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Our Say – Beyond solutions

Nearly thirty years ago an article appeared in *Newsweek* under the heading, “The Strangest Age” (July 25 1977). In part, the article observed:

Perhaps ours is the strangest age. It is an age without a sense of the strangeness of things. The human race has grown up and lost its capacity for wonder.

Perhaps we have become used to the new and the exciting. Perhaps, too, our excessive emphasis on the rational and the functional has had the unintended effect of reducing our capacity to even acknowledge, let alone truly know and understand, anything that does not fall within the bounds of the rational and the functional. We easily confuse information with knowledge and knowledge with wisdom. There can be no coming to wisdom that does not go by way of wonder.

In his groundbreaking book of 1963, *Religion and Personality*, Adrian van Kaam made an observation that invites reflection: “Life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem

to be solved.” Certainly, life presents us with many problems to solve, but life itself is not one of them. There is no solution to life. There is just the living. Life and living defy the grasp of the rational mind and the functional attitude.

The rational and the functional must deal with the immediate and the relative, things that actually do not matter in the end. They measure and quantify, they look for efficient programs and neat outcomes. If we are not careful, they create the illusion that we are in control.

When it comes to what is ultimate, what matters in the end, we must learn new ways of thinking and knowing. We cannot deal well with questions of life and death, with the pursuit of wisdom and truth or our heart’s desire to love and be loved, in merely rational and functional ways. Nor can we deal with all those critical matters pertaining to renewal of the Church in merely rational and functional ways. To attempt this, would

reduce our faith to an ideology and that is a sure path towards various egoisms – perfectionism, elitism, us-and-them-ism and so on. The fruits of these are intolerable impatience, mockery, frustration, destructive anger, superficiality and silliness. The Church, like life, is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved. Part of that mystery is the scandalous mix of good and evil.

The genuine mystics and contemplatives – and there is one in each of us – must be called on to teach us afresh how to engage the Church and world in wonder. We must reclaim the mystical heart of our faith, largely hidden under the desiccated rationalism of the last few centuries, further lost to view in some of the misguided approaches to renewal in recent years.

This will demand, as a *sine qua non*, communities where people actually embody the mystery of Christ in the world. Anything less will leave us impotent before the momentous task that is ours. ■

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)

The Patrons are:

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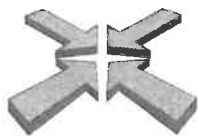
The Editorial Committee is:

Michael Whelan SM, Geraldine Doogue,
Tim O'Hearn and consultants

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Address all correspondence to:
PO Box 139, Gladesville, NSW 1675, Australia
Tel/Fax: +61 2 9816 4262

Web site: www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au
catalyst-for-renewal@tpg.com.au



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 Dina Cavazzini. It is quite intimidating to have to talk about your own life and to know that from now it will be part of the eclectic mosaic of lives that appear in *The Mix* every month. I was born in Ferrara, in the North of Italy, in 1950. I have to add that my mother was terribly proud that I was born on the very day of the Sacred Heart feast and in the Holy Year 1950. How could it be more obvious that this was a sign?!

However, in my maternal grandmother's family, all names were Jewish and so was their surname: Soriani. They were most certainly the descendants of Spanish Jews expelled during the Inquisition and accepted in the Venice by the Doge and by the dukes of Este in the nearby region of Emilia. Most of them (but not all) converted – undoubtedly with some gentle pressure! – to Catholicism.

I am telling this story because, long before I learnt the history of my family, I had always felt a strong attraction for the Jewish roots of Christianity. To make the picture complete, I have to say that my father, a doctor, was an atheist, although the way he lived was totally committed to the service of the other. Some of his patients, in post-war Italy, were very poor and could hardly afford to pay him. This meant that a lot of his work was pro bono.

Dad let mum take care of our religious education, which was given to us both privately and through the Parish. In Italy, still today, the school system is mainly public and there are very few religious or private schools. The staunch Catholicism of those pre-Vatican II days is not a good memory, as I was a very inquisitive child and I never refrained from asking questions regarding rules that I did not quite understand. And there was a lot I did not understand in my mum's religion

I was very lucky, though, to find on my path people who would answer my questions and let me breathe the new air that was beginning to come through the Catholic Church. Among them, there were two Jesuits priests who were teachers in my Lyceum. One was also the coach of our skiing team and I still remember the beautiful Masses he celebrated, before competitions, on a make-shift altar in the snow fields of the Italian Alps. I have always felt a passionate love for nature, in the beauty of which I can perceive the presence of God so clearly.

The other Jesuit teacher was a theologian and very ambitiously initiated us into reading demanding writers such as Teilhard de Chardin. He was also the councillor of my Girls Scout group. The Scout movement, which is in Italy associated with the Catholic Church, had a great influence in my life for the type of commitments that it required. I loved the open air life and the physical effort required to be self-sufficient in our outings, but also the social work in which we were involved.

I graduated in Classics and married in 1974. Then the great Australian adventure began. Both my husband and I were nomadic at heart and loved travelling. We came initially to stay for a couple of years and went to live in Western NSW as he is an agronomist. We are still here thirty years later.

We had three children and we enjoyed very much their upbringing. We always tried to transmit to them the many passions we are not short of. We involved ourselves in the life of our Parishes as much as we could.

However, we never stopped questioning and I guess that being involved in Catalyst for Renewal is part of this never-ending search. I live surrounded by young people (I am a teacher) and I am, in contrast to many, very optimistic about the future of our youth, despite all the difficulties that they encounter in today's world. I guess that my faith is a key factor for this hope.

I recently finished a Master Degree in Theology. I did that study because I felt the need to know more. I loved studying for it but I found it at times very challenging: it did not only give me answers, but it also opened many more questions. So I keep searching.....



Dina Cavazzini

Your Say – Various observations and opinions

Frances Moran, Peter Kaukas, Kate Mannix

So. We are consumers. That is what we are told and the trouble is, this has become true. We are in tune with the spin doctors of the marketplace. We have become who, what, the 21st century needs – hungry for the next commodity that promises to make that difference to our lives that we have always longed for. Strangely, we keep buying, never satisfied, our hunger never assuaged, but rather heightened by what next appears. We are then, objects. Objects forever at the behest of market forces. Objects souled-out of our very own subjectivity.

Our what? You may well ask. Yes, we have souled-out our sense of our selves as human beings who are more, far more, than things at the beck and call of the now global economy. We have, bit by bit, lost our ability to be subjects of language, of depth, of desire for the beyond of ourselves, the Other. We have lost, have we not, a sense of value that is not deceived by appearances or seduced by the ever-glorified image. Our life has become, to a large extent, 'virtual' as we glue ourselves to the screen that shields us from one another.

And so it seems to me that the real imperative of our time is to rescue our own subjectivity from the annihilation of its sensibilities in the contemporary market economy.

Is this not, indeed, the pastoral imperative of our time – the recognition that there is more to each than meets the eye and there is more to each than meets the 'I' as well? In other words, we could, if we set about it, reposition ourselves as subjects and counter the forces that have made us the plaything of the dollar.

If this idea appeals, you might care to look out for *Beyond the Culture of Care: Helping those souled-out by the market economy* (St Pauls, 2006). ■

Frances M Moran, Armadale, VIC

Last Sunday I picked up a book from my local church. Titled: *Faith Beyond Resentment - Fragments Catholic and Gay*, by James Alison.

I have never read such an entertaining, thought-provoking, easy-to-read conversation-provoking exposé of Christian/Catholic theology. I recommend it for your purview for the coming months, knowing that your diary is booked far ahead. I picked it up because of the word 'gay' in its subtitle. God made me, for it is anything but exclu-

sively written from or for a 'gay' point of view, rather from a Jesus and inclusive one, if one can state that Jesus had a 'point of view', being God and All. I would really like to know, read or hear your thoughts on this publication.

It is published by Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001, reprinted 2002, \$34.95. Fly leaf quotes:- "for the purposes of conversation regarding faith beyond resentment, James Alison can be reached at cgfragments@btinternet.com. I believe it is very apt for cat.4 renewal, don't ya think? God bless and I hope to see you soon. ■

Peter Kaukas, Redfern

(Editor's note: I am familiar with James Alison's work. The possibilities and the limits of his work are the same: he sees all things through the gay lens. His voice must be taken seriously though. No person of good will should be excluded from our conversation. Pope Paul VI's words concerning the relationship we must develop to promote conversation are relevant: "This type of relationship indicates a proposal of courteous esteem, of understanding and of goodness on the part of the one who inaugurates the conversation; it excludes the a priori condemnation, the offensive and time-worn polemic and emptiness of useless conversation." (Ecclesiam Suam, 79))

Fr Whelan is correct when he calls for renewed commitment to our institutions, which, at their best, are tremendous repositories for the wealth of our religious and cultural tradition.

He also calls for a commitment to the renewal of our institutions. Fair enough. But what strategy is suggested?

Catalyst clings to the singular solution of "Conversation". After years and years of conversation, what has changed? What renewal of the institution has been effected? Does conversation work?

It is now clear that significant other parties are not, and never have been participating in the conversation. What I did not anticipate was that Catalyst itself has begun to collude in the Great Catholic Stonewall.

It was rather brought to a head for me at the Cardinal Murphy O'Connor lecture. This event was micro-managed to the nth degree, for the express purpose of DIS-ABLING conversation.

Why? Does Catalyst have so little confidence in the marvellous British Cardinal? Did you not trust him to have taken ques-

tions from the floor, relying instead on Michael Whelan's schoolgirl niece, Marea Donovan and the appalling Dorothy Dixer from Francois Kunc for pre-arranged 'responses'?

Conversation is always an admirable aim and not always easy to achieve. But it is the only strategy Catalyst has. If you abandon conversation for expediency – ever – you undermine Catalyst's reason for being. ■

Kate Mannix

(Editor's note: For the record, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor came to Australia solely as the guest of Aquinas Academy. Aquinas Academy takes full responsibility for the way the Cardinal's Sydney lecture was handled.)

"How much I must criticise you, my church and yet how much I love you! You have made me suffer more than anyone and yet I owe you more than I owe anyone. I should like to see you destroyed and yet I need your presence. You have given me much scandal and yet you alone have made me understand holiness. Never in the world have I seen anything more obscurantist, more compromised, more false, yet never have I touched anything more pure, more generous or more beautiful. Countless times I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face – and yet, every night, I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms! No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even if not completely you. Then too – where should I go? To build another church? But I cannot build another church without the same defects, for they are my own defects. And again, if I were to build another church, it would be my church, not Christ's church. No, I am old enough. I know better!" ■

(Messenger, Jan-Feb., 1989, 15. The piece originally appeared in the U.K. Catholic Herald. Carlo Carretto was a leader of Catholic Action in Italy, and served as National President of Catholic Youth, 1946-1952. When he was 44 he went to the Sahara where he joined The Little Brothers of Charles de Foucauld. He later returned to Italy and set up a little community near Assisi. He died, on 4 October 1988 at the age of 78. See the bottom of page 6 of this issue of The Mix for more on this man.)

Essay – The church and freedom in these times

Patty Fawkner

Patty Fawkner is a Good Samaritan Sister in Sydney. This is the text of her presentation at SIP, Sutherland's United Services Club, Wednesday 20 September 2006.

How well do we the Church build freedom in these times through pursuing truth, acting justly, loving wholeheartedly?

The question tonight is about freedom and how we build it up by pursuing truth, acting justly and loving wholeheartedly. Freedom is at the heart of our democratic tradition. A *European Values Study* published every ten years, consistently shows that freedom is the most cherished value for Europeans, and so too for us. Freedom is often seen as getting on with one's life with minimum interference, the freedom of self-determination, autonomy, opportunity even consumer choice. From this perspective we are the freest people ever to walk on the planet.

This is a very Western notion of freedom, focussed very much on the individual. The ancient Greek word for person is *pro-sopon*, which means the one turned to the other. We are only human in terms of others, in terms of relationships. For non-Western societies, being human is about belonging to other people, the family, clan or tribe.

Freedom flourishes when we balance both individual and communal needs. I cannot be free, in the fullest Christian meaning of the word, if my freedom is at the expense of the freedom of the group. In this understanding I am not free if my sister or neighbour is unfree. In my personal life I know that if I'm self-absorbed, always self-referring, I do not have the *inner* freedom, the most precious of freedoms, to love wholeheartedly or act justly.

Monumental aberrations in the name of freedom abound. The War in Iraq is fought in the name of freedom and democracy, but how much freedom has it really brought to the people of Iraq?

In the church there are those who demand more freedom and those who wish to roll freedom back in the name of God, morality and church loyalty. Ronald Rolheiser says that neither of these stances is correct. What we need, he says, is to raise the level of our maturity to match the level of our God-given freedom.

Christian discipleship calls us to be builders of freedom. I wish to explore how we can do this by taking three brief examples from the Church's spiritual tradition, of people who have loved wholeheartedly,

pursued truth and acted justly. My examples are from the fourth, fourteenth and twenty-first centuries.

It's damn hard to love wholeheartedly. All of us know that. Recently I was speaking appreciatively about a homily Cardinal Pell gave at a Mass for Religious. A friend scoffed at me, disbelieving that anything positive could be said about Cardinal Pell. He, it seems, is the enemy, so easy to stereotype and demonise. It is just as easy to stereotype and demonise "feral nuns" like myself.

There is no freedom in a predictable, anti stance, where battle lines are already drawn, where there is not a trace of civility, let alone wholehearted love.

The desert tradition teaches that there is no true freedom without wholehearted loving.

When I become judgmental, I negate the freedom of the one I judge and I compromise my own inner freedom for love. I do violence to the one I judge and violence to myself. So, the desert tradition teaches, one simple way to build freedom is by loving wholeheartedly, by not being judgmental.

Antony the Great who lived in the fourth century and is arguably the most influential desert father, says: "Our life and our death is with our neighbour. [Our human freedom is with our neighbour.] If we win our brother [or sister], we win God. If we cause our brother [or sister] to stumble, we have sinned against God."

My neighbour is "won", that is, freed and brought into life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ, when I love wholeheartedly, when I use my inner freedom to enhance my neighbour's freedom, when I use words to build up, not to tear down, when I renounce the power of being judgmental, and when I refuse to talk ill of my neighbour.

There is a famous story of Abba Moses:

There was a brother at Scetis who had committed a fault. So they called a meeting and invited Abba Moses. He refused to go. The priest sent someone to say to him, 'They're all waiting for you.' So Moses got up and set off; he took a leaky jug and filled it with water and took it with him. The others came out to meet him and said,

'What is this, Father?' The old man said to them, 'My sins run out behind me and I cannot see them, yet here I am coming to sit in judgment on the mistakes of somebody else.' When they heard this, they called off the meeting.

When I become judgmental, I negate the freedom of the one I judge and I compromise my own inner freedom for love. I do violence to the one I judge and violence to myself. So, the desert tradition teaches, one simple way to build freedom is by loving wholeheartedly, by not being judgmental.

We build freedom by pursuing truth. Catherine of Siena, born in 1347 knew this. Catherine's times – marked by violence and an uncertain future – were similar to our own. During her lifetime the papacy fled to Avignon splitting the Church and states into warring factions.

If Catherine ever had a motto it would be the line from John's Gospel, "The truth will make you free" (John 8:32). She called God "Gentle Truth", and Jesus was her model of truth and freedom. For her, Gospel freedom is freedom *from* illusion, ignorance, fear and selfishness, in order to be free *for* love and service to the world, especially to those who are vulnerable.

Catherine never pulls any punches. In a letter to cardinals who were supporting the anti-pope, she wrote, "What made you do this? You are flowers who shed no perfume, but stench that makes the whole world reek."

She wrote to Pope Gregory XI urging him to leave Avignon and return to Rome, even though he was afraid of being poisoned. "Be not a timorous child, but manly." She spoke to him like a loving daughter affectionately referring to him as Babbo, which means Daddy.

Catherine even dared to tell God what to do: "I plead with you to restore the warmth of charity and peace and unity to holy Church. It is my will that you do not delay any longer." Obviously she who must be obeyed!

Feisty and direct though her words always were, Catherine spoke with courage, love and an inner freedom. Her words attempted to unite rather than divide, to illuminate rather than obscure, to heal rather than wound.

Catherine's respect for, and obedience to, the hierarchy was unquestioning. But loving obedience to the church doesn't mean an uncritical silence. She, herself could never be silent. She wrote to some cardinals, 'Be silent no longer. Cry out with a hundred thousand voices. I see that the world is destroyed through silence.'

Christ's spouse is pallid, her colour has been drained from her."

Catherine called church authorities to be *ministers* rather than *teachers* of truth. She believed that they didn't own the truth, but that they were servants of truth. For her Christ alone is the teacher of truth. She writes beautifully to Cardinal de Luna:

"Oh dearest father, fall in love with this truth so that you may be a pillar in the mystic body of holy church, where this truth must be administered. Truth must be administered by truthful persons, persons who are in love with truth and enlightened by it."

What can we learn from Catherine? First, be a critical lover, not an unloving critic of the Church. To critique honestly and lovingly in one's search for the truth is not a sign of infidelity, but a sign of an adult faith.

Second, freedom won't be won by silence.

Third, be ministers, servants of the truth and not owners and dispensers of the truth. There is a disease in our church, and in society generally called the disease of certainty. It negates any possibility of dialogue. To grow and learn, to pursue truth and inner freedom, I must surrender certainty and the need to be right.

As Jewish poet Yehuda Amichai says in his poem:

In the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow in the Spring.
The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled like a yard.
But doubts and loves dig up the world
Like a mole, a plough.

The hard certainties of religious rhetoric can be crucifying, but "doubts and loves dig up the world".

We build freedom by acting justly. My example here is that of Joan Chittister and her community. Joan is a Benedictine nun from Erie Pennsylvania. A prolific writer and international lecturer, she has received numerous awards including the Pax Christi Peace Award for her advocacy for the rights of women, children, the poor and the disenfranchised.

Joan hit the headlines in 2001 when Rome learned that she had agreed to address the first international conference on women's ordination in Dublin. The Vatican sent a letter to Joan's prioress, Christine Vladimiroff, directing her to issue a "precept of obedience" forbidding Joan to attend. There would be "just penalties" if she ..

Sr Christine flew to Rome to talk with Vatican officials and then returned to her monastery. During Evening Prayer on the

night before Joan's scheduled departure for Ireland, instead of forbidding her to attend, Christine handed Joan a letter co-signed by 127 of the monastery's 128 Sisters, stating that she would not relay the command. Thirty five of the younger sisters pledged that if Joan were punished they wanted to share her penalty.

Sr Christine said that she came to

this decision not to comply with Rome precisely because of her understanding of obedience. The Vatican notion of authority exerts power and control out of a false sense of unity inspired by fear. Benedictine obedience and authority, on the other hand, are achieved in a spirit of co-responsibility. Obedience has a higher meaning than merely following orders from a legitimate superior I cannot be used by the Vatican to deliver an order of silencing.

She continued:

I do not see her participation in this conference as 'a source of scandal to the faithful,' as the Vatican alleges. I think the faithful can be scandalised when honest attempts to discuss questions of import to the Church are forbidden.

Speaking in Dublin, Joan said that she hadn't come to defy anybody. She said, "I have always broached the question; I have never breached the discipline".

.... loving obedience to the church doesn't mean an uncritical silence.

What did Rome do? According to one reporter, "Rome blinked" and issued a statement that there were no plans for disciplinary measures "in this case".

What are we to take from this example? The Vatican's unwise, heavy-handed stance in the name of justice, is an unjust assault on the freedom and dignity of the individual. As Joan Chittister said, what damages the communion of the Church is the loss of discussion and participation in the development of ideas. Forbidding debate and imposing harsh sanctions on those who disagree is not only unjust and unfair, it is also unwise. It only hardens attitudes and deepens divisions.

I am not an advocate for women's ordination, but we are on very dangerous ground when church officials decree with utter certainty that it is *God's will* that women should not be ordained. This is bad Scriptural exegesis and bad theology.

To wag a finger and say that we are not even to talk about the issue, infantilizes who we who are as Church. It negates just processes in the church and promotes the opposite of freedom, a culture of control

where people are watched and reported.

So back to the question: How well do we the Church build freedom in these times through pursuing truth, acting justly, loving wholeheartedly? Because we're human, sometimes we do it well and sometimes we fail miserably. We would do well to follow the many examples in our church of wholehearted lovers, the pursuers of truth, and those who act justly. Building freedom is hard and constant work. But, as disciples of Jesus, we don't have any other choice but to have a go. ■

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

"In the depths of our consciences, we detect a law which we do not impose upon ourselves, but which holds us to obedience. Always summoning us to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to the heart: do this, shun that. For we have in our hearts a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of the human person; according to it we will be judged (cf. Rm 2:15-16). Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a human being. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our depths (Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (May 15, 1961): AAS 53 (1961), 417). In a wonderful manner, conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor (cf. Mt 22:37-40; Gal 5:14). In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of the human family in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence, the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for those who care but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin.

"Only in freedom can we direct ourselves toward goodness. For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within the human person. For God has willed that we remain 'under the control of our own decisions' (cf. Sir 15:14) so that we can seek our Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to him. Hence, our dignity demands that we act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure." (*Gaudium et Spes*, nos 16-17.) ■

Words for a Pilgrim People

"I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time she came out of the land of Egypt." (Hosea 2:14-15)

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*"'Union with God' is not the whole of the mystery because the experience is at the same time communion with people. Solitude in which there is no other activity at all becomes, for Merton, the symbol of this absolute, ultimate and inexhaustible encounter with God and with humanity. Nothing occurs, nothing happens, and yet everything is given, received, shared, given back by God to us in many ways, through the written word, through conversation, through the example of a smile, of joy, and the message becomes more and more specific, simple in its form, more and more direct and perhaps even shocking, but always more apt to leap over the barricades, to push back the frontiers." (Jean Lelclercq, Introduction to **Contemplation in a World of Action**, Image Books, 1973, 13.)*

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*"Solitude can be sought and found in the routine of the simple world, in which man can be alone in his heart. 'But this desert is not necessarily a geographical one. It is a solitude of heart in which created joys are consumed and reborn in God.' (Sign Of Jonas, 59)." (Henri Nouwen, **Pray To Live – Thomas Merton: Contemplative Critic**, Fides/Claretian, 1972, 44.)*

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*"It would be interesting and valuable to discover how far loneliness and the fear of it lie at the root of war and aggression. There is a Gaelic proverb which says 'strife is better than loneliness', and I think it expresses a general truth about men and groups of men." (Noel Dermot O'Donoghue, **Heaven in Ordinarie**, Templegate, 1979, 60-62.)*

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On the 2nd Sunday of Advent (Year C), we hear again the proclamation of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-6). (See also Matthew 3:1-12 & Mark 1:1-8.) Luke tells us that "the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah, in the desert" (v 2). Luke then recalls the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one that cries in the desert ..." (Isaiah 40:3).

The desert or wilderness lies at the heart of the Covenant tradition. And it is a huge paradox because it is at once a place of death – a "howling waste" (Deuteronomy 32:10), a land of "trouble and anguish" (Isaiah 30:6; see also Deuteronomy 1:19) and "deep darkness ... that none passes through, where no man dwells" (Jeremiah 2:6) – and the place of liberating love – "I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness" (Amos 2:10) and "the people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness" (Jeremiah 31:2). The paradox continues here: The word of love is heard in the desert. A precursor of the greatest of all acts of love in the greatest of all deserts – Calvary.

The desert is the uncharted place. You simply must depend on the one who has the map. It is the place where the soul is laid bare. You cannot hide anywhere. The escape routes are not there anymore – escape routes that thrive in the forgetfulness of daily busy-ness and allow us to avoid facing what we really should face. In the facing is the purification. In the purification we begin to hear more and more clearly the word of love. That is why we seek the desert, to know the truth and hear that liberating word of love. The truth is, we are loved infinitely and unconditionally. We do not have to perform, we have to listen. We have to create space to hear that very good news.

Deserts abound in our lives. There is, for example, the desert of the evening news and the daily newspaper, the hospital ward and the unemployment office, the desert of our own struggles and the desert of God's silence when we seek help. The listening and the hearing in the these deserts can be aided and abetted by taking time out and going to places that are solitary. Nothing will enliven us more than that word of love heard in the heart. ■

The Tradition – The desert life

The practice of going to a place of seclusion to listen and hear the word of love, is a common one in the Christian tradition. Apart from the hermits – of whom there seems to be a growing number these days – we have treasured the Sabbath and promoted pilgrimages, retreats and days of reflection. Thomas Merton's life has done much to stimulate interest along these lines in the modern era. Many would also be familiar with the life of Carlo Carretto.

**"Remain motionless
in an act of love
before the Father."**

Carlo Carretto was a leader in Italian "Catholic Action" and served as National President of Catholic Youth from 1946 to 1952. At the age of 44 he went to the Sahara. There he joined the Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles de Foucauld. He died in 1988. He writes of his experience in the desert: "The great joy of the Saharan novitiate is the solitude, and the joy of solitude – silence, true silence, which penetrates everywhere and invades one's whole being, speaking to the soul with wonderful new strength unknown to men" And again: "This is crucial: as long as we pray only when and how we want to, our life of prayer is bound to be unreal. It will run in fits and starts. The slightest upset – even a toothache – will be enough to destroy the whole edifice of our prayer life. 'You must strip your prayers,' the novice master told me. You must simplify, de-intellectualize. Put yourself in front of Jesus as a poor man: not with any big ideas, but with living faith. Remain motionless in an act of love before the Father. Don't try to reach God with your understanding; that is impossible. Reach him in love; that is possible. The struggle is not easy, because nature will try to get back her own, get her dose of enjoyment; after some hours – or some days – of this exercise, the body relaxes. It becomes passive. The senses go to sleep. Or rather, as St. John of the Cross says, the night of senses is beginning. Then prayer becomes something serious, even if it is painful and dry. So serious that one can no longer do without it. The soul begins to share the redemptive work of Jesus." ■

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 **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Joan 6021 6880).

° **Blackheath Spirituality – The Australian Connection** The Gardners Inn **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Elizabeth 4787 6198).

° **Bowral** The Grand Bar and Brasserie **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Julian 4861 4649).

° **Braidwood** Servicemen's Club **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Pauline 4842 2829).

° **Campbelltown** Campbelltown Catholic Club **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Rosemary 9603 2975).

° **Engadine – Sutherland United Services Club**, 7 East Pde, **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

° **Goulburn** Soldiers Club **Recommencing 2007 2**(Info: Tony 4822 2636).

° **Inner West – Recommencing 2007** (Info: (James 0418 242 932).

° **Jamberoo** The Jamberoo Hotel **Recommencing 2007** (Info Gabrielle 4232 2735).

° **Kincumber** The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Carmen 4367 2743 or Sue 4334 3174).

° **Newport** – Newport Arms Hotel **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Terry 9973 1192).

° **North Sydney** – Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney, **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

° **Paddington** – Bellevue Hotel **The Heart of the Matter** March 7 "The Heart of the Matter" Kate Englebrecth & Bishop David Cremin (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

° **Penrith** Golf Club **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

° **Rouse Hill** The Mean Fiddler on Wind-sor Rd **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Maria 9680 2220 (H))

° **St George** Kings Head Tavern South Hurstville **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Greg 9546 2028).

° **Waitara** - The Blue Gum Hotel Elphick **Recommencing 2007** (Info:Carole 9869

1036(a/h)).

Victoria

° **Alphington** Tower Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm February 21 "Mental Health Illness: What can I do? What can we do?" Chaired by Len Thomas, Healthcare Chaplain, Speakers tba (Info: Charles 0417 319 556).

° **Ballarat North** Midlands Golf Club, Heinz Lane, Second Wednesday each month 12.00-2pm **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Kevin 5332 7451).

° **Bendigo** Foundry Arms Hotel 8pm-9.30pm **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Helen 0409 212 009).

° **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

° **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Paula 5231 3376).

° **Fitzroy** Pumphouse Hotel, 128 Nicholson St, 8pm-9.30pm **Recommencing 2007 March 7** (Info: Denise 9816 3001)

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

° **Mornington** The Royal Hotel, Victoriana Room, 770 The Esplanade, 8pm-9.30pm, **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Colleen 9775 2163 or Carole 5976 1024).

° **Southern** The Dev Hotel, Cnr Bay & New Streets, Brighton, 7.30pm-9pm **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Kevin 9776 2705)

° **Wangaratta** Café Martini **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Kate 5721 6322).

° **Western Victoria** on Hyde, Yarraville 7.30pm **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Anne 9312 3595).

° **Woodend** Holgate Brewhouse-Keatings Hotel **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Marg 5429 5907).

Other States

° **Devonport (TAS)** Molly Malone's Irish Pub, **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Graham 6424 8286).

° **Hobart North** Moonah Café Bar & Bistrot December 13 "What is the relevance of Christianity in a media saturated culture?" Fr Richard Leonard sj (Info: Tony 6273 8590).

° **Perth (WA)** The Elephant and Wheelbarrow, cnr Francis & Lake Sts, Northbridge 7.30-9.10pm **Recommencing 2007** (Info:Deborah 0419 939 864).

° **Verdun (SA)** Stanley Bridge Tavern, Onkaparinga Rd **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Gerald 8388 5957).

Other Matters and Events

° **St Mary's Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, Dec 8-10 Advent prayer weekend; Dec 8-14 Advent guided retreat (Info: 02 4630 9232).

° **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

CATALYST ANNUAL APPEAL FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

We have launched our Seventh Annual Appeal by writing to our *Friends* to help us in our mission of raising the level of good conversation in the Australian Catholic Church as one way to promote renewal.

Thank you for your generous response in the past. We are hoping to raise a similar amount through this Seventh Appeal.

As of November 13, this Appeal had raised \$31,045.

We continue to ask for your generous support.



**Sketch of Madonna and Child
Raphael c. 1503.**

The mother and child are vulnerable in their trust. The mother looks to a point beyond the child – this child is not hers to keep. The child is blissfully unaware, playing nonchalantly with the mother's fingers. We all need those kinds of moments. Christmas celebrates such simple things. May the vulnerability of God and God's trust of you speak to your heart in this season.

Recommended

Robert Ellsberg, *The Saints' Guide to Happiness. Everyday wisdom from the lives of the saints.* North Point Press, 2003, HB, 221 pages, Notes and Index, ISBN: 0-374-25353-6, \$US 15.64.

With so many books on happiness now on the market, you might be tempted to think that this is just another one. It isn't. It is a beautifully written book with wisdom that the others could only dream about. Ellsberg is a very gifted writer and an extremely well read one. He delves into some quite extraordinary lives to distil profound thoughts, thoughts that this world increasingly needs. Not that many of the world would be all that much interested. He uses the word "saints" very loosely. Many of the lives and vignettes are of people who lived holy lives but have not been canonised: Dorothy Day, Dag Hammarskjold, Henri Nouwen, Thomas Merton and others. At the same time, he also invites the reader to ponder the writings of some of the desert fathers, Augustine, Catherine of Siena, Meister Eckhart, Severinus, Boethius and Cardinal Bernadin. The theme, learning to be happy, is traced through seven areas: learning to be alive, to let go, to work, to sit still, to love, to suffer, to die and to see. With each sub-theme, Ellsberg writes clearly and with his own as well as the insights of the saints and holy people. Ellsberg says we must see our lives through the lens of God. It can be bleak as in any discussion of *Death and Happiness*, for example. This is a book worth the expense for those wanting to contemplate life's most basic issues. The same reader will be on the way to the quest for personal happiness with God.

Martin Flanagan and Tom Uren, *The Fight*, One Day Hill, 2006, pb, 179 pages, photographs, \$24.95. ISBN 0-9757708 -2-9

This is not hagiography, it is not even biography in the strict sense. It is storytelling. And Flanagan's life credentials for the telling of this story are good. Apart from being a renowned journalist with *The Age*, his father was a POW and shared some of Tom Uren's nightmares. He grew up in Tasmania, a place of horror in our own history, where aborigines and convicts alike were treated like brute animals. Flanagan blends stories of Tom's life with his own observations about Australian society and culture. A surprising and pleasing result is the vulnerability of both men, barely hidden in the raw stuff we find on these pages. In September 2005, Tom Uren was addressing a group of young Japanese at Macquarie University. One of them asked what his "philosophy of life" was. His response is reproduced as Appendix A in this book. In part he said: "The strong should look after the weak. The young should look after the NOT so young. The fit should look after the sick. We should collectivise a substantial portion of our income to help protect our sick, needy and our people." Chapter 27 is an essay by Tom Uren, with lengthy reference to John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*. Flanagan writes: "... the most urgent message he wanted to convey in this book, that 'the answer to the hopelessness preached by Samuel Huntington, the guru of the neocons who says a third world war is inevitable because of what he calls the clash of the civilizations, is to be found in the writings of Pope John XXIII.'" Read this book and be inspired and delighted.

Michael M Stevens, editor, *In The Footsteps of Christ: Homilies of Tom Donovan SJ*, Delphian Books, 2006, 628 pages, photographs, index, \$44.95 (including postage) – contact 02 9876 1050. ISBN 0 9775491 0 0.

The written word and the spoken word are uneasy companions. That is why books of homilies are a chancey business. So much depends – for better or worse – on the presence of the preacher. Dr Michael Stevens manages to bridge the gap between the spoken and the written word skilfully. The word lives on these pages. Stevens has done an excellent job in editing thirteen years of Fr Tom Donovan's homilies. The homilies cover the three cycles of the liturgical year for Sundays, plus a few other homilies given on feast days. They are all helpfully listed under both the relevant Sundays and according to themes. One listing indicates those homilies which have particular relevance in explaining the Creed. Those who have met Fr Tom know him to be someone who definitely loves people and so obviously loves God. These qualities come through in the texts of the homilies gathered here. They have an unobtrusive erudition supporting practical and topical references. They are concise and to the point, all about three pages in length. The leitmotif that runs through the homilies is, "his loving providence will always be there" (384). This book will serve many beautifully as a spiritual reading book to which they will return time and again. Others will find it a useful book for group discussions. It is the kind of book you can open at random and expect to discover something worth meditating on.

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"It follows for the Christian churches that they must fulfil further their old task of employing the Word of the cross to destroy religious idolatry and personal fetishism and to spread the freedom of faith into the very hovels of the obscure. Its new task then will lie in struggling against not only religious superstition but also political idolatry, not only religious alienation of man but also his political, social and racial alienation in order to serve the liberation of man to his likeness to God in all areas where he suffers from inhumanity. In this sense, I think, it would also be the task of the churches today to develop 'social critical freedom' in institutions. I say 'also' because man is basically enslaved by anxiety, and liberation from anxiety happens in the first place through faith -- not through social improvements."

[Jurgen Moltmann, "Political Theology", *Theology Today*, 28 (1971), 20.]