. Wahaby has completely misrepresented incidents from the life of the Prophet (pbuh). As I cannot go into detail here, I recommend reading Karen Armstrong's biography *Muhammad, A Western Attempt to Understand Islam*. On the history of Muslim-Christian relations, her book *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World* is excellent. It demonstrates where the misunderstandings have arisen.

Certainly, some Muslims do not live up to religious teachings, as with some Christians as well. Terrorists act contrary to their religion. Sometimes poorly educated Muslims confuse Islamic teachings with traditional cultural beliefs, giving rise to misconceptions about Islam. Dictatorial leaders misuse Islam to strengthen their hold on power. There is a need for those people to be educated, but Westerners also need to learn about true Islam, to avoid being misled by the scare-mongering of media and politicians.

As a fifth generation Australian, I feel it is my role to see that fellow Australians are properly informed.

Kerri Hashmi

Essay – Life as Witness

Margaret Goggin

Margaret & Denys Goggin spoke on this topic at a reflection morning at Hunters Hill in May 2006. Both are now retired and actively involved with family, church and community activities. This is an edited version of Margaret's talk. Denys' talk will be published later.

Denys and I chose as the title of our reflections: *Life as Witness*. Our intention was to reflect on how we had lived our lives and explore what it meant for us as committed Catholics to be “witnesses”. Witness in Greek is *Martus* or *Matur*, and signifies one who gives testimony to the truth at the expense of his/her life. It is in this sense that the word is mainly used in the New Testament and our word “martyr” has come from this also. While not related to the idea of physically giving your life, I thought that metaphorically, or symbolically, the idea of the truth of who are and of living your life with integrity was a valid starting point.

So what insights and wisdom can I share with you after many decades lived as faithful but also questioning Catholic, an educator, a mother of three wonderful adults, a wife of some 42 years and grandmother of four grandsons?

Primarily, there is the sense that I have lived my life for the service of my God and others, especially those closest to me, my husband, close and extended family and wider community. Somehow in all the complexity and challenges of my life, there is the belief that I don't act alone but in all that I do I try to manifest the presence of God. I believe there are key events in my life where I have tried to do this.

What gives my life meaning? My Catholic faith, prayer, relationships, family, Eucharist, and belonging to a faith community. Above all there is the privilege of motherhood and the awesome responsibility of nurturing and shaping young and fragile lives. I was also blessed to have had a career as an educator in the humanities and religious education, and to be given the privilege of not only developing the ideas and concepts of young people, but helping to shape their future, sharing in their growth and development. I found there was always a wonderful vitality and hope, sense of wonder and imagination in the young people I encountered that has influenced who I am.

One Sunday morning a few weeks ago I was sitting in a beautiful historic church, St. Joseph's in Subiaco in Perth, surrounded by fourteen members of my extended Family. I am the second eldest of

ten children and there are numerous nieces, nephews and their respective children. We had all congregated in Perth for the wedding of my nephew, Justin, to Sarah, the previous day and were enjoying the opportunity to spend some extended time together. This occasion had been a great celebration of family.

My sister, who keeps the family records, handed a personalised certificate to welcome Sarah to the extended family. She had just become family member number 108. It struck me as I looked around our family group seating in the pews, sharing the mass together, that this was a unique, never to be repeated moment in our lives. Never again would we gather in quite the same way, each with his/her own life experiences and emotions.

The wedding itself was a special cause for joy and celebration. Interwoven with the joy was the underpinning of tragic events: the recent death of Sarah's father, and an ongoing battle with cancer of Justin's mother, my sister, and the freak, accidental death of my nephew Graham's best mate. They had known one another since kindergarten and were like brothers. A falling tree killed his mate almost instantly as they worked together lopping trees. Thus the celebration had a special poignancy: The blessings of a large family and our shared relationships; the triumph of the human spirit in adversity and gratitude that was heart felt and shared by all.

In life there are the deaths and the resurrections. It was certainly a celebration of life itself. But then it occurred to me that all of our lives are exactly like these moments, composed of experiences, celebrations, challenges, circumstances, that can be never be shaped in an identical way again. For all of us life has a very similar pattern: the mundane, the routine, the moments of exhilarating happiness juxtaposed with profound sorrow and anxieties.

My image for all this complexity of life is a kaleidoscope rather than a journey. As a young child I was fascinated with the kaleidoscope. I found it magical, a thing of beauty, with its infinite variety of patterns, shapes and colours. The same pieces or ordinary coloured glass, with a different perspective could be transformed into unique patterns. I like to think that this can be a metaphor for our lives.

Perhaps at times we have lost a sense of the preciousness and sacredness, indeed the uniqueness of many of the small happenings that constitute our daily living. They are often appreciated in retrospect, when we have lost them. There is a danger of taking

it all for granted and missing the wonder and, above all, the mystery.

Hopefully, there are many moments of clarity and transcendence when we step back and reflect with gratitude and appreciation on the mundane, the routine and the formative experiences that make up the many years of our life.

This has been a major learning in my life. As I grow older, and hopefully wiser, I try to take more notice of things and to live more attentively and carefully. I try never to take everything for granted: health, close family relationships, the birth of a new child, celebrations, the dawn of a new day and another day of the gift of life. I constantly strive to be a person of gratitude for all the blessings and, although it is much more challenging, the hardships and the setbacks of life. This can start with even the seemingly insignificantly things, thanking the young person who serves you coffee; the one who sings at Mass; your own family members even for the smallest things; those who perform the mundane tasks for us, and being conscious that it is your God who is providing.

Grandchildren are a wonderful gift in this respect. They remind you that spiders and snails, ants and minute life, can be a source of wonder. Small children tackle each day with a sense of wonder and openness. They laugh so beautifully at the simplest things and never seem to lose interest in a story you read over and over again. Denys and I have four grandsons, aged from 2 to seven. Fortunately, we have been an important part of their growing up. They have so much to teach you. Innocence, trust, their sense of wonder and their simple but probing questions.

Perhaps there is a tendency for many of us to feel that our lives are quite ordinary, and have been lived in relative obscurity. How many of us feel that not only our lives, but also we ourselves are unique? People don't always feel valued. Perhaps this is compounded in our society today, in the way that people are not accorded the respect and dignity that should be theirs as God's own unique creation. Money and possessions are valued more. Human rights are constantly infringed on, and nations enter into wars where people are regarded as “the enemy” or “the terrorist”. All kinds of atrocities can be perpetrated and justified by religion, ideology, propaganda or lies. Rather than people being the true wealth of the nation, they are too often considered dispensable and technology and the economy rate as higher priorities. This is really a sad indictment.

However, the metaphor of life as a kaleidoscope has its limitations as all analogies do. It may suggest randomness, a lack of a coherence or meaning. Sadly, for many people this is the pattern of their lives: a question of survival rather than guided by an overall meaning. What has given my life its centrality and meaning are my Catholic faith and the consciousness of the presence of God in all that has happened. I believe that nothing is without a purpose. It may not be immediately evident and that is really frustrating and confusing, but that is where faith and trust in God's special purpose for my life has been the pivot.

I would like to reflect on some of those key moments in my life in terms of images and reflect on what those images tell me about being that presence and witness: The powerful image that comes to me often is that of closed doors, often of forbidding doors. I suppose because some of the people I have encountered are either locked into a closed world or shut off from the outside world, physically or emotionally. The huge old wooden door of the prison when I visited my brother; the multiple doors and grotesque barbed wire of the Villawood Detention Centre where hundreds of people are denied freedom and dignity; the doors of nursing homes where my dear mother in law and others I encountered are locked into lives of dementia; the doors that isolate lives of those who are gay, like my son and his close associates; the doors of the hospital wards where the young men I supported were dying of Aids related illnesses.

Sometimes in our lives our God takes us down a road where we are loath to go. And it is difficult to trust that He knows what he is doing. There are inevitably lots of questioning, doubts, challenges and the journey is a difficult one. "What is the meaning of all this?" is a constant refrain. Often what He has in mind for us perhaps is a special need to be His witness to others. This is not always evident at the moments of crisis. The two strongest examples for me, where I have gained so much understanding and have greatly influenced me, have been my association with detainees at the Villawood Detention Centre and my journey with my son into the experience of the gay community.

So how do we parents – and there are many of us – cope with the knowledge that their son whom they dearly love is gay, and is destined to lead a life on the margins where gay people are so often ridiculed, hated and even subjected to physical violence and robbed of their dignity?

One constant in our struggle has been the special love and acceptance that both Denys and I have for our son, and our sup-

port for him at all times, especially for some of saddest times as he struggled for his own dignity and that of others. It was a struggle that we all shared.

At first this is a bewildering and often a lonely, secret struggle, because the families of gay people can also suffer alienation and derision. There have been countless times when I have had to restrain myself from commenting on prejudiced, cruel comments and insensitive remarks that are deeply wounding. Part of you wants to confront and remind people that it is your son they are referring to. However, many people don't want to be confronted with your truth, so you have to tread carefully indeed. This is not a comfortable place to be.

As a Catholic my faith and my conscience were challenged severely and this was not helped by some of the harsh statements and judgments that are made. We had to reconcile many tensions, to make our own peace, and inform our own consciences. I felt that I also had to equip myself for this journey on behalf of other mothers who struggled. I prayed a lot and read a lot of material, both spiritual and secular from informed sources. Then I listened to the experiences of gay people and became involved as a mother, and carer in a world I have never encountered before, hoping to seek understanding.

At the outset, I joined an emotional support group called Ankali, for people, mostly gay men, who were living with Aids. This was the early nineties when the epidemic in Australia was close to its peak and paranoia was widespread. Few drugs were available to counteract the effects of devastating illnesses, and almost all afflicted died after great suffering and anguish within a couple of years. I was privileged to be the emotional support person for a number of courageous, inspirational and fine young men as they faced their deaths, and also for their mothers. I have met dedicated nuns and a priest who worked unashamedly and without prejudice in this tragic and complex world.

I learnt to suspend judgments, to avoid stereotypes, and to treat those I met with dignity, compassion and respect, as if they were my own sons. At the same time my son was working for the AIDS council and we able to develop a shared understanding of people's sufferings. As a young man in his twenties he experienced many deaths and engagement in suffering. This was a profound experience of life on the margins and a glimpse of what it was like for those who have to live in secrecy, shame and guilt. Many were treated like modern day lepers.

However, I have experienced many "sacramental moments" in my endeavours to understand and be a presence to others in

this marginalised world, often beyond my wildest imaginings. Close family, friends, strangers, those I have worked with, and even priests friends, rejected sons, bewildered parents have trusted me and spoken their deepest truths. So many people do engage in a very lonely struggle with the challenges of their sexual orientation.

I think that the powerful lessons of unconditional love, and the need to hear people's personal stories, have helped me to take greater risks than I would have thought possible, like visiting Villawood Detention Centre. There's nothing like your own personal witness of what happens behind these barbed wire enclosures to give you an insight into the inhumane policies of this government in the treatment of refugees.

I went to Villawood on a personal plea to help people learn some English. I have heard the tragic, personal and complex stories of many detainees. Sometimes I felt great shame at being an Australian and knowing that such unbelievable abuses were happening in Australia. The first Chinese lady I met had a one-year-old little girl who had lived all her life locked up in Villawood. It was so poignant meeting her baby because she was the exact age then of my one year old grandson, Sean. And the contrast between the two lives of these little ones could not have been starker.

It is impossible to convey in this short time left the myriad of experiences I had. Even the weekly process of gaining entry to Villawood was an ordeal to be met at the hands of officialdom.

I now support a Chinese woman and her daughter with whom I formed a close relationship in detention. Her story is indeed complex but is probably representative of the struggle so many have to claim genuine refugee status. Miraculously, my friend, her husband and her daughter, whom she was separated from while in Villawood, were finally granted a permanent residence visa. After six years of waiting, and two and a half of these spent in detention alone not being able to see her daughter or her husband, their asylum seeker status was finally and belatedly recognised! At last they can attempt to live a life of normality, albeit with horrific memories and the traumas of what they have experienced.

So, suffice to say this has been a huge learning curve and I am a harsh critic of this government's inhumane treatment of some of the most inspiring and fine men and women who would make a great contribution to this country. This is an issue that I feel very strongly about. ■

The Bible – Be opened!

Words for a Pilgrim People

“He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man’s ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then, looking up to heaven, he sighed; and he said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ ‘Be opened.’” (Mark 7:33-34)

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“Lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest’ (John 4:35). The Word is in the midst of His disciples. He is asking his hearers to lift up their eyes toward the fields of the Scriptures and toward the other field where the Word is present in every creature, however small, so that they may perceive the whiteness and brilliant radiance of the light of Truth which is everywhere.” (Origen’s **Commentary on John’s Gospel**, cited in Olivier Clément, **The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts and Commentary**, New City Press, 1995, 218.)

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“When someone whose mind is but partially developed sees something clothed in some semblance of beauty, he believes that this thing is beautiful in its own nature ... but someone who has purified the eyes of his soul and is trained to see beautiful things ... makes use of the visible as a springboard to rise to the contemplation of the spiritual.” (St Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, cited in Olivier Clément, **The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Texts and Commentary**, New City Press, 1995, 218.)

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“Human life is a whole and everything in creation is good. There is no aspect of life in the world that cannot, if rightly understood and used, contribute to leading us to our final end. Temporal reality and human endeavours are reflections of the perfections of God. Material things are sacramenta, symbols that reveal the goodness and beauty of the Creator.” (Timothy Fry, editor, **The Rule of St Benedict**, Liturgical Press, 1981, 370.)

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On the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), we meditate on Mark’s account of the healing of a deaf-mute man (Mark 7:31-37). This has to be one of the most puzzling passages in any of the Gospels. It follows the encounter with the Syrophenician woman, in which Jesus cures her daughter. This occurs in “the territory of Tyre” (7:24) – modern-day Lebanon. Mark then says: “Returning from the district of Tyre, he went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region” (7:31). In fact, Sidon is north of Tyre and the Sea of Galilee is south of both Tyre and Sidon, and the Decapolis region is south of the Sea of Galilee. Is Mark emphasizing that this is a journey to those who are not Jews? Jesus is quite literally breaking out of the Jewish world and encountering the Gentile world.

Jesus is set in stark relief by the geography – this is not his place – the culture – these are pagans – and the social setting – these are not his people.

Jesus is set in stark relief by the geography – this is not his place – the culture – these are pagans – and the social setting – these are not his people. “They asked him to lay his hand on (the man)” (7:32). Why does Jesus, instead, take him “aside in private, away from the crowd”? And what about the details – the sighing, the fingers in the ears, the spittle on his tongue and the Aramaic word *Ephphatha* (7:33-34)? The detail emphasizes the close contact. And all this with a pagan, and a sick one at that? Jesus is being awfully intimate and at ease with one who is distinctly “other.”

There are two parts of this that might frighten us. Firstly, Jesus is very physical in this encounter, and thus asks each of us to make a decision about the physicality of our own lives. Secondly, Jesus has a relaxed intimacy with the “other,” and thus asks us to make a decision about the way we regard the “other.” In the history of Christianity, we have frequently built our lives on a resistance to the physical. The persistence of the heresy of Docetism – “Jesus only appeared to be truly in the flesh” – is one major example of this resistance. Jansenism is another. And the ease with which we seem, throughout history, to slip into a “siege mentality,” setting ourselves over against the world, resisting the call to let others be “other,” suggests we need to examine carefully and constantly our attitude to the “other.” *Ephphatha!* “Be opened!” thus becomes a remarkable invitation and challenge to everyone who would be a disciple of Jesus. ■

The Tradition – Sacramentality

Karl Rahner SJ once observed: “There is only one fundamental mystery that has two aspects: The mystery that is the being of God and the mystery that is the saving presence of the incomprehensible God in human history.” (Cited by Eugene Kennedy, *Would You Like to be a Catholic?*, St Anthony Messenger Press, 2003, 47.) This is, in essence, the principle of sacramentality that the Catholic Church has preserved through the ages. The infinite is present to us in and through the finite, the eternal in and through the temporal, the divine in and through the human. This sacramentality is realized in its fullness in the Incarnation, the enfleshing of God in the historical man, Jesus of Nazareth.

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Thomas Groome sums it up this way: “The sacramental principle means that *God is present to humankind and we respond to God’s grace through the ordinary and everyday of life in the world.* In other words, God’s Spirit and humankind work together through nature and creation, through culture and society, through our minds and bodies, hearts and souls, through our labors and efforts, creativity and generativity, in the depth of our own being and in community with others, through the events and experiences that come our way, through what we are doing and what is going on around us, through everything and anything of life. *Life in the world is sacramental – the medium of God’s outreach and of human response.*” (*What Makes us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life*, Harper Collins, 2003, 84-85.)

The principle of sacramentality insists that we go to the world and expect to find God already at work there, in and through each person, event or thing. ■

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 Gardners Inn September 13 “Spirituality & the Australian Experience” Fr Paul Maloney & Sr Patty Fawkner (Info: Elizabeth 4787 6198).

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

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

◦ **Campbelltown** Campbelltown Catholic Club September 13 “Grief, loss and hope” Mary MacDonald rsj & Anne Chatham (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

◦ **Engadine – Sutherland United Services Club**, 7 East Pde, September 17 “How well do we the church build Freedom in these times through: pursuing truth, acting justly, loving whole heartedly?” Sr Patty Faulkner & Michael Costigan (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

◦ **Goulburn** Soldiers Club September 12 “Handing on the Faith to the next generation. Have we been a success or failure?” Dr Paul Collins & Marilyn Hatton (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

◦ **Inner West – “Passion” Note new venue: The Pine Inn, 19 Parramatta Rd, Burwood** September 27 “Hey .. it would have to be politics – but!” Tony Burke MP (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 October 3 “Respecting the Rights” Terry Cooke & Rev Jonathan Inkpin (Info: Carmen 4367 2743 or Sue 4334 3174).

◦ **Newport** – Newport Arms Hotel October 26 “Happiness and Wealth Creation” Fr Tony Doherty & Marea Donovan (Info: Terry 9973 1192).

◦ **North Sydney – Be Attitudes Vs Me Attitudes** Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney, September 18 “Seeking harmony between all people” Anthony Renshaw & Roger Packham (Info:

Michelle 9958 5963).

◦ **Paddington - The Getting of Wisdom** Bellevue Hotel October 4 “The getting of wisdom: Growing old and growing young” Rev Chris Albany & Panel of three (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

◦ **Penrith** Golf Club October 25 “Spirit v Law in daily life” Sr Veronica McClusky & 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 September 27 “Dealing with Adversity” Margaret Kelly & Collette Donoughue (Info: Greg 9546 2028).

◦ **Waitara – We must choose to matter - In the part of the world we touch?** The Blue Gum Hotel September 20 Robert Fitzgerald & Sandie Cornish (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 (Info: Paula 5231 3376).

◦ **Fitzroy** Pumphouse Hotel, 128 Nicholson St, 8pm-9.30pm September 6 “Without Creed & Ritual: The Quaker Tradition” (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 October 25 “Our Stewardship of the Earth, Developing an eco-spirituality; Responsibility for monitoring our living style & standards; Allowing others to develop: a fair share for all” Peter Coghlan & Anne Boyd (Info: Kevin 9776 2705)

◦ **Wangaratta** Café Martini (Info: Kate 5721 6322).

◦ **Western** Victoria on Hyde, Yarraville 7.30pm September 12 “Aboriginal Reconciliation” Vicki Walker & Tristan Munga-

topi (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 & Bistro 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 October 3 Árt, Meaning, Justice & Spirit” Dr Gerry King, Julie Corfe & tba (Info: Gerald 8388 5957).

Other Matters and Events

◦ **St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, Sept 15-17 prayer weekend; Sept 19-25 Spirituality of Ageing; Sept 29-Oct 5 guided retreat; Oct 6-14 Life’s Healing Journey/directed retreat; Oct 20-22 & 27-29 prayer weekends; Oct 27-Nov 2 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).

◦ **Weekend Residential Retreat** Sept 15-17 Star of Sea Retreat Centre, 16 Clarence St, Yamba “Binding hearts to the Sacred” Presenters Bernadette Kavanagh/James Stewart Cost \$190 (Info: 01 5512 5455 or 07 5520 7242).

◦ **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 September 16
with

Fr Kevin Bates sm
“Music Tells a Story”
9.30am – 12.30pm

All welcome. Entry by donation.

Recommended

Richard Rohr with Joseph Martos, *From Wild Man to Wise Man. Reflections on Male Spirituality*, St Anthony Messenger Press, 2005, 182 pages, further readings, pb, \$24.95, ISBN: 0-86716-740-8.

Richard Rohr has completely revised his 1990 text to address male spirituality. He makes it clear that the discovery of this spirituality is for both men and women, although men seem to need more of a helping hand in that discovery. It is an honest book, with examples of Richard's own path and the complementarity of the male and female. His readings of scripture, and the figures of John the Baptist and Paul in particular, are challenging for us all. Careful reflection on these is particularly rewarding. Equally challenging are his chapters on male sexuality and the deep longing in men for a father figure – themes that go to the heart of a balanced life for males. In these ways it is a rightfully disturbing book. It upsets the equilibrium of male self-satisfaction and particularly any satisfaction with superficial markers of success such as money, job, or popularity. The book is very cleverly written in short chapters for easy reflection, either on one's own or in groups. Richard Rohr has obviously seen the need for men to come to terms with their inner spiritual lives and sees that one way of achieving this is for men to talk about matters of the spirit, to let God become central to their inner lives. He presents a very interesting chart of "The Male Spiritual Journey" that men and the significant women in their lives could well spend hours discussing: both the journey and the destination, in Rohr's words, to the Holy Fool.

Michael Fallon, *Yielding to Love. Learning to follow our yearning for deeper communion with God*, St. Paul's Publication, 2005, Bibliography, pb, 206 pages, ISBN: 1 921032 03 0, \$24.95.

Here is an Australian writer who has written a wonderful book that fortuitously carries the same message as the Pope's first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*. The first chapters just happen to detail the concept of God's love, and they do this so simply they are a joy to read. Michael relies heavily on St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross in his exploration of prayer and love, obedience, humility and belief. Once he has dealt with the concepts, he moves into extremely practical approaches to prayer. He is very down to earth and realistic in helping readers cope with their everyday experiences. The second part, Active Prayer, covers topics such as 'Beginning to Pray', 'Devotional and Liturgical Prayer', 'Prayer of Petition', 'Gospel Meditation', 'Spiritual reading' and, for many a struggler, 'Distraction and Emptiness'. The writing is for all people who want a closer relationship with God through prayer, for those who may be ready for what Fallon describes as "Passive Prayer". The text will resonate with readers familiar with the writings and thoughts of the two saints, Teresa and John of the Cross. At every turn there is reference to these great spiritual writers who have had so great an influence in the development of Catholic spirituality. This is a book that is thoroughly recommended for a serious reflection on our prayer life and developing our spiritual lives. It would be excellent for either personal or group reading.

Paul J Philibert, *The Priesthood of the Faithful. Key to a Living Church*, Liturgical Press, 2005, 173 pages, notes and index of names and subjects, pb, ISBN-10: 0-8146-3023-5, \$US 15.95.

The Tablet recently (13 March '06) ran an article on "The 100 most influential lay Catholics in Britain today". Who are the most influential Australian lay Catholics today? The connection with Philibert's book is that the latter focuses specifically on "the priesthood of the laity" some forty years after the use of that term by the Second Vatican Council. It is a book that details both the scriptural and Church documents to justify the concept of lay priesthood and then moves into the reality of lay people in the US and the wider Church. In some senses it is just a term, not a lived reality for many lay Catholics who live without a great deal of leadership. Philibert, a Dominican priest, outlines the need for lay and clerical understanding of the implications of the priesthood of the faithful. There are plenty of words but little effective understanding of what the concerns of lay people are and certainly very little direction for them to exercise their leadership in the Church. He favours first a fuller understanding of the Eucharist as a graced sign, and Lay Ecclesial Ministers as the realisation of the Eucharist in daily life. The second half of this book is very critical of current neglect of the laity and ignorance of their issues by many clergy. It is a book that warms up once it gets to the practical implications of scripture and the Church documents. It is recommended for lay groups but its ideas are best discussed with their pastor.

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“Out in the dark, I know, sing a thousand voices;
and the owl, the poet's bird, and the saint's white moth
blunder against my window, the frog in the rain rejoices.
I pledge to the night and day my life's whole truth.

“And you, who speak in me when I speak well,
Withdraw not your grace, leave me not dry and cold,
I have praised you in the pain of love, I would praise
you still
In the slowing of the blood, the time when I grow old.”

[Judith Wright, "Prayer" in *Judith Wright: Collected Poems*, Angus & Robertson, 1994, 229.]