



# THE MIX



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## Our Say – The risk of scandal

On December 20 2006, the Italian poet Piergiorgio Welby died in Rome. He was 60 years of age and had suffered from progressive muscular dystrophy for 40 of those years. In an open letter to the Italian President in September 2006, Welby described what his life had come to:

The day starts with the alarm of the lung ventilator device, while humidifying filter and the mouth catheter is changed, the day continues with ... frequent aspirations of tracheal secretions, the monitoring of oximetric parameters, personal cleaning, medication and Pulmocare beverages. ... my muscular dystrophy is in such an advanced state, that I cannot make any movements ....

Welby depended on a complex array of medical interventions – especially a respirator machine – to stay alive. He described his life as “an unbearable torture”.

In that same letter to the President, Welby asks for a law which would allow those in his and similar situations “to be

able to obtain euthanasia”. He clearly saw his death – a very public death by having the respirator switched off – as euthanasia.

Although Welby professed no religious belief, his family is Catholic. They requested a funeral Mass and were denied. Cardinal Ruini – the Pope’s vicar as bishop of the diocese of Rome – said:

Because, unlike the cases of suicide, in which it is presumed there is an absence of the conditions for full awareness and deliberate consent, Mr Welby repeatedly and publicly affirmed his desire to end his life, something that is incompatible with Catholic doctrine.

It could be argued that the scandal given by Cardinal Ruini’s decision was much more grave than the scandal that might have been given by embracing Welby’s family in a Catholic funeral Mass.

Contrary to Welby’s talk about euthanasia, his death was not, in fact, euthanasia. Nor was it “doctor-assisted suicide”. Nobody killed Piergiorgio Welby,

he died because extraordinary mechanical means that were keeping him hanging on by a very painful thread, were removed. This is morally acceptable according to orthodox Catholic teaching. Consider Pope John Paul’s refusal of extraordinary means in his own last hours. Consider, further, the Vatican’s 1980 Declaration on Euthanasia:

One cannot impose on anyone the obligation to have recourse to a technique which is already in use but which carries a risk or is burdensome. Such a refusal is not the equivalent of suicide (or euthanasia); on the contrary, it should be considered as an acceptance of the human condition, or a wish to avoid the application of a medical procedure disproportionate to the results that can be expected.

Cardinal Ruini’s action presented an insensitive Church to the world. We would all be better served by reaching out in honesty and compassion to men and women of good will, whatever their beliefs, even at the risk of scandal. ■

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The following is its Mission Statement:

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

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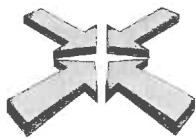
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**The Four Arrows and the Cross** symbolise diversity giving rise to communion in and through the Paschal Mystery. Those who are diverse by nature and culture, in and through Christ find life-giving unity.

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

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## THE HUMAN FACE

**M**y name is Lynne Polson and my path to Catholicism has been a winding one. My stepfather, the worst Catholic since Henry VIII, persuaded by mother to enrol my sister and me at Holy Cross Primary School and to have us baptised as Catholics and make our first Holy Communion. I did well there and secretly enjoyed Benediction on Fridays, not an attitude I rushed to share with the other girls.

As in many schools in the fifties, corporal punishment and fear were sadly present. When my mother heard that my sister, a most biddable child, had been beaten by the Head Nun, she withdrew us from the school and sent us back into the public school system. As neither my mother nor stepfather ever attended Mass, our Catholicism lapsed, although I always felt a pull towards it.

Still the best thing to ever happen to me was meeting my husband, John, when I was 16 and he was 18. He was then a practicing Catholic and I subsequently took instruction when we married in the Catholic church. I was then 20 and he was 22. John had experienced great brutality during his Catholic schooling and vowed never to subject our children to it. He comprehensively studied comparative religion and embraced Buddhism.

Prophetically as it turned out, I used to joke that if ever his life was under threat, which seemed highly unlikely in those immortal days of our youth, he’d revert to Catholicism. When he was 60, John was diagnosed with cancer and hospitalised in St. Vincent’s. We were shocked, sad and fearful and I was very angry that God, if he existed, could allow such a decent human being to suffer so much. Why couldn’t he punish the wife beaters and child molesters and leave John alone?

Early in his hospitalisation, I was approached by Sue, the Catholic Pastoral Carer. My first thought was: “That’s all we need now. A God Botherer.” But Sue was patient and kind and explained that John had recorded RC as his religion on his admission form. My prophecy had come true. I told Sue that perhaps John needed both Catholicism and Buddhism in these desperate times and she quietly organised a visit from Father Cau, a Vietnamese priest who’d been raised a Buddhist.

As John recovered, he, Sue and Father Cau discussed theological matters and their presence gave John great comfort. When Sue brought John communion, she would ask if I too would like to participate, but I always told her I was too angry with God to do that. During John’s long hospitalisation, Sue and I discovered a shared commitment

to social justice and through her, my daughter and I visited Villawood Detention Centre and joined a Refugee Action Group.

John’s health gradually improved and one Sunday he asked if I would like to go to Mass. I was surprised as he still had grave doubts about Catholicism, but I would have gone anywhere that gave him comfort. After a few weeks, our parish priest, Father Chris, asked John what had brought him back to Mass. He replied “Fear, Father.” Father Chris replied, “Well; that’s as good a reason as any other, I suppose.”

Going to Mass in those first weeks always made me cry, which was probably cathartic. I was also impressed by the simplicity, decency and sense of community of our local parish, which I think reflects our wonderful parish priest. I decided that if I were to re-embrace Catholicism (3rd time lucky?) I’d do it properly and yet again attended instruction, where I found that fifties Catholicism with its fear and prejudice no longer existed. John was my sponsor and spent all week thinking up curly questions for the Tuesday night gatherings. All of our doubts and questions were treated with consideration and respect as were those of the other participants.

I don’t always agree with Cardinal Pell, but he was very helpful when he confirmed me one freezing Sunday in August 2005. Seeing that I was a woman of a certain age (62) he whispered that I need not kneel, but oh no, I was going to do this proper! After my poor old knees had been on the freezing Cathedral marble for a while, they locked up and Cardinal Pell kindly helped me to my feet with a minimum of fuss.

I took the name Veronica, as I’d always admired her feeling for the afflicted. Our son Mark had no particular faith and some personal problems. I suggested very tentatively that he talk to Father Chris. Mark now attends Mass with John and me. His faith is very similar to mine. It washes over us and hopefully helps us to be better people.



Lynne Polson

# Your Say – What kind of people do we want to be?

Claire Thomas

**This is the text of Claire Thomas' presentation at the Catalyst Dinner on October 20, 2006.**

*ie heart is the dwelling place of where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or biblical expression, the heart is the place 'to which I withdraw'. The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is a place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as images of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant"*

*The New Catholic Catechism, 2563.*

**T**he heart is a place of decision – a place of choosing, of living a spiritual and moral life

It is in the heart that we, as a people, have the potential to walk as one. Attending to each other, rhythmically responding to each other's desire for life in all its fullness and dignity

And it is the place where we encounter, as the English mystic "The Cloud of Unknowing" once explained, 'the blind stirring love' of God. The unitive, enlivening and all-embracing love that dares us to empty ourselves and be filled with compassion, courage, charity and forgiveness.

Forgiveness of ourselves so that we are able to limber up to becoming more playful and creative.

Charity opens our hearts to God's desire and reign, so that we may be able to attend to the wounds of the earth and the hurts of others.

And it is through a deep confidence and compassion for others that we are able to be the voice, ears and hands of God.

**I**n his book, "Seeking Spirituality," American Oblate and theologian Ronald Rolheiser comments on four things as an essential praxis for a healthy spiritual life:

- Private prayer and private morality
- Social Justice
- Mellowness of heart and spirit
- Community as a constitutive element of true worship

He argues that, for Jesus, these four elements comprise the essentials, the non-negotiables of Christian discipleship. They comprise the essence of a spiritual life, they

also supply its balance. Only when all four of these are present in our lives are we healthy, as Christians, and as human beings.

On the issue of private prayer and morality, I recall driving down a busy road and looking to the beautiful blue horizon. I was struck by the azure sky and such a sight.

Suddenly out of nowhere, a sky sign writer appeared writing I'm home .... Wow! This is an interesting statement. Perhaps a message from a soldier to his girlfriend ...?

The next word was "with" I thought, "Uh uh, perhaps a vindictive message from a jilted lover?"

**Len was always immaculately dressed. .... He financially supported his divorced wife, as he felt that she needed extra money to help her ease her poverty and loneliness in his absence. He always lent a helping hand despite his own physical and psychological fragility.**

Then the following letters: J E S U S. I slowly sank into my chair and looked in the rearview mirror to see if anyone could see the message. I really had mixed emotions about seeing such a grand display of a Christian message. I thought the energies and finance of doing such a thing could be spent on something else. However it does illustrate the point that private prayer invites one to be at home with the triune God. Being able to converse and at times silently contemplate with the Divine, in the confines of one's internal and external home.

Through this connection with the Divine, an deep sense of right judgment and clarity evolves. Furthermore, the development and strengthening of character also takes place.

Psychotherapist and clinical professor, Len Sperry, in his book, *Transforming Self and Community*, points out that the call to Christian conversion (*metanoia* – change of heart) is a call to become a person of good character. Richard McBrien explains that

moral theology is concerned with that which gives orientation, direction and shape to our lives.

**I**recall hearing the term "good character" from a dear and cherished friend, Len. I met Len through a community named

Rendu, so-called after Frederick Oznam's friend Rosalie Rendu. Len fought in PNG during WWII. As a result of severe psychological trauma, he was unable to continue his postings and was sent home and hospitalized in Rozelle Hospital for sixty years.

Len was always immaculately dressed. He would always ensure he would walk closest to the road to protect me from a possible car injury. He always gave a tip even for the girl serving a sundae at McDonalds. He financially supported his divorced wife, as he felt that she needed extra money to help her ease her poverty and loneliness in his absence. He always lent a helping hand despite his own physical and psychological fragility.

Len often spoke of how state and federal education departments should teach the importance of forming the young person's moral character. He would write letter after letter to various ministers over twenty years requesting that this should happen, otherwise the moral fibre of society would slowly decay. Len taught me so much, but one of the greatest lessons he gave was that he was a man prepared to challenge the system to bring about God's Presence and reign.

Len passed away four years ago and I believe he would roll in his grave if he knew of some of the recent stories that have appeared in the media. For example, the man who lay dead in his housing commission home for 4 months. The government continued paying his pension. He received no visitors in that time frame. Or the many cases of political corruption, sportsmen accused of indecent behaviours through to the more severe cases of senseless assaults and murders of the innocent – locally, nationally and globally. Where is our sense of morality, spirituality and justice in that?

**I**t is extremely challenging to live out Jesus' core teachings. However, if we are to be people of Light and Love, we are called to open the ears of our hearts and deeply listen to where life can be restored within unjust systems, ourselves, others and God.

Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the fathers of liberation theology, suggests in his book *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, that to have a healthy spirituality we must feed our souls through private and communal prayer, practice of justice and having those things in our lives such as good friendships, creativity and healthy leisure, that help keep the soul alive and mellow. We can change the world, not through guilt and anger, but from a grateful heart. ■

# Essay – What kind of people do we want to be?

David Ranson

**This is the text of Fr David Ranson's talk at the Catalyst Dinner, Hunters Hill, October 20, 2006.**

Even though spirituality has become what one might call my professional field of endeavour, the term 'spirituality', of course, is an incorrigibly difficult one to define. I have struggled over the years to seek a definition that does justice both to the traditional and religious framework in which the spiritual life has been treated over the centuries, and, at the same time, acknowledges the pervasive contemporary interest in spirituality.

I have found the definition that promises to engage both a 'definition from above' and one 'from below' best resides in the experience of 'awakening.'

Spirituality awakens us; it is the dimension of our lives which works to awaken us and to keep us awake to the deepest currents and springs of life, or as David Tacey, to whom I owe such a debt in conversation about spirituality, that which gives "depth, meaning and resonance to what we do ordinarily." Indeed, another Australian to whom I am indebted, Michael Leunig, once portrayed, in a customary drawing, one of the clearest definitions of the spiritual life that I have come across. In his portrayal, he has his figure, eyes wide open, haversack over his shoulder, following his duck, (symbol of the soul for Leunig), on a journey over what at first looks like the tops of mountains. Closer analysis of the picture reveals the apparent tops of mountains to actually be the noses of upturned faces that are asleep.

I have interpreted this drawing as Leunig's inimitable way of declaring a truth that has become dear to me: the spiritual person is the one who lives his/her life awake, whilst the rest of the world slumbers. It is not surprising that elsewhere, Leunig prays, "God awake us, and awaken with us." (Michael Leunig, *A Prayer Tree*, (HarperCollins, 1990).

Yet, "I have never met a man who was fully awake," wrote the American humanist Henry Thoreau in his classic *Walden*. "How could I have looked him in the face?" And so, writes Thoreau,

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep . . . To [the one] whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labours of [people]. Morning is when I am awake and there is dawn in me. Moral reform is the

effort to throw off sleep . . . The millions are awake enough for physical labour . . . only one in a hundred million to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. (Henry Thoreau, *Walden*, (Signet Classics, 1960), 65-66.)

**L**est we think that such an understanding of spiritual maturity is a late invention, I wish to contend that it the 'awakening' to which Thoreau alludes lies at the heart of the gospel. There, though, it is our encounter with the risen Jesus which awakens us. He is the One who comes to greet us, and who calls us, "to come and see" (John 1:39).

The Risen Christ, in the Spirit, continues to open our eyes and our ears, so that we might see and hear, might listen more deeply, and might perceive more fully the truth of ourselves, of the world and of the divine promise that is offered us (cf Matt 13:14-16).

The Risen Christ awakens us to the depth and to the height, to the entire breadth, of our humanity and our divine vocation (cf Eph 3:16-19). Our discipleship of the Risen Christ demands that we 'stay awake' in constant expectation of the varied ways in which his approach is incarnated within our experience (cf Matt 24:42; 25:13; Mk 13:33, 35).

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**Spirituality awakens us; it is the dimension of our lives which works to awaken us and to keep us awake to the deepest currents and springs of life ....**

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The Spirit thus "rouses us from our slumber," from our passivity and inertia and brings refreshed vision and new energy – a theme eloquently explored by Jürgen Moltmann in his work, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*.

It is St. Paul, however, who reminds us that we "do not live in the dark" for "we are children of light and children of the day: we do not belong to the night or to darkness, so we should not go on sleeping, as everyone else does, but stay wide awake." (1 Thess 5:4-6; Rom 13:11).

Thus, the paschal mystery finds its vitality in the way that the Spirit leads us from our slumber into a life which is fully awake. The Pentecostal miracle is the transformation of slumber – the New Testament metaphor for fear – into wakefulness, which is its metaphor for love.

For love fully awakens us whilst fear

renders us somnolent.

If Jesus has come that we may have life and have it to the fullest, he does so not in some ethereal theological way. He does so by first awakening us, by opening our ears and our eyes, so that hearing more and seeing more, we become more aware, more receptive, more alive; he does so by enabling us to move beyond our fears and to trust that life is, in the end, entirely gracious. Life belongs to the one who is awake, no longer fearful, but enlivened by love.

**W**hat kind of person do we want to be as a follower of Jesus? We want to be firstly a person who is awake, who lives his/her life as one awake, and, therefore, a person who is free to love. We want to be one who listens, and is maintained in wakefulness by the adventure of listening, for we know that we can only love to the extent that we listen, that loving is the choice to listen.

Our prayer, along with the blind man of Jericho (Luke 18:41) is to see, for sight, as a metaphor for awareness, is the foundation for transformative action.

This was the genius of the Cardijn methodology of "see, judge and act" which was at the heart of Catholic Action in the first half of the twentieth century and given even fuller framework by the Canadian philosopher, Bernard Lonergan's imperatives, "Attend, Inquire, Interpret, Act" which taken all together, for Lonergan, meant "Being in Love."

**T**o see, to become aware, however, is not as simple as it sounds. Our vision is blurry for as T. S. Eliot suggested, we cannot bear very much reality:

'Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind  
Cannot bear very much reality.'  
(T S Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 'Burnt Norton,' l.)

By instinct and by choice we can shield ourselves from seeing too widely, and from hearing too deeply. Or we want to see only the extraordinary, the sensational, the titillating while we miss the richness of the obvious, the ordinary, the familiar. Or we find it more consoling to stay behind the fences of our own prejudices and the shores of our own projections.

I am reminded of David Malouf's wonderful pericope in "The Sun in the Winter":

To see what all this really was, she insisted - beyond the relics and the old fashioned horrors and show - you need a passion for the everyday. That was how she put it. And for that, mere

looking got you nowhere. "All you see then," she told him, "is what catches the eye, the odd thing, the unusual. But to see what is common, that is the difficult thing, don't you think? For that we need imagination, and there is never enough of it – never, never. (David Malouf, "The Sun in the Winter," in *Antipodes* (Chatto and Windus, 1985.)

**I**t is the Spirit who impels us to look more closely, to watch and to wait more passionately. And in this waiting we are stirred from sliding back into slumber by what Johannes Metz described in such classic fashion as the 'dangerous memory': the *memoria passionis*. With this memory we are no longer afforded the luxury of being asleep. Metz declares that

the memory of suffering [is] our critical tool for survival . . . The Christian memory of suffering is dangerous because it warns us where things have gone wrong and challenges our comfort in the official story. The memory of suffering, our own and especially that of others, connects each with the other and provides a practical warning system about distorted relationships, institutions and situations. . . And this memory impels us to a solidarity with victims. (John K. Downey, "Introduction," *Love's Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz*, edited by John K. Downey (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 8.)

**T**hus the spiritual life and the political life achieve a fundamental integration. Thnoeffer rightly therefore declares, "only . . . one who first stands on the side of the victim has the right to sing Gregorian chant." Metz, himself, puts it this way,

Christian witnessing to God is guided through and through by political spirituality, a political mysticism. Not a mysticism of political power and political domination, but rather – to speak metaphorically – a mysticism of open or opened eyes. Not only the ears for hearing, but also the eyes are organs of grace! . . . In the end Jesus did not teach an ascending mysticism of closed eyes but rather a God-mysticism with an increasing readiness for perceiving, a mysticism of open eyes, which sees more and not less. (*Johannes Metz, A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, edited and translated by J. Matthew Ashley, (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 163)

This mysticism of open eyes awakens us. And it is people who are awake that we wish to be.

**B**ut to what are we awakened? Again, to turn to Metz:

It is a mysticism that especially makes visible all visible and inconvenient suffering, and – convenient or not – pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it, for the sake of a God who is a friend to human beings. . . Such witnessing to God is not allowed political innocence. In the

end, witness is intimately involved, with eyes that see, in that history where people are crucified and tortured, hated and miserly loved . . . the God who comes near in Jesus is not primarily interested in how and what we think about him, but rather first in how we behave toward the other; and only in this – how we deal with others – can it be known how we think about God and what we think of God. (Metz, *A Passion for God*, 163.)

No longer politically innocent, we thus become awake to the new sectarianism in the West that is being peddled by the chatter of commercial journalism on the one hand and the silence of religious and political leadership on the other; we become awake to the marginalization, the fear and the confusion of those who are rendered suspect and unacceptable by such facile commentary; we become awake to the anonymous social revolution occurring in the country within a particular legislative agenda just as we are to the first sprouts of a new fascism growing under the mantle of a misnamed war on terrorism and fueled by the lies of political convenience which swirl around us.

We become awake to the pain of those suffering in Darfur, in the Congo, in Zimbabwe, in Mutujulu – the pain of all those who are too inconvenient for those with power and resource to take much notice; we become awake to the desperation of the thousands whose lives have become a misery in Iraq, in Chechnya and Afghanistan because of the sheer stupidity of those who have never learnt the lessons of history and who cannot understand the force of culture.

We become awake to the groan of the planet struggling to breathe, and the dying Australian landscape now that the indigenous songlines are no longer preserved.

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**By instinct and by choice we can shield ourselves from seeing too widely, and from hearing too deeply. Or we want to see only the extraordinary, the sensational, the titillating while we miss the richness of the obvious, the ordinary, the familiar.**

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**L**et us make no mistake, to be awakened, to live one's life awake, is to be disturbed, and to be disturbed greatly.

I do not mean to say that we are only awake to the pain around us. We are, equally, of course, awakened to the sheer beauty, natural and human, in which we are immersed. But we do not have such difficulty in remaining alert to that side of the story; we do struggle to remain awake to

the side that demands our resistance, our responsibility and our reform.

In her 2004 book, *Putin's Russia*, the recently murdered Russian journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, lamented that her society, "wants nothing more than to be lulled into sleep." (Cited in James Button, "A tough crusader falls," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14-15 October 2006, 27.) There is a part in each of us, more or less, that wants to live life asleep. The gospel, however, will not provide us with the sedative. ■

## AWAKENINGS

"Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone . . . There is an order in the universe which must be respected, and . . . The human person, endowed with the responsibility of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well being of future generations. I wish to repeat that the ecological crisis is a moral issue." (John Paul II, "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation," 1989, 12-13.)

"From now on, it is only through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive." (Pope John Paul II, Address to the United Nations University in Hiroshima, 1981.)

□□□□

## AN ANCIENT IRISH PRAYER

I will kindle my fire this morning  
In the presence of the holy angels of heaven.

God kindle thou in my heart within  
A flame of love to my neighbour  
To my foe, to my friend  
To my kindred all.

To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall,  
O Son of the loveliest Mary,  
From the lowliest thing that liveth  
To the name that is highest of all.

Come Mary, milk my cow,  
Come bride, and encompass her,  
Come, Columba, the benign  
And twine thine arms around my cow.

Come, Mary to my cow,  
Come great Bride, the beautiful,  
Come, thou milkmaid of Jesus Christ,  
And place thine arms beneath my cow.

I would like a great lake of beer  
For the King of Kings.

I would like to be watching  
Heaven's family.

Drinking it through all eternity.

## The Bible – The attraction of Jesus Christ

### Words for a Pilgrim People

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one sir”, she replied. “Neither do I condemn you,” said Jesus.” (John 8:11)

□□□

“At Papal coronations, as the Pope was carried to St Peters, it was once the task of a barefoot Franciscan to step into the route of the procession and to light a torch of flax, which flared and went out. The Franciscan cried out, ‘Sancte Pater, sic transit gloria mundi’. The ritual has long since been abolished, but I like to think in the work of the historian its spirit lives on” (Eamon Duffy, “The Popes: theory and fact”, *The Tablet*, July 4, 1998, 873..)

□□□

“I discovered something which I had never confronted before, that there were immense forces of darkness and hatred within my own heart. At particular moments of fatigue or stress, I saw forces of hate rising up inside me, and the capacity to hurt someone who was weak and was provoking me! That, I think, was what caused me the most pain: to discover who I really am, and to realize that maybe I did not want to know who I really was! I did not want to admit all the garbage inside me. And then I had to decide whether I would just continue to pretend that I was okay and throw myself into hyperactivity, projects where I could forget all the garbage and prove to others how good I was. Elitism is the sickness of us all. We all want to be on the winning team. That is the heart of apartheid and every form of racism. The important thing is to become conscious of those forces in us and to work at being liberated from them and to discover that the worst enemy is inside our own hearts not outside!” (Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, Paulist Press, 1992, 19.)

□□□

On the 5 Sunday of Lent (Year C), we hear an amazing story (John 8:1-11). It is found only in John’s Gospel and scholars tell us it is probably not written by John. It is the story of the woman caught in adultery. There are five major players in the drama. Firstly there is Jesus, the centre of the entire Gospel story; secondly, there is the crowd, “the people” who had come to hear Jesus teach; thirdly there is “the woman who had been caught committing adultery;” fourthly there is the group of “scribes and Pharisees;” fifthly there is an absent player, the man who was the woman’s partner in adultery. It is a story of the conflict between the humanizing power of true religion and the dehumanizing power of pseudo-religion.

**If we are truly awake to who and what we are, we will be attracted to what is on offer in Jesus Christ.**

The woman is forced to stand “in the middle.” This is humiliating and oppressive. Her lonely figure reminds us of the absent man. Maybe he is one of the accusers? Whatever the fact of the matter, this is ugly, dehumanizing behaviour. “The scribes and Pharisees” under the guise of religion are deceitful in pursuing their own ideological ends. Jesus “bent down.” They persist. “He straightened up.” “Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.” He “bent down” again. “They went away, beginning with the eldest.” The dehumanizing pseudo religion has lost out to the humanizing power of true religion this time.

A natural and healthy response to this story is anger. Vulnerable people are being used and abused by other people trying to gain an advantage. This misuse of power is despicable. Our feelings run to the woman “in the middle.” None but the utterly callous would want to see “the scribes and the Pharisees” defeat Jesus in this moment.

Grace liberates and enhances our humanity. The human ground is the ground of the Christ life. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ does not demand anything of us that is in conflict with our deepest needs as human beings. Our being in Christ is the fulfilment of our best possibilities. If we are truly awake to who and what we are we will be attracted to what is on offer in Jesus Christ. ■

## The Tradition – Our vocation

A commonly recurring aberration in Christian history is found in the attempts to turn Christianity into an ideology. This shifts the focus from God and what God has done and is doing to how we systematize what we think God has done and is doing. Such a systematization feeds our sense of control. This breeds pseudo-religion.

The Christian life – perhaps better called *the Christ life* – is a living relationship with God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our spirit and the Holy Spirit bear united witness and we call God, “Abba!” (see Romans 8:16). It is our belief that God seeks us out to love us into freedom. The Incarnation is pivotal to this act of God. God becomes a human being that we might become human beings and fulfill our destiny as companions of God. Our challenge is not one of conforming to an ideology but quite simply one of being who we are: Human beings, creatures of Love, created in the image and likeness of Love.

**“It is our belief that God seeks us out to love us into freedom.”**

Karl Rahner represents the best of the tradition well: “... the ultimately Christian thing about this life is identical with the mystery of human existence. And hence we can readily say that the ultimate and most specific thing about Christian existence consists in the fact that a Christian allows himself to fall into the mystery which we call God; that he is convinced in faith and in hope that in falling into the incomprehensible and nameless mystery of God he is really falling into a blessed and forgiving mystery which divinizes us; and that he also knows this on the level of reflexive consciousness and of his explicit faith, and he hopes for it explicitly, and does not just live it out in the anonymity of his actual existence. And to this extent to be a Christian is simply to be a human being, and one who also knows that this life which he is living, and which he is consciously living, can also be lived even by a person who is not a Christian explicitly and does not know in a reflexive way that he is a Christian.” (Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, A Crossroad Book, 1978, 430.) ■

# 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](mailto:terry_catalyst@hotmail.com)

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

**NSW and ACT – 7.30-9.00pm unless specified:**

◦ **Albury** New Albury Hotel, Kiewa St **Recommencing 2007** (Info: Joan 6021 6880).

◦ **Batemans Bay** Soldiers Club, Beach Rd, March 20 “What is Spirituality?” Geraldine Doogue & Dr Murray Lloyd.

◦ **Blackheath – What the World Needs Now...** The Gardners Inn March 14 “To find the common ground” Zuleyha Keskin & Fr Peter Maher (Info: Elizabeth 4787 6198).

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

◦ **Braidwood** Servicemen’s Club March 6 “Ethics and the Media” Peter Manning & Jack Waterford (Info: Pauline 4842 2829).

◦ **Engadine – How can we leave the World a better place for our Children?** Sutherland United Services Club, 7 East Pde, March 21 “What kind of world do we want to leave our children?” Kate Englebrecht & Richard McMahon (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

◦ **Goulburn – Let your Words be for the Improvement of Others (Eph 1:29)** - Soldiers Club March 13 “When advocacy for the common good is silenced, who gains, who loses?” Robert Fitzgerald & Ross Kirby (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

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

◦ **Jamberoo – Prophets in Our Time** The Jamberoo Hotel March 12 “Transforming our Lives” Dr Alex Nelson & Sr Pia Galea osc (Info: Gabrielle 4232 2735).

◦ **Kincumber – And the Greatest of These is Love** - The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive April 3 Peter Brown & Chris Kokegei (Info: Carmen 4367 2743 or Sue 4334 3174).

◦ **North Sydney – Maintaining Human Dignity ... Mission Impossible?** – Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney, March 19 “Human Dignity and the Justice System – do not repay anyone evil with evil” Paul Flannery & Michael Gravenor (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

◦ **Paddington – The Heart of the Matter** – Bellevue Hotel April 4 “Forgiveness”

Mark Byrne (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

◦ **Penrith** Golf Club May 2 “Living our Spirituality by working for justice” Julie McCrossin & John O’Neill (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

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

◦ **Waitara – Ours is a Destitute Time. What is the way forward for Religion?** - The Blue Gum Hotel March 21 Anthony Maher & Trish Madigan op (Info: Carole 9869 1036(a/h)).

## Victoria

◦ **Alphington** Tower Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm May 16 “Leadership in the Church” Peter Price (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 – Hope** Foundry Arms Hotel 8pm-9.30pm March 21 “What hope is there for Muslims to be part of Australian Society?” Frank Purcell & tba (Info: Helen 0409 212 009).

◦ **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm March 20 “Coping with drought” Fr Bill Attard & speaker from Rural Women’s Network (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

◦ **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel March 15 “A Journey Outward & a Journey Inward – Reflections of a pilgrim in Spain” Fr Peter Sherman (Info: Clare 5236 2091).

◦ **Fitzroy** Pumphouse Hotel, 128 Nicholson St, 8pm-9.30pm May 2 Sr Maryanne Confoy (Info: Denise 9816 3001)

◦ **Goulburn Valley** Terminus Hotel (Shepparton) May 21 (Info: Kerry 0408 579 904).

◦ **Mornington** The Royal Hotel, Victoriana Room, 770 The Esplanade, 8pm-9.30pm, March 28 “Religion and Violence” Bishop Christopher Prowse & Azar Katar (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 March 20 (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 & Bistro **Recommencing 2007** (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

◦ **Aquinas Academy** has a web site where Michael Whelan posts regular reflections – see [www.aquinas-academy.com](http://www.aquinas-academy.com). Aquinas also offers a series of adult education programs. See the same web site for details.

◦ **St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, March 7-15 directed retreat; 16-22 guided retreat for young people; 23-25 centering prayer weekend; 30-1 Apr prayer of mindfulness; 30-7 Apr directed retreat; April 1-7 Easter with Julian of Norwich (Info: 02 4630 9232 ext 101).

◦ **Mount Saint Benedict Centre** Pennant Hills has facilities for group bookings, for day or residential seminars and conferences. Daily sessions and weekend packages available. A number of programmes available for 2007 (Info: 02 9484 6208).

**Forum for the Future**  
“Issues concerning  
Children Worldwide”  
with  
**Fr Patrick Byrne** svd,  
Friday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 6-8pm  
in  
**The Crypt,**  
**St Patrick’s, Church Hill.**  
All welcome – entry by donation.

**Special Catalyst Dinner &**  
**‘Spirituality in the Pub’**  
**March 17, Bayview Conference**  
**Centre, Clayton, 6pm for 6.30pm**  
**“Are we running out of Steam?**  
**Are there signs of Hope?”**  
**Sr Maryanne Confoy &**  
**Terry Monagle**  
**\$50 per person including Wine -**  
**Reservations essential**  
**RSVP March 12**  
**Want to come just to the SIP part**  
**of the evening? Come around**  
**7.30pm – entry by donation.**  
**(Info: 02 9816 4262)**

## Recommended

Gerard Hall, (Editor) *Australian EJournal of Theology*, Issue 8, October 2006.  
website:  
[http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt\\_8/index.html](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_8/index.html).

John W O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, hb, 261 pages, Notes and Index, ISBN 0-674-01498-7, \$44.96.

Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005, ISBN: 0-8028-2990-2, pb, 129 pages, notes and index.

There is so much good reading available to us nowadays it is difficult to keep up with it all. For many it is *The Tablet*. For the same people and others it might be *online Eureka Street*. It is difficult to say that there is nothing to read. More likely, it is the other extreme, there is almost too much to keep up with all that is coming out. What does one read after the course in theology has been finished? The theology ejournal is for the serious readers who want to extend their understanding of both current and enduring theological matters. The matters in this now eight issue journal vary considerably in their outlook but never in their challenge. The most recent issue presents a sound piece on Christian-Muslim relations and the role for interfaith dialogue; it repeats Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor's talks in Melbourne and Brisbane, good reading for those who could not benefit from the Aquinas Academy's efforts to have his thoughts more publicly available to Australians. Brian Lewis picks up the issue of politics and the religious person; John Ozolins writes about surrogacy and embryo research. The issues are contemporary and challenging to all people of good faith. Browse all eight issues to discern articles of special interest and challenge. The days of claiming that the Catholic Church in particular does nothing to assist adults in their faith growth are gone with the variety of many challenging electronic resources available.

We have heard a lot lately about the "clash of civilisations"; this book deals with the contestations within western culture with the strongest focus on the Renaissance period. The contest was whether Jerusalem (the transcendent claims of the Church) had anything to learn from Athens (human culture and learning). The history of changes and contests within the Church is interesting in itself; the fascinating aspects are those detailing the cultures. O'Malley describes the four cultures as: prophets; philosophers and scientists, academics, and professional people; humanists such as poets, dramatists, orators and statesmen; and artists, musicians, architects, performers. They each have strengths and can fall prey to their shadow side. For example, the prophet can use liturgy as a bully pulpit for propaganda; the academic can use it as a classroom for instruction on orthodoxy; the orator can use it as an expression of solidarity or cleverness of preaching style; none use it as celebration or as ritual. Perhaps the most interesting aspect is the view he puts that each speaks to the other from their own position, with the resulting miscommunication and often total lack of conversation between holders of the "culture". The reader has to consider how to communicate across cultures within our present Church and whether we just expect others to see life from one's own position. It is a valuable contribution to all Catalytic conversationalists.

Many Catholics believe that they alone have a pre-Reformation history and that religions established either then or since have no claim on pre-reformation times. Rowan Williams, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, has a different view of all that. His short book makes it clear that all Christians have a claim on the history of the early Church and that they need all to be conscious of what they can learn from that history. History is our story, the one we tell in an attempt to understand "who we are and the world we're now in," to separate the continuity from the discontinuity. The early writers were interested in what it meant to belong to God and what separated them from the lords of this earth. Sometimes martyrdom was the price of belonging, an identifier of the true believers. It is possible that some nowadays hearken back to the past to argue for what should or should not be the case today; however, the decisions made suited the times and maybe they are not suitable for ours. History is fraught with difficulties: ensuring that we have all the evidence, understanding context, allowing for changes. Williams argues for increased knowledge of the history of the Church as civilisation faces an increasing number of voices vying for attention. We are impoverished if we remain ignorant of the richness of our history and the struggles our ancestors went through to identify what was important to them and their understanding of their relationship to God.

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“God rest us.

Rest that part of us which is tired.

Awaken that part of us which is asleep.

God awaken us and awake within us.

Amen.”

[Michael Leunig, *When I Talk to You: A Cartoonist Talks to God*, Harper Collins.]