



THE MIX



JOURNAL OF CATALYST FOR RENEWAL INCORPORATED

Circulation of approximately 2500 in Australia and overseas

VOLUME 12 NUMBER 04

June 2007

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Our Say – On being voice for the voiceless

Baptism, we believe, anoints us to be prophets. How many believers think of themselves seriously – and realistically – as prophets? Archbishop Pius Ncube of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe takes his baptismal vocation as prophet seriously. He visited Australia recently as the guest of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Sadly, his visits to Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney were not widely advertised or promoted. For example, this writer has become aware of only three events while the Archbishop was in Sydney: The first, a luncheon at the Lowy Institute on Thursday May 3 and the second, a seminar organised by the Australian Human Rights Centre at the University of NSW on Friday May 4 at 1pm. While it was pleasing to see that the Australian Bishops Conference also received him, this was a private session. The wider Catholic community of Australia should have been exposed to this man and his prophetic presence.

Archbishop Ncube embodies the two

central characteristics of the prophet. Firstly, he is a living reminder of important truths the community has forgotten or is ignoring. Secondly, he gives voice to the voiceless. The oppressed and downtrodden, those deprived of any reasonable chance to resist the power of the powerful, must have someone to intervene for them.

Being prophetic can make you simply unpopular. There are times, however, when it can be downright dangerous, especially when you are dealing with someone like President Mugabe. Archbishop Pius Ncube accepts this as his vocation.

In a report in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (May 12-13, 2007, 33), the reporter noted, significantly enough, that “(Ncube) fortifies himself with an hour, sometimes two, of prayer, reflection and reading every morning, rising at 5am.”

We can and must be prophetic where we are. That is part of what it means to be baptised. We might find some

simple and concrete ways of expressing this vocation by asking the question: Where/who are the voiceless in my life?

Catalyst for Renewal was established to promote conversation. In doing this – without fanfare or spectacle – we believe we are quietly prophetic, providing voice for the voiceless. We also believe that is profoundly in tune with the Second Vatican Council and its desire to promote dialogue at all levels of Catholic life. In other words, Catalyst is, and intends to remain in the years ahead, thoroughly Catholic.

With regard to the particular issue of global warming, we might also speak out for the future generations of human beings. Surely they will appreciate it if we make decisions now that leave them with a planet to rejoice in rather than one to lament.

It might also be helpful to look around and give thanks for those many people who do remind us of forgotten truths, people who do act for and on behalf of the voiceless and the vulnerable. ■

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

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

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This journal is published ten times each year,
March to December. It is sent to all Friends of
Catalyst for Renewal.
(See coupon on back page for Friend's Application)

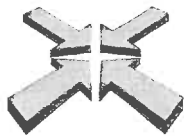
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Registered by Australia Post
Publication No: 255003/02125

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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.

All items submitted for publication in *The Mix* should reach the Editor no later than the 12th of the month previous to publication.

All original work in *The Mix*, unless otherwise indicated, is the work of the Editor.

Printed by Serge Martich-Osterman Printing and Publishing Pty Ltd, Annandale.

THE HUMAN FACE

My name is Ben (actually Benedict) Keneally. I was born in 1971 and grew up in Gladesville, Sydney as the oldest of five children. We went to Mass every Sunday at Villa Maria in Hunters Hill and if we were good we were allowed to buy Paddle Pops afterwards at the corner store. It seemed that all of my parents' friends went to Mass there too. The chatting after 8.30am Mass would often continue until the 10 o'clock crowd arrived.

We weren't terribly formally religious – every now and then Mum would have a kick for saying grace or a family rosary, but it usually petered out. But I saw active Catholicism every day. Most obviously, I saw it in my parents' patient love for their family – but I largely took this for granted.

What I really noticed was that throughout my childhood we often had additional family members in the house – a dying great aunt that Mum was caring for, an aunt and an uncle continuing their studies and needing somewhere to live. I also saw both my parents involved and active in the school and in the broader community.

It was only during high school – at Holy Cross College – that I realized not everyone was as firmly surrounded by a Catholic family and community. As I went through the adolescent process of defining myself apart from my family, I was lucky to find another Catholic community through the Antioch movement. I think the Church still has much to learn from Antioch. The power of peer-to-peer ministry – supported by a priest who can guide, challenge and affirm – is enormous and should be explored more fully in our parishes and schools.

I was particularly lucky because Antioch spiritually and socially engaged me at a time when Catholicism was not intellectually engaging me. I feel quite strongly that my generation of Catholics were let down by loose and sloppy religious education in Catholic schools. While I thrived on the challenge of rigorous maths and English syllabuses, I was unaware of the depth of thinking available in theology.

Many of my contemporaries did not "rebel" against Church teachings – they simply drifted away from something too insubstantial to rebel against. This situation seems to be being repaired in schools – I certainly hope so – but we need to think more about how our parishes approach the task of religious education.

Through school and university I struggled with dividing my energy between religion, politics – which had become an interest – and pining for, chasing or going out with girls. I often felt pulled in three

directions.

In the middle of my five years at university, I was selected by Antioch to attend World Youth Day in Czestochowa, Poland. It was a life changing experience. I felt the universality of our Church through the presence of over a million young pilgrims. I felt the vitality of our two thousand year old church, and in meeting John Paul II I also felt its rock. And, I also met the woman who would become my wife, Kristina.

Kristina was a young American woman who had been involved in student politics and who was studying Catholic theology. In three days of long discussions as we walked the streets of Czestochowa, I realized that my three conflicting interests could be united in this one person – if only we could get past the fact we lived so far apart.

Now, 16 years since we met, we're still passionately in love. We have two boys. Kristina is making a difference as the NSW Minister for Disabilities, and I hope I'm making a difference as a senior public servant. We're involved in our parish – although a bit less since Kristina was elected – and we annoy our children by talking with our friends for too long after Mass.

At times I think it is harder today to surround my children with the same strong sense of a Catholic family and community that I had as a child. But then I remember that so many Catholics have struggled to retain and pass on their faith against much greater challenges. Like them, all I can do is pray for the strength and wisdom of the Spirit and try to act with love and justice every day.



Ben Keneally

Your Say – The bible still packs a punch

Tim Lockwood

For staff prayer at the centre where I work I took some excerpts from Walter Brueggemann's book, *Texts Under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination*, and called it "Imagining Things Differently". I had a couple of initial excerpts by Brueggemann saying that biblical hope is not an explanation but a celebrative acclamation of the presence of God and the assurance that God will not quit from the world God has created. There were then three short extracts, also written by Brueggemann, detailing the hopelessness that is present in the world today. Then there were extracts which attest to Israel's faith, statements of assurance, and of promise of fulfilment, and of God's mighty presence and love.

I had in my mind (but did not believe) the comments of some downgrading the revealed scriptures in the light of the revelation of God in creation and the claim that the scriptures are put forward by official religion to bolster its status. I was struck by the book's arguments at the time of re-reading it a few weeks ago and inspired to prepare the prayer from it. But now that I was actually to lead the prayer, I wondered how it would be taken.

Here the relevance and strength of scripture could be tested. Would the excerpts that I had selected have an impact on these people gathered here for the prayer? Does scripture really pack a punch? Is the portrayal of Yahweh (God) in the Hebrew scripture so hopelessly anthropomorphized that it does not have an impression on people today?

I also wondered if there really is a great deal of hopelessness in the world today in ways that affect everyone. (This is a contention of Brueggemann in the book).

I began with a hymn, "Springs of Water," by Marty Haugen. Adding the hymn to the extracts was an afterthought. I said to those present that singing a hymn is itself an act of hope. However, a couple of people later said that they were put off by the 'boppy' hymn which did not acknowledge the serious dimension of the topic.

Every one of the seven participants responded quite strongly to the excerpts and to the topic. One said that he thought of the intractable issues in the world today: water shortages, wars, shortages of food and resources for so many people, consumerism. But in reflection on the scripture passages, he felt a resurgence of hope in himself.

Almost everyone tapped into areas of hopelessness in themselves that they were not aware of until the prayer. One woman

focussed on the lines,

For the mountains may depart
And the hills be removed
But my steadfast love will not depart from you.

A couple noticed 'the covenant of peace' also in Isaiah 54:10. Three were taken by the line from Brueggemann, "that God will not quit until God has had God's full way with the world." The idea of God not quitting struck them forcibly.

Another was struck by the statement, also by Brueggemann, that hope is 'an act' rather than an attitude or a state of mind. No one referred directly to the statements of hopelessness on the sheet. They may have started with them but they moved to the powerful statements of hope contained in the scriptural passages.

Finally, another reflected on the verse from Psalm 23:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

He was used to the translation 'kindness' rather than 'mercy', but 'mercy' was much stronger. God's mercy brought him hope and peace because he need not rely on himself but on God. It was clear to him that hope came from God. His hope was not for the world but that God would keep him faithful to following God in his vocation for the whole of his life. In the prayer he had a felt sense that God would do this.

The theme of hope pervades the Bible. It is present especially in the literature on creation written at the time of the exile. All of the creation literature was written not to give an account of some former time but to encourage the people in their present struggles to see that God was at work and that God would ultimately fulfil their deepest hopes.

I was aware that there are so many passages on the end of the world from the book of Revelation and other apocalyptic sources as well as statements in the prophets, Ephesians, Romans, Colossians and other places that I could have included on the prayer sheet if there was room. The responses of those in the group showed me clearly that at least this theme of hope in the Bible still packs an enormous punch and is desperately needed in contemporary society.

I learned too that it is not only people with no formal faith or religious practice who experience feelings of hopelessness. These feelings are present in everybody.

I remember that this book, *Texts Under Negotiation*, was used by Joseph Donders at a seminar he gave in Melbourne several years ago. The topic of the seminar had to do with Christians speaking in the public forum. Donders, to the disappointment of some, did not go into the details of how Christians could have a public voice or on what issues they could speak out. He spoke only of the hope that we Christians have to share.

We can bring a different perspective on issues that seem hopeless. Through the way we speak, rather than what we say, we can bring new hope. We can help people imagine things differently. People in public life are not aware of this dimension until someone who has it shares it. Then those involved may be like that disreputable figure in the gospels, Zaccheus, whose life was transformed when Jesus invited him to think of himself as a son of Abraham. ■

Tim Lockwood is an Australian Christian Brother. He has been working in Africa and is back in Australia for twelve months. Tim is currently living in the St Kilda community of the Christian Brothers in Melbourne.

LETTERS

We have received many letters apropos the decision to make the July issue of The Mix the last. Thank you to all those who wrote and thanks to all who have spoken and written words of encouragement and support over the years. Here are some samples.

"I am so sad and so grateful for all your efforts, whatever, wherever, loved the editorials."

Betty McKay, Jamistown, NSW

"Sorry to read in the latest issue of the end of *The Mix*. I have looked forward to receiving it for some years now, and always find something to mull over and think about and hopefully have a conversation with someone about the articles."

Mary Georgelin, Coburg, VIC

"We have found the arrival of *The Mix* into our home each month a useful and valuable means of fostering conversation in the spirit of its mission statement."

Brian & Yvonne Monro, Marion, SA

Essay – What is the way forward for religion?

Peter Maher

This is the text of Peter Maher's presentation at Waitara Spirituality in the Pub, May 16, 2007.

"My religion means a lot to me" – we hear people say. What do they mean? Do they mean the religious ritual practice; the comfort of "knowing" a loving God; the support of a community of faith; a moral guide; an authority to trust; doctrines and dogmas or a sense that it is right because it is all I know? I have enjoyed the comfort of the Catholic religious tradition as long as I can remember. It was the comfort of a mother's prayer as we lay down to sleep; the pride of helping Father at Mass as an altar boy; the boldness of being a part of a group that did good in the world when I was a teenager and the priestly vocation to a life of religious, spiritual and pastoral activities.

So is religion a psychological practice to comfort those who struggle? The sense of assurance about the mystery we call life? A knowledge of God? A hook on which to hang my troubles or a truth on which to pin my hopes. I guess it can be all of these.

In a world that is increasingly complex and multidimensional, fractured and at war, individualistic and selfish, concerned with economics of wealth at the expense of global environmental economics, willing to settle for money as a substitute for happiness, a world that offers denial and lies for political expediency as the way ahead, there is a greater need for true religion than ever before.

In the present climate we need to reclaim the golden religious tradition of compassion and humanity that is not afraid to speak prophetically. We need the voices of liberation that speak to the hopes and experiences of all humanity. Religions must rise above the fear of their own small future that produces destructive and compulsive behaviour that comes from being primarily inward looking.

True religion looks out beyond itself fearlessly in search of the liberty of persons, not stopping for self preservation. True religion is in the tradition of Isaiah, Rebecca, Jesus, Mary, Buddha, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Mary McKillop and Mum Shirl – all people who sought to foster the common good.

It can be argued that these greats were trailblazers and critics of religion calling all to move beyond the constraints of religion. But each saw the place their tradition played in giving them inspiration and hope.

However I fear that religion, especially

in its institutionalised form, or worse, in the guise of fundamentalist fear, is becoming more irrelevant than ever, if not downright dangerous.

The cultural religion of the West in our time is some kind of warped Christianity that has affirmed all that Jesus' Beatitudes oppose.

Too often, it is aligned with extreme violence and war, possessed by greed and acquisitiveness, racist; sexist; homophobic and prejudiced and lacks any thoroughgoing practice of peacemaking, dialogue, compassion, understanding, care for the poor and economic or environmental justice for the world.

Too often it values conformism, seeks growth in numbers and promotes tribal survival over creative and imaginative ways to curb the alarming rise in the rate of war, address poverty and the devastating effects of climate change.

Too often it is more likely that Christianity, at least in its virulent cultural form, will back Howard and Bush in their extreme short-sighted form of capitalism and warmongering rather than critique their mean-spirited capitulation to the worst of western decadence and greed which is highly antithetical to the gospel.

.... we need to reclaim the golden religious tradition of compassion and humanity that is not afraid to speak prophetically.

Let me speak about the Catholic church at this point because it is my own. My religious tradition seems to be peddling backwards in enormous fear. I can't see any daring beyond trying to outdo others. World Youth Day has much to recommend it as a way of valuing youth and young voices in the church. But if it is turned into a competition to see who can get the most people to turn up and whether we outdo Hillsong or Bishop Peter Jensen. It becomes the worst kind of propaganda fueling dangerous forms of sectarianism.

Sydney diocese comes late to a Pastoral Plan but better late than never they say. However is it? There is no mention anywhere in the 30 page (draft) document of Aborigines, ecumenism, other faiths, climate change or gays and lesbians just to mention a few glaring omissions in a plan for evangelisation under the patronage of Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) so proudly quoted.

The poor and marginalised are mentioned in the platitudinous tones of social welfare, concentrating more on setting up structures and getting the words right, like a Catholic Humphrey Appleby, than providing a practical hard hitting critique for justice in civil society.

Catholic fundamentalism, that reduces the strength of the Western intellectual tradition to mindless conformism, is a betrayal of the tradition. To suggest that good religion consists of the repetition of sexist, racist, homophobic and unimaginative formulae in the name of biblical purity, is not only to suggest that modern biblical scholarship, psychology, science, anthropology and archaeology have nothing to add to the working out of things in the world in our time, but it is to deny the work of God being present in the process of the unfolding human and cosmic mystery.

So is there a way forward for religion? I believe there is. There are many religions and many possibilities but let me make a few remarks tonight about Christianity.

The Christian religion has carried the gospel story through 2,000 years and is likely to do so for many years into the future. There are many dangers for Christianity at the moment. Once again let me begin with Western Christianity.

To the extent that it maintains its alliance with Western empire-building it will increasingly become irrelevant and discarded by those who care about peace, the future of the planet, human relationships, healing and transformation.

Large numbers of people, young and not so young, have abandoned the institution because they see it as unable to address the needs of our times and their personal hopes. This trend will continue in the West in direct relationship to the extent that the church continues to look inward and focus on numbers.

We must stick to the gospel and let the process take its course. In times of fear the human thing to do is to seek certitude in conformity to doctrines. This is eroding the charisms of ingenuity and imagination and thus blocking the very energy of the church itself to transform society by confronting the culture of death armed only with the daring of the gospel.

Let me say, finally on this point, that the clergy system, as we have it in the Catholic Church, is very vulnerable. In its present form it is in grave danger because our seminaries are in denial about the skills required for pastoral care and in regard to the issue of sexuality. This will lead to greater num-

bers leaving the practice of their religion because the clergy will make the practice increasingly irrelevant and unbearable. These issues can be overcome by allowing married and women priests. But I wouldn't hold my breath. They will come however because ultimately the church is pragmatic and it will change to survive.

So what might be the way forward for religion? There are many strengths already present. Catholicism in the West is all but collapsed. We could ask whether such a "collapse" is a bad thing. I believe it will, in fact, be the new Pentecost. There will be an outpouring of new and groundbreaking ideas from its strength – its international nature. The Catholic religion will survive with much of its resurgence coming from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

I don't know whether its massive assets will enable the church in the west to survive as an institution but I believe its spiritual strength is in its international nature where there is energy and vitality; ingenuity and imagination.

In the developing world religion may seem culturally conformist but they have recent knowledge of breaking from traditional cultural practices to practice Christianity. They know how to do it. The new Pentecost in the developed world I hope will be accompanied with surprising resilience and creativity in Asia, Africa and South America.

Other ways forward for religion are going to be found in reclaiming the gospel. Once again this is a big task in the West where gospel values critique our war-mongering and greedy ways. But gospel values give hope to those who are increasingly being left out of the global economy. Climate change will favour those who can live simply and thus will benefit those already living simply by choice or poverty. We will see true religion emerging in these societies while the wealthy will continue to fight to the death for the right to gobble up what is not there and is not theirs.

Sometimes the crippling and domineering hierarchical nature of the structure and decision making apparatus in the Church blinds us to the reality of the Church which is of course ultimately the people. Those of us who live so close to the power of the Church can sometimes forget that the real life of the Church is happening in peoples' hearts and minds and practices.

No matter what the hierarchy say, people are listening to the gospel and they are listening to God in their hearts. They are maintaining their core Catholicism which is the right to belong, participate and contribute. And I dare say this is mirrored in other Christian denominations, if not religions. This is the hope of the Church. This is why

in a sea of grief, war, alienation and distraction, in the struggle for religion to survive in any worthwhile form – especially a form that is aligned to the gospel rather than temporal or religious power – there is a way forward.

Religion can grow and be strong because of the common sense of the people who maintain watch, not at the gates, but in subversive action for justice and true holiness – not on this mountain or in Jerusalem but in every heart that believes.

Large numbers of people, young and not so young, have abandoned the institution because they see it as unable to address the needs of our times and their personal hopes.

Where people meet regularly, pray in diverse ways, chat about their lives and celebrate Eucharist both in the Sacrament and in sacramental ways, the Church is alive and true religion is alive. Where believers, on the basis of what they have gleaned from the truth of their faith traditions, are supporting the worker, the sick, the poor, women, victims of violence, gays and lesbians, true religion has triumphed.

When peoples' religious traditions help them confront the culture of fear and violence so that they oppose war and militarism, the detaining and abuse of refugees and asylum seekers, the judgement of those different from us and the lies that maintain these practices, then religion has triumphed.

I suspect many religions could have similar stories. The dangers and possibilities are similar depending on the extent to which the religion capitulates or aligns itself to the dominant political power and thus fear and fundamentalism. Bravery and imagination are required by the people to rescue religion from fear that it may continue to carry the story and practice of compassion for emerging generations and cultures.

Paul Collins wrote in a recent article:

"People are not looking for pat answers and don't need a religious authority to tell them what to do. They are suspicious of institutions with all the answers. They are content to live with the questions and certainly want to take charge of their own spiritual lives." ("Australians quietly spiritual, not Godless," in *Eureka Street*, May 2, 2007)

I believe many will continue to do this most effectively in community, supported by and in support of their religious tradi-

tions. Indeed, it is in this practice people intuitively know they pass on the story of healing and hope to a new generation.

But those who espouse religion and hope it has a future will do so at their peril, if they believe people can't do it without the currently operating religions or the way religions – Christian and other – currently operate in the Western world. If these don't leave space for true religion someone will simply create another one they think will. There's plenty of evidence for this. ■

Fr Peter Maher is the Parish Priest of Newtown in the Archdiocese of Sydney.

JOHN PAUL II: ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

"1. In our day, there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of *due respect for nature*, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty.

"Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past. The public in general as well as political leaders are concerned about this problem, and experts from a wide range of disciplines are studying its causes. Moreover, a new *ecological awareness* is beginning to emerge which, rather than being downplayed, ought to be encouraged to develop into concrete programs and initiatives.

"15. Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be *the responsibility of everyone*. When the ecological crisis is set within the broader context of *the search for peace* within society, we can understand better the importance of giving attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us: namely, that there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability 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*." ■

From the Message for World Day of Peace, January 1, 1990. Pope John Paul also refers in that Message to the proclamation he made in 1979, making St Francis of Assisi the patron of those who promote ecology.

The Bible – The birth of a prophet

Words for a Pilgrim People

“Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way. A voice cries in the wilderness: prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.’ And so it was that John the Baptist appeared.” (Mark 1:2-4)

□□□

[At the very end of Georges Bernanos’ novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, the priest is dying in the presence of an old friend, a priest who had incurred excommunication because he had left and married. The priest asks for absolution from his excommunicated friend:] “But a few minutes later he put his hand over mine, and his eyes entreated me to draw closer to him. He then uttered these words almost in my ear. And I am quite sure I have recorded them accurately, for his voice, though halting, was strangely distinct. ‘Does it matter? Grace is everywhere.’ I think he died just then.” (Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, translated by Pamela Morris, Fonatna Books, 1936/1956, 253.)

□□□

“God wishes to lead all to a life of communion with Himself. It is this idea, fundamental to the doctrine of salvation, which the theme of the covenant expresses. In the OT it dominates all religious thought, but we see it deepen with the passing of time. In the NT it acquires an unparalleled fullness, for henceforth it has as its content the total mystery of Jesus Christ.” (Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, Geoffrey Chapman, 1967, 75.)

□□□

“Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb?” (Isaiah 49:15)

□□□

On the Feast of the Birth of John the Baptist (Year C), we turn to Luke, the only one of the Gospel writers to speak specifically of the birth of John the Baptist. Matthew simply says: “In due course John the Baptist appeared” (3:1). Mark begins his Gospel with a reference to Isaiah followed by the remark: “.... so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness” (1:4). John, immediately following his Prologue, introduces John the Baptist by telling of how he was questioned by the authorities: “Who are you?” (1:19-34). Why might Luke have included the details of his birth?

We could consider at least two reasons for Luke’s inclusion of these special details. Firstly, Luke has an obvious intention to make it clear to his readers that being a disciple of Jesus is no more nor less than

the natural flowering of Judaism. Jesus is the promised one and everything that happens concerning him is part of the fulfilling of the promise in the history of the people of Israel. He has already situated Mary deeply in that history. See, for example, the parallels between Mary’s “Magnificat” (Luke 1:46-55) and the Song of Hannah (1Samuel 2:1-11). Like Jesus, John is circumcised according to Jewish custom and named at that event. Also like Jesus (see Luke 2:21), the name is given by an angel of the Lord (see Luke 1:13). The name John means “Yahweh-is-gracious”.

Secondly, Luke’s details of the birth keep in focus the unmerited action of God. God has taken the initiative to intervene in human history and that intervention continues in all generations. The people live by trusting God’s fidelity to a promise. Their whole existence as a people is a graced existence. The Baptist’s mother – like Isaac’s mother – is beyond her child bearing years. In the sight of the human community she is barren, one who will never be a mother. By the grace of God this child is born and by the grace of God this child will be what he must be and do what he must do. This child is to be a servant of the Great Mystery of Love embracing and liberating the world. ■

The Tradition – We who seek are sought

“Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold you were within me while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me, but I was not with you.” (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, J. Ryan, ed., Image Books, Bk. 10, Ch. 27) This is one of the better known statements by the great saint. Perhaps it is better known because many of us easily identify with the sentiment: “You were with me, but I was not with you.” Many Catholics raised before the Second Vatican Council have had to struggle with an image of God that is judgmental, and a sense of self that is too influenced by false guilt. The moralism that characterized so much of our recent history is not faithful to the Tradition.

Listen to the Catholic Catechism speaking of prayer: “If you knew the gift of God! (Jn 4:10). The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for God.” (n.2560) What the Catechism says of prayer applies to living as such. St Bernard of Clairvaux says: You have been seeking God? Know that he has long since been seeking you.

When we forget that the work of our redemption is first and last the work of God – a work of grace – we are inevitably drawn into a self-centred way of living. That self-centred way of living may be

disguised behind the language of piety, but it remains self-centred. Here is a little test you might run: When you catch yourself doing or being good in some way, is your most obvious feeling one of satisfaction or gratitude? If it is the former, chances are you are living a self-centred life. If it is the latter there is a good chance that you are, in your being, aware of something central to the tradition: Life is first and last, grace. ■

**By the grace of God
this child is born
and by the grace of God
this child will be
what he must be
and do what he must do.**

**When we forget that the
work of our redemption is
first and last the work of
God – a work of grace – we
are inevitably drawn into a
self-centred way of living.**

Bulletin Board

Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

SIP Meetings

www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/news.htm

NSW and ACT – 7.30-9.00pm unless specified:

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

◦ **Batemans Bay** Soldiers Club, Beach Rd.

◦ **Blackheath – What the World Needs Now...** The Gardners Inn July 11 “A Voice for Justice” Pat Drummond & Rev Ruth Thomas (Info: Elizabeth 4787 6198).

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

◦ **Braidwood** Servicemen’s Club August 1 “Christianity and Islam – What is the common ground, what are the differences?” Professor Anthony Johns & Shakira Hussein (Info: Pauline 4842 2829).

◦ **Dubbo** (Info: Carole 6882 4233).

◦ **Engadine – How can we leave the World a better place for our Children?** Sutherland United Services Club, 7 East Pde, June 20 “A Place of Peace” Trish O’Donohue & Ken Moroney (Info: Elizabeth 9520 0617 or Annette 9548 2475).

◦ **Goulburn – Let your Words be for the Improvement of Others (Eph 1:29)** - Soldiers Club (Info: Tony 4822 2636).

◦ **Inner West** The Pine Inn Burwood/Concord (Info: James 0418 242 932).

◦ **Jamberoo – Prophets in Our Time** The Jamberoo Hotel (Info Gabrielle 4232 2735).

◦ **Kincumber – And the Greatest of These is Love** - The Kincumber Hotel, Avoca Drive July 3 Anne Asmus & Jane Walton (Info: Carmen 4367 2743 or Sue 4334 3174).

◦ **North Sydney – Maintaining Human Dignity ... Mission Impossible?** – Union Hotel, Pacific Hwy & West St, North Sydney, June 18 “Human Dignity and Discrimination – Do not be arrogant, but associate with those who do not seem to be as worthy as you” Afroz Ali & Mel Morrow (Info: Michelle 9958 5963).

◦ **Paddington – The Heart of the Matter** – Bellevue Hotel July 4 “The Heart of the Matter: Hope” Nadia Wheatley & Tamer Makram (Info: Marea 9387 3152).

◦ **Penrith** Golf Club June 27 “Living our Spirituality in caring for others” Kerry Dolaghan & tba (Info: Sue 9760 2324).

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

◦ **Waitara – Ours is a Destitute Time. What is the way forward for Religion?** - The Blue Gum Hotel June 20 Peter Carroll msc & Marjorie Roberts (Info: Carole 9869 1036(a/h)).

Victoria

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

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

◦ **Bulleen** Veneto Club, 191 Bulleen Rd, 8pm-9.30pm July 18 “Climate Change and Stewardship of Creation” Bishop Toohey & Dr Penny Wheaton (Info: Charles 0417 319 556).

◦ **Clayton** The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm July 17 “Questions of Faith for Modern Christians” Michael Morwood (Info: Jo 9807 1912).

◦ **Colac** Central Hotel-Motel (Info: Clare 5236 2091).

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

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

◦ **Mornington** The Royal Hotel, Victoriana Room, 770 The Esplanade, 8pm-9.30pm, July 25 “Crime and Punishment” Brian O’Donnell & Sherryn Donald (Info: Colleen 9775 2163 or Carole 5976 1024).

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

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

◦ **Western** Victoria on Hyde, Yarraville July 17 (Info: Anne 9312 3595).

◦ **Woodend** Holgate Brewhouse-Keatings Hotel (Info: Marg 5429 5907).

Other States

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

◦ **Hobart North** Moonah Café Bar & Bistro (Info: Tony 6273 8590).

◦ **Verdun (SA)** Stanley Bridge Tavern, Onkaparinga Rd July 3 John Schumann & tba (Info: Gerald 8388 5957).

Other Matters and Events

◦ **St Mary’s Towers Retreat Centre**, Douglas Park, June 8-11 Life’s Healing Journey; 15-17 & 15-21 The soul’s journey; 22-24 Men’s retreat; June 30-July 8 directed retreat, July 9-15 praying with the Cloud of Unknowing; July 27-29 praying with icons (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).

CATALYST FOR RENEWAL

VICTORIA

Reflection Morning

September 15, 9.30am – 12.30pm

Currajeen,

811 Bridge Inn Road, Doreen

DOROTHY MAHER RSC

“The Spirituality of our Lives”

Entry by donation

Information 0425 878 236 or

Email macrsc@netspace.net.au

CATALYST FOR RENEWAL

SYDNEY

Reflection Morning

August 25, 9.30am – 12.30pm

Marist Centre,

1 Mary Street, Hunters Hill

CLEMENT BASEDEN SGS

“Life’s Journey: The Way”

Entry by donation

Information (02) 9816 4262

Email: catalyst-for-renewal@tpg.com.au

CATALYST FOR RENEWAL

SYDNEY

“On Writing

The Gospel According to Judas: Some Theological and Pastoral Reflections”

A CONVERSATION WITH

FRANK MOLONEY

Sunday July 15, 2pm – 4pm

The Crypt,

St Patrick’s Church, The Rocks

\$20 at the door

Information

Pauline:(02) 9816 4262

Sandra: (02) 9247 4651

Email: sandra@aquinas-academy.com

NOTE: Michael Whelan SM continues to write a regular column on the web site: www.aquinas-academy.com. Go to “Reflections.”

Recommended

Robert Ellsberg, *Blessed among all Women. Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for our time.* ISBN: 0-8245-2251-6, , 2005, hb, Crossroad Publishing, 313 pages, Index, \$US 12.97.

Fortunately women are claiming their rightful place in the history of the world. More and more they are refusing to remain silent and increasingly demanding to be taken seriously. Parallel to this movement is the rise of Church women who are also demanding that they be noticed and that the Church take account of their lived experience. Robert Ellsberg offers a wonderful insight into a wide range of women's experiences and singles out those who offer hope to us all, male and female alike. The women aren't all saints; the Church gave some of them short shrift. Undeterred, they came back and their lives demanded attention and emulation. There are non-Christians, lay women who have not sought recognition and some who once were "in" and are now "out" and many recognised as saints by the Church. Like all gatherings of the people of God, they are a motley lot, but for all that, women who have lived extraordinary lives and shaped the imagination of others. Gone are the stereotypes of the submissive, demure, quiet saint; here are the world-shakers, those who have opposed injustice; some have raised families, have led justice movements; and all seem to fit the Beatitudes. They are blessed, people who have made their mark on their and our times. This is a book well worth reading; the lives are inspirational and the struggles show that oppression can be overcome and that women have so much to teach us all, men and women alike.

Andrew O'Hagan, *Be Near Me*, Faber and Faber, 2006, ISBN: 978-0-571-21603-1, pb, 278 pages, \$29.95.

Some novels challenge, some entertain and some make almost no impression whatever. This is a decidedly interesting and challenging novel of a young priest caught up in a world he doesn't fully understand. As his housekeeper says: "I don't think he knows very much about people". An English priest, well educated, is sent to a depressed village in Scotland. He is an outsider on so many accounts: his education, accent, Englishness, his cultural interests – he is certain to be defeated. For all that, he is a caring, loving man, cut off from his fellow priests and his Bishop by factors that neither party fully understands. He struggles with his ministry which he takes seriously, especially that ministry with the youth, the drop outs of the village. It is a dimension of ministry where he succeeds in a paradoxical way, although here too he is an isolate, out of his depth in fully understanding the lives these wayward young people live. His main solace is his music, art and his main support is his faithful housekeeper and his mother, two women who see his struggles and who are the most tolerant of him and his weaknesses, for he is a weak man. Is this one priest or is he many? Publicly he sins; the reader can see it coming, yet he is a naïf in this world, an innocent trapped by his own make-up, his isolation and his lack of support. His final stance is brave and full of integrity. This is a finely written novel, challenging some of the myths of priesthood – a good read.

Robert Tilley, *Benedict and the Search for Truth*, St Pauls, 2007, ISBN 9781921032264, pb, 287 pages, footnotes, \$29.95.

"The primary aim of this book is to help you get a grip on Benedict's thinking, to discern the logic that informs his writings." The author also sounds a warning: "I am what most people would call a conservative Catholic. So, yes, there's an argument in this book, one you might well violently disagree with, and if you realise that after having paid for this book you have my commiserations (but no refund)." The author focuses on Benedict's – and John Paul II's – constant return to metaphysics, the philosophy of being as the key to understanding his thinking. The argument is that, having lost its appreciation for, and therefore grounding in, metaphysics, the modern mind, in its search for truth, has lost any coherent sense of objectivity. Without any coherent sense of objectivity, the modern mind finds itself lost in subjectivism and relativity – anybody's opinion is as good as anyone else's. The style is popular and readable. The content is presented in a forthright and polemical manner, and therefore a bit hard edged at times, perhaps too simplistic. However, the author writes with good humour and the polemics tend to give way to very solid thinking as the book proceeds. When following the trail of ideas with detachment, Tilley is at his best. This is a challenging and stimulating book. I hope it is not dismissed as merely an argument for conservative Catholicism. It is much more than that. I would recommend it especially for Year 12 students and their teachers.

**WE REGRET THAT WE MUST INFORM ALL
OUR FRIENDS THAT THE JULY 2007 ISSUE
OF THE MIX WILL BE THE LAST.**

**THIS DECISION HAS BEEN MADE
DUE PRIMARILY TO MICHAEL WHELAN'S
UNAVAILABILITY TO CONTINUE AS EDITOR.**

**CURRENT SUBSCRIBERS WILL RECEIVE A
LETTER IN JUNE EXPLAINING HOW
CATALYST WILL CONTINUE AND GIVING
INFORMATION CONCERNING REFUNDS**

**WE KNOW WE CAN DEPEND ON
YOUR GENEROSITY AND PATIENCE.**

**PLEASE CONTACT US IF YOU HAVE ANY
QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS**

**CFR, PO Box 139, Gladesville 1675
T 02 9816 4262**

THE SPIRIT IS PRESENT AND ACTIVE IN EVERY TIME AND PLACE

"The Spirit's presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time.(Cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53: loc. cit., 874f). The Second Vatican Council recalls that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the 'seeds of the Word,' to be found in human initiatives – including religious ones – and in humankind's efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself (*Ad Gentes*, 3, 11, 15; *Gaudium et Spes*, 10-11, 22, 26, 38, 41, 92-93). The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history: 'The Spirit of God with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26)."

(Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), 28.)