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What we do is more
important than
what we believe



St Mary's Matters

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From the Editor

For this edition I suggested that our readers might like to reflect on the idea in Peter Kennedy's TedX address that *what we do is more important than what we believe*. This may seem a simple proposition to people such as those in our community who have been acting on this aphorism for years. After all we were tossed out of the Catholic Church, not for what we did (our social activism was accepted as good) but for what we didn't believe. So why the need for reflection?

I rather suspect that what we do is actually a reflection of what we believe. This can be illustrated best in my life by my children's continuation in their families of the 'bone roster'. When they were young we only had roast leg of lamb occasionally, and when we did the picking clean of the bone was a treat for one member of the family. In the interests of fairness I introduced a bone roster so we would all have a fair share of this treat. They saw this, and still do, as a simple matter of fairness. Fairness is a really important belief in our family and the children grew up with this notion. They believe in fairness and so they 'act justly'. Why? Because it just seems right.

Marg Ortiz

What you do is More Important than What you Believe

On the Sunday after Easter in 2009, a faith community of over a thousand people walked from St Mary's Catholic Church, on the corner of Merivale and Peel Streets, South Brisbane to the second floor of the Trades and Labour Council building just down the road. We had to cross one street, Hope Street. The Christian feast of Easter is a journey of hope – the hope of a new beginning.

We provocatively called ourselves St Mary's-in-Exile.

St. Mary's was a vital community of Brisbane people who passionately believed that "what you do is more important than what you believe". Our mission statement is taken from the Hebrew Scriptures – the prophet Micah – who told the people of his day "all that God asks of you is to act justly, to love tenderly and walk humbly".

The story of this community is a story played out over thirty years, of breaking down barriers; a story of inclusion rather than exclusion; of reaching out in practical ways to people marginalised by race, gender, sexuality or social status; - "for what you do is more important than what you believe".

We came to see during the unfolding of the years that working for justice was not an optional extra but the essence of what it meant to be human as well as Christian. That emphasis on justice includes focussing on the injustice



Celebrating Eucharist in St Mary's Church before the Exile

happening within the institutional church.

So the Sunday service gradually accommodated itself to this emphasis on justice. Women became prominent in leadership, gay, lesbian and transgender people were embraced, their commitments celebrated, their children baptised. People who had been physically, psychologically, sexually abused in church and state-run institutions felt at home; priestly vestments were no longer worn; homeless people were often part of the community service and they required special attention and acceptance by the community, because of mental illness.

In other words the way we celebrated the Sunday Mass became very different to what one would expect to find in your local Catholic parish. And for this emphasis on justice we

were reported to the Vatican by ultra-conservative people outside of our community and the Vatican directed the Archbishop to take steps to deal with this "intransigent community".

The Archbishop decreed that we were no longer Catholic – that by our practices and theology we had put ourselves outside the Roman Catholic Church. It was up to us to bring ourselves "back into the fold"! He refused to dialogue with the community; in other words "shape up or ship out". After much angst, as a community we decided on the latter.

And it has to be said that it was a community of people, not any one person, that had the courage to stand up to an all powerful institution and walk away from it with nothing but the promise of an uncertain future.

Three years on we are still at the Trades and Labour Council building. The TLC. Totally lapsed catholics! Totally liberated catholics ! More hopefully tender loving Christians.

We have close to 2000 people who would identify themselves with the community of St. Mary's-in-Exile. Every week it seems that new people are coming to "check us out" – Catholics increasingly disillusioned with the leadership of the institutional church and people from diverse religious backgrounds, both Christian and non-Christian. Even the occasional agnostic and atheist! "For what you do is more important that what you believe".

In the church of St. Mary's, not long before we were unceremoniously ejected , we entered through ceremony into a treaty with local aboriginal people. We continue to honour that treaty with the active presence of aboriginal people within our community. The real possibility of partnering a permanent sacred dreamtime space with the First Australians is being seriously acted upon.



About fifteen years ago in response to inner city homelessness, a not-for-profit organisation Micah Projects came into being with the practical and financial support of the community. This decision was in step with our mission statement " all that God asks of you is to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly".

Micah Projects has grown today to an organisation that employs 140 people. From its beginnings it has been led by a remarkable woman Karyn Walsh.

Micah Projects has been involved in bringing to Australia an innovative supportive housing project called Common Ground.

Brisbane Common Ground opened its doors in July of this year to a mix of low income and formerly homeless tenants – 146 in all. It is affordable and permanent housing with each unit self-contained and fully furnished. Micah Projects is responsible for the tenant support services at Common Ground. As a community we continue to be embedded with Micah Projects, supporting it in practical ways as well as financially.

When it comes to belief, in the end, that is a personal affair. Speaking for myself, there have been a number of paradigm shifts over the years. I have



now come to an understanding that no one religion is the same, but all are equal. Further that the Scriptures, the sacred writings of the various religions are works of literature. They are not concerned with history as actual historical happenings, they are not "divinely inspired". They are rather clever and subtle literature; story, metaphor, allegory, paradox – whose purpose is to guide their adherents, to help them to find direction and order in the lives. The purpose of all religions is to help people to grapple with the most profound questions and experiences that life "throws at them" – what the Australian biblical scholar Professor Robert Crotty in his book "Three Revolutions" calls Ultimacy. If religions do that they accomplish their purpose.

Therefore there is no excuse, no place whatsoever, for religious intolerance and bigotry. Such an understanding of religion is a key to peace among the peoples of our world. "For what you do is more important that what you believe".

Peter Kennedy

Peace is the Way

In the Sydney Morning Herald Yearly Calendar for November the image is a cartoon of Michael Leunig which has a profound message. It reminds us that when we stop and listen, we listen to the mind-driven world, a world of thoughts, ideas and opinions. This can be a very depressing world.

Recently in the news we have been bombarded with images from the Middle- East. A conflict driven by the mind-driven world of ideologies, beliefs and dualisms. In this place we are again reminded of the enormous injustice perpetrated by Zionist Jews on the Palestinian people: how they continue the ethnic cleansing of the people by systematically dispossessing the Palestinians of their land, their history and culture, methodically destroying and dismantling their infrastructure; affecting every sphere of life, including education, health and employment.

During that week the media attempted to portray the conflict as it often does, as a battle between equals, but this is far from reality. As the statistics displayed, the fatalities and the images of complete destruction in the Gaza, compare unequally to a few holes in the roofs and sides of the houses in Jerusalem where Palestinian rockets managed to evade the rocket shield.

Earlier this year Israeli-born Jewish woman Avigail Abarbarel



came to St Mary's to share with us something of her story: of her gradual awakening to what her people had done and were continuing to do to the Palestinian people. Quoting Arundhati Roy, *the trouble is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There's no innocence. Either way, you're accountable.* Her desire to be accountable led her to collect the stories of other Jewish people who also have awakened from the Zionist lies and aspirations of many Jews in order to write a book. Nicole Erlich, an Australian born Jewish woman, now living in Brisbane, who was with Avigail when she visited us mid-year, writes about how she grew up in a Jewish family, went to a Jewish school in Melbourne and was never told the truth about the Israeli occupation and the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. She says, *it is analogous*

to spending years being married to a psychopath, having made a conscious decision to spend your life with him and then find out that, not only does he have flaws that you may not have been aware of, but he is committing crimes, systematically and without remorse. It is beyond your worst nightmares. Not only do you need to be prepared to believe that you have been constantly lied to, but that you are, by association and ignorance, complicit in his actions. And all the while, he staunchly maintains that he is the decent person you married, and indeed, he sincerely believes that.

Nicole believes that there will never be peace in the Middle East until Judaism can let go of its profound fear of other humans – particularly of Arabs – and allow itself to move past its obsession with victimhood and exceptionalism.

Peace is the Way

In the Gospel story where Jesus stands before the Roman Governor, Pilate, the author of John's Gospel paints the scene of two central characters facing off with two completely different world views and understandings of reality. Pilate, as Roman Governor, steeped in all things Roman, believed as every good Roman Citizen did, that the way to Peace was to defeat and subdue your enemies. For carved in stone on every archway, wall and crevice were the words:

Through Battle —> Comes Victory
—> Comes Peace

Caesar Augustus defeated Anthony and Cleopatra in the final war of the Roman Republic at the Battle of Actium which ended 100 years of Civil war and reunited the great Roman Empire. He ordered these words to be carved everywhere to remind all that this is the political agenda and central belief of what it means to be Roman. For re-uniting the

Empire he was given the great title 'Son of God'. The author of John's Gospel has a man called Jesus who dares to use the grand title entrusted to the Emperor.

The Roman reaction was, *what impertinence and disrespect this man displayed; how could he call himself 'Son of God'?* The use of this title by the author of John's Gospel grabs the attention of the colonising power, Rome. The purpose of using the title, writes John Dominic Crossan, foremost biblical scholar on the historical Jesus, is so that these early Christians can grab the attention of the Romans. Once they obtain their attention they could now explain the central alternative message of this man Jesus who claims also to be the 'Son of God'. That central message was in opposition to the Roman propaganda and understanding of the way to peace. Not

Battle —> Victory —> Peace,
but
Repent —> Enter the kingdom
—> Peace.

Repent, as I have mentioned before, comes from the Greek word *Meta noia*:

Meta – to move above/ to transcend

Noia – the mind (the world of thoughts, judgements, dualisms.

The place where there is separation).

This is an invitation to enter the larger mind – the mind of God, where there is only ONE. To enter the Kingdom of God, the Dream of God where there is no separation. This kingdom, this mind of God is close at hand, you can enter it now. It does not have physicality; it is not a place; it transcends all form. As Jesus says to Pilate *My kingdom is not of this world*'.

The peace that Jesus promises is *a peace that the world cannot understand*. It is not related to externals and therefore transcends the rational mind.

Peace is a choice to *Meta noia*, again and again. The Roman way to peace is the temptation for all of us; to defeat those elements which get in our way.

The state of Israel has chosen the Roman way and it has not and will not work for them. The way to peace, the way of Jesus, is to choose peace every step of the way. For as the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh says:

There is no way to peace

Peace is the way

*Terry Fitzpatrick
Homily 25th November 2012*

A Palestinian boy holds a window frame taken from a damaged house hit in an Israeli strike, in Gaza City, Thursday, Nov. 15, 2012.



Priorities,

my choices and my actions

Opening Prayer

Our opening prayer is based on a reflection by the Dutch-born Catholic priest and writer Henri Nouwen from his book *Bread for the Journey*:

Words are important. Without them our actions lose meaning. And without meaning we cannot live. Words can offer perspective, insight, understanding and vision. Words can bring consolation, comfort, encouragement and hope. Words can take away fear, isolation, shame and guilt. Words can reconcile, unite, forgive and heal. Words can bring peace and joy, inner freedom and deep gratitude. Words, in short, can carry love on their wings. A word of love can be one of the greatest acts of love. That is because when our words become flesh in our own lives and the lives of others, we can change the world.

So, as we gather around the Word in our liturgy this evening, let us pray that we remain forever mindful of the power of our own words to affect the lives of others. We pray this in the name of Jesus who, in our tradition, is the Word of the Divine made manifest. Amen.

Gospel: Mark 10:35-45

Homily

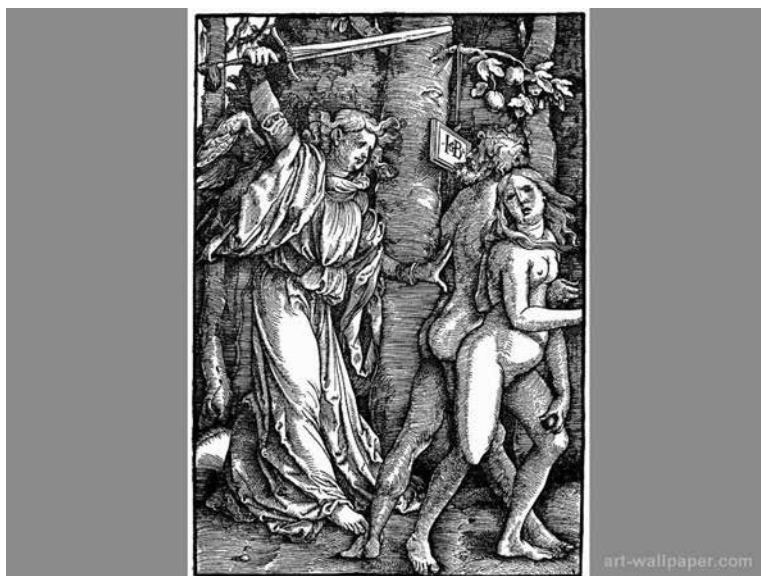
I can't remember when I stopped believing that Adam and Eve were real people, but it was a very long time ago. In dispensing with any belief in the actual existence of Adam and Eve, I dispensed with any interest in the story itself. But about 16 years ago, in the mid-1990s, I started reading more about scripture as allegory and metaphor, scripture as a literary device that tells powerful stories

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the mystery of life in all its manifestations including the Divine

about the nature of being human and about human attempts to understand the mystery of life in all its manifestations including the Divine.

In the framework of allegory and metaphor, I have developed a profound appreciation of scripture that depends on the insights of the stories rather than on whether the characters in the stories were real or fictional. I have consequently grown into an unapologetic admirer of the scriptures of my own tradition. The Adam and Eve story is now pivotal for me in my search for understanding and for meaning because I see it as a story of devastating insights: of taking for granted what we already have and assuming it will always be there, of wanting more, of pushing the boundaries, of blaming others when things go wrong, of not thinking about the consequences of our choices and our actions, and of living with consequences that affect not only ourselves in the here and now but also generations to come. It is a story with many parallels in the Gospel reading.



This German Renaissance woodcut by Grien Hans illustrates the story of the angel casting Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

James and John take it for granted they will be with Jesus in his glory. They take it as a given that they will keep their privileged position as members of Jesus' inner circle. Loss of what they have doesn't occur to them. On the contrary, they want more than they already have. They want the best seats in the house. With not the slightest hint of embarrassment, they ask for the seats next to Jesus, offering

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there's a dark side to wanting more

nothing in return, and without any consideration for what this request might mean for themselves, for Jesus, for the other apostles, or for anyone else then or in the future.

At the outset, Jesus knows he can't agree to the request. But he invites James and John to reflect on what they're doing in asking for such a favour. Jesus asks them if they'll pay a price for what they want, the same price Jesus thinks he is going to have to pay for his own seat. "Of course" say James and John without knowing what that price might be. "Anything. But we want those seats."

James and John want more. Just as Adam and Eve wanted more. I think I can confidently say that it's the nature of being human to want more. It's an ever-present temptation in the lives of all of us. Nobody escapes, whether it's to want to have more, know more, do more, be more.

'Wanting more' is not intrinsically bad or undesirable. Wanting more can be eminently life-giving: wanting more food if I'm starving; wanting more knowledge if I'm ignorant; wanting more respect if I'm downtrodden; wanting more patience if I'm struggling; wanting more justice if I'm oppressed; wanting more compassion if I'm neglected; wanting more love if I'm bereft. 'Wanting more' saves us from impoverishment in all its manifestations.

But there's a dark side to wanting more as Adam and Eve discovered. We can lose perspective and any sense of what we already have; we can fail in gratitude; and we can fail to remain aware that we might lose what we already have. We can become greedy and selfish. We can push ahead with our own plans for improvement – whatever form that might take – and risk becoming oblivious to the consequences for ourselves and for others not just in the here and now but also in the future. There is always a cost to wanting more – every action has a re-action – and we need to constantly assess that cost.

So in wanting more we walk a tightrope. We must constantly ask ourselves, "When does wanting more stop being life-giving and start being life-destroying, not just for myself but for others?"

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus was saying to James and John "know the cost of wanting more because there is a cost and be prepared to pay it". That cost is not just for ourselves in the here and now, but for others now and in the future. In the Adam and Eve story, Adam and Eve lost

paradise not just for themselves but for all generations for all time.

Jesus ends his conversation with James and John with a no-nonsense reality check. "You might pay the price" says Jesus "but I can't guarantee you the outcome you want. The seats are not mine to give". The insight for me here is: If I'm going to do this, do it because I believe in what I'm doing and not just because I want the outcome, because I may not get the outcome I want, and then I will have to live with the consequences of my actions.

So in reflecting on this Gospel, these are the questions I ask myself: How does 'wanting more' manifest itself in my life? Is this 'wanting more' life-giving or soul-destroying? What price am I paying for wanting more? Who are my actions affecting? Are my actions life-giving or soul-destroying? Do I believe in what I'm doing or am I taking an opportunistic route to self-advantage? If I don't get the outcome I want, if I don't get 'the more' that I'm seeking, am I honoured or dishonoured by the actions I've taken to achieve that outcome which is now denied to me?

Irrespective of whether the characters in Mark's Gospel really lived or not, I see this as a powerful story about the nature of being human, just as the Adam and Eve story is powerful. This story reveals me to myself and demands that I reflect on my priorities, my choices and my actions. I invite you all to reflect in your own way on the insights this story holds for you and how you live your life.

Gaye Kier

A Nurse without Borders

Melissa Calligeros talks with Kerry White's daughter, Kate, of her amazing work with Medecins Sans Frontieres in South Sudan.

She treats toddlers whose limbs have been pulverised by high velocity bullets and women whose bodies are crippled with disease. But it's the blissful ignorance of those worlds away, sipping their chai lattes, that Kate White finds most confronting.

Down a crackling phone line from an office in the heart of South Sudan's dusty capital Juba comes a jovial voice, not in the slightest way indicative of the surrounding environment.

Kate White, a 32-year-old nurse with Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders), is taking a rare vacation from her post at a hospital in the small town of Leer, about a 1½ hour flight from the capital, where oil fields litter a sprawling, flat marshland.

She speaks of the trials and tribulations faced in attempting to provide medical care to the country's most vulnerable with the relative objectivity of a historian, but her emotions surface when recalling a return visit to her home in the inner-Brisbane suburb of West End.

"The culture shock coming home is probably worse than culture shock you have going into the field," she says.

"After my first mission I don't think I dealt with it particularly well. I'm not generally an introverted



person, but I became a little bit that way ... because you talk about it with some people and they just don't understand and get this glazed look in their eyes and so you stop talking about it in general.

"Just little things make you angry - people complaining about the price of a cup of coffee. Why are you complaining about that? You have it so good and you have no idea.

"In some ways, you stop talking about what you do to some people and maybe that's not the best thing, but you know the people in your life who are still interested and I think we build closer relationships with them and they're the ones that really get you through and help you adjust to normal life."

When at home, comments made in jest about war or poverty by friends and family are not taken lightly. Upon her first return to Australia, after four months in Libya at the height of the 2011 assault by pro-Gaddafi forces,

she struggled rationalising the injustice, feeling nobody cared, nobody understood and nobody could understand.

"But then you come to realise that everything is relative," she says.

"People have different experiences in their life and for a lot of people they don't ever experience this side."

White recalls rumbling into Libya in a four-door sedan, amid the threat of repeated air strikes, headed past eight rebel checkpoints for a hospital in the small north-western city of Zintan in the Nafusa Mountains.

Shelling attacks came within 50 metres of the six-foot-high concrete walls surrounding the hospital, where inside White and her team treated the wounded.

"It was a little bit overwhelming at first, but you get into a routine in what you do in those situations," she says.

"When you're dealing with such large numbers of war casualties coming in at once, the very, very severe patients that you would need to do big interventions on ... we actually triage them in a category called 'black'.

"And that means that you make them comfortable and you wait for them to die. There's nothing that you could do that in the long run could potentially save them, because the type of treatment that they need is so many hours away from where you are they wouldn't survive that journey.

"It's so different from what you would do back home. The first time you have to explain what's happening to your friends and family that are there, it's really difficult."

White abandoned a university law degree after graduating from Brisbane State High School to pursue a career in nursing with the hope of eventually joining Doctors Without Borders. She secured a graduate position with the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, before taking up a role at Melbourne's Alfred hospital to familiarise herself with cardiac surgery.

Less than three months after first applying for a position with Doctors Without Borders, White was deployed on her first mission in May last year. One year later she landed on the dusty plains of South Sudan, where moments of joy on the job come with miraculous stories of survival.



"There was a little boy who had come in and he had come from a place that was three day's walk away and had been shelled," White says. "His arm had been basically blown off from the shoulder joint. He was two years old.

"When he first came in to the hospital I was the first person to treat him. He was crying and I'm sure he almost thought that I was causing the pain, and he became really scared of me - absolutely petrified.

"But then gradually over the 10 days he was in hospital he became my best friend. He would come and play with me. He was really incredibly resilient. It was incredible to see his recovery and the change in his reaction to me in going from the big, mean white

person who had caused him pain to being his friend. It was really, really beautiful. He was quite remarkable."

Therein lies the reward for White. *"This work gives me so much satisfaction. It's the best work I've done in my life," she says.*

She admits longing for a hot shower on occasion, or a meal at her favourite Greek restaurant on Boundary Street, but on her current vacation she will spend two weeks trekking the mountainous gorilla country of Uganda, before returning to her hospital rounds.

Reprinted with permission by the author Melissa Calligeros from brisbanetimes.com.au

The Presence of the Holy One

The hum of the city sounds
Is a song of the Holy One
Who pulsates at the heart of all
Who is in all; one with all.

The swish of the river wash
Is the love of the Holy One
Embracing the earth and all living things
Enfolding us all in a oneness of being.

The shudder of my high rise home
Is a reminder from the Holy One
To be awake, present, embracing all
For life and death aren't two but one.

The gentle touch of the river breeze
Is the kiss of the Holy One
The precious moments with those we love
The embrace, the touch, that lingers on.

The silence of the sinking moon
Is the stillness of the Holy One
Ever present at the heart of all
Ever waiting for us all.

And the glare of the rising sun
Is the mystery of the Holy One
More than we can know or name
Screen out, block out or contain.

*Margaret Clifford
October 2012*

Christianity beyond Christendom:

Reflections on a European Sojourn

Olga and I have just returned from a guided tour of Italy and central Europe. Predictably, our daily diet included one 'bloody church' after another. To a tourist from the antipodes, these cathedrals and abbeys with their multi-century histories are awesome. As structures, their construction defies the imagination. Architecturally, they are masterpieces. The music they create is superb, while the stain glass windows, statues and frescoes retelling the biblical sacred history are artistic wonders.

At the end of the day, however, they are testimonies to the significance of institutional Christianity in the past era of Christendom in which the spoils of power and wealth were shared between church and state amid great violence which often enslaved and impoverished the masses.

At the same time it cannot be denied that in post-Feudal days, institutional Christianity, arguably influenced by the Enlightenment, was the crucible from which many social welfare initiatives were born. Moreover, these structures still radiate spiritual influence, inspiring countless devotees to compassionate service, as a visit to Assisi reminds us. To this day these grand places of worship provide an ambience for the remaining faithful to celebrate rituals in settings which point to the transcendent.



The Cathedral of Saint Barbara in Kutna Hora, Czech Republic. It's generally considered to be one of the best examples of a Gothic church in the whole of Europe

However, even if one were to approach these amazing sites as a pilgrim seeking the mystical and magical among the medieval, only intellectual dishonesty would deny that, in the twenty-first century, they are essentially museums and mausoleums.

As we moved from sanctuary to sanctuary, there were reminders of martyrs who witnessed to costly discipleship, sometimes in spite of the established church, though such stories often went unmentioned by our guides. For instance, the official tour of Westminster Abbey made no mention of the ten twentieth century martyrs (including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Father Kolbe and Martin Luther King) represented in a row of stone busts above the entrance to the Abbey. While in

Florence, the story of Girolama Savanorola, a Dominican Monk executed in that city in 1498, went unnoticed. Savanorola was put to death after condemning the corrupt excesses of the Medicis and the incumbents of the Vatican. One exception was in very secular Prague where the monument to Jan Hus, burned to death for heresy, stands prominently in the town square, perhaps more as a testimony to Czech nationalism than faith.

In my heart of hearts the question was never far away: what would the Nazarene think of all this? Though, as a twenty-first century tourist, I observed all this as a theologically trained tourist, schooled by the social sciences to see religious phenomena as a social construction.

Two conclusions are unavoidable. Without doubt, European civilisation is now thoroughly secular, though that doesn't mean that religion or spirituality is dead. The property wealth of Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and Lutheranism are sure indicators that institutional religion is far from dead.

A story from my Protestant youth came to mind. As the wealth of the New World of the Americas was confiscated in the sixteenth century and brought back to Europe, indeed, much to the coffers of Cardinals, Archbishops and the Pope himself, one churchman was heard to say to another (recalling a story in the Book of Acts): "No longer need St Peter say, 'silver and gold have I none' to which the other replied, 'yes but no longer can he say 'in the name of Jesus rise up and walk' ". Perhaps that story is apocryphal, though as we wandered around Vatican City and observed the homeless huddled behind its colonnades this yarn certainly had the ring of truth. It poses the conclusion our travels provoked: too often temporal power has been traded for spiritual integrity.

It so happens that our journey coincided with significant events for establishment Christianity: the search for a new Archbishop of Canterbury and Pope Benedict's convening of a Synod of Bishops. The Synod was to debate how to counter rising secularism on the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, whose conclusions Rome now seemingly eschews. During October, the Synod has heard the call of the Pontiff for



St Michael weighing souls with the Devil interfering - central portal Notre Dame

a "new evangelisation", while returning Catholicism to Roman orthodoxy. Europe is a special concern of this German Pope for, across Europe, Rome is fast losing adherents and many priests are joining the rebellious laity disenchanted with the hierarchy. This concern was clearly flagged by Cardinal Ratzinger when he became Pope taking to himself the name 'Benedict', the saint who led the evangelisation of Europe in the first millennium of the Christian era.

Incidentally, on our return from Europe we were fascinated to see two excellent Compass reports on ABC television (October 7 and 14) which documented the struggle going on within Catholicism in Europe and the connections between the Vatican and regressive, even fascist, groups like Opus Dei and the Legion of Christ.

At the end of our tour, in a Bolognan bookshop, I stumbled

across a copy of the just released title by Matthew Fox, *The Pope's War: why Ratzinger's Secret Crusade has imperilled the Church and how it can be saved*. (Fox was one of the many casualties during Ratzinger's period as Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith). Meanwhile, at Gatwick, I read a newspaper with an article headed "Bishops to counter rising secularism" outlining the forthcoming Vatican Synod.

It concluded how the present Pope, as a young theologian, was an adviser to the Vatican Council convened by Pope John XXIII. The journalist quoted the young Ratzinger from those promising days: "Faith has to come out of its cage, it has to face the present with a new language, a new opening". The Report went on to say, "But then came 1968 – a traumatic year for Ratzinger when students at his faculty interrupted professors and mocked dogma in the name of revolution".

Actually, when we visited Regensburg in Bavaria I had been reminded of how, in his autobiography, Hans Kung (now disbarred as a Catholic theologian by the Roman Curia) recalls theologian Ratzinger's flight from the ecumenical and open, theological faculty of Tübingen, where both Kung and Ratzinger worked. Professor Ratzinger retreated to the safety of a Catholic University in Regensburg where he began his rise in the hierarchy, becoming by 1981 a Cardinal in the Curia where under Pope John Paul II he began to dismantle the work of the second Vatican Council.

Kung's account suggests that Ratzinger took fright at the challenges of the 1968 world-wide student unrest which demanded debate of dominant orthodoxies and liberation from an authoritarian culture. Ratzinger himself reflected later on his flight from the 1968 ethos: "everything falls apart if there is

no truth" (Milestones, p.153 www.ratzingerfanclub.com/biography.html). And he has seemingly been imposing his version of 'Truth' ever since!

All this became vivid to me as we made our way across Europe. These museums and mausoleums could be seen as signs of institutional Christianity, withdrawn into itself, in flight from liberal democracy and post modernity, afraid to open its windows as John XXIII had prayed.

This personal analysis might sound overly cynical. It is not. Rather it backgrounds questions many of us who have grown up in one Christian church or another are asking: to what extent can a spirituality relevant to our global future be shaped within traditional religious institutions? That is, to use the time honoured imagery of the church likened to a ship: to what extent can we stay on board and rock the boat (i.e. honestly address these questions)

or will we only be moving deck chairs on a sinking vessel? Is it inevitable that those who seek a spirituality, informed by the Jesus way, but stripped of non-believable dogma, must either jump ship or risk being pushed overboard?

*Noel Preston, ethicist, theologian and social commentator, adjunct Professor, Griffith University)
Brisbane, November 5, 2012*

Post Script

A reader might ask: why I, as a person of Protestant heritage, should focus so much on the future of Roman Catholicism?

There are many valid responses to such a question. One simple answer is that what happens in the Roman Catholic community has clear impacts on those who are non-Catholics in our global and ecumenical society, both within and without institutional religion. Personally, I am drawn to this debate because Catholic spirituality, and the consequences of the second Vatican Council, have influenced my own life profoundly. On a wider stage, the drama now being played out under the papacy of the present Bishop of Rome has a similar character to the tensions in monotheistic religions of many brands - tensions about putting new wine in old wineskins, tensions between hierarchical authority and communal authenticity, tensions between an orthodoxy forged in a past era (for some, Christendom) and one that recognises that that era has passed.

And finally, is this a futile struggle, even an indulgence, when the urgent challenge is to translate compassion into local and global acts for peace, social justice and environmental sustainability? Is it better to let the dead bury the dead?



What we believe does influence what we do and how we do it

I certainly realise that what I believe is only what makes sense for me at this time in my life. When we were young we believed in the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Probably having to face the fact that adults had told me stories that were not in fact true should have prepared me to accept this questioning attitude to everything in my life. The more we question and search for answers that satisfy us, (at least for the moment), the more we approach true knowledge. We have to be careful though not to come to the conclusion that all truth is relative or that what we believe is unimportant. I feel strongly that what we believe does influence what we do and how we do it - and is therefore vitally important,

We are a Trinity and we should aim not just at getting a balance but developing to their maximum each of the three aspects of our entities - Body Mind and Spirit, (the material me, my reason and my emotions; Body, Reason and Emotions; Being, Truth and Love),

As for the content of what we believe, I do not think that is as important as being open to truth wherever we find it. We should be searching for truth and open to a deepening understanding of what that means to us. A search for TRUTH is indeed a search for God.

What we do is vitally important and flows out of the balance we have found in ourselves. It should

be the expression of our love and of what we have come to accept as truth but is restricted, I am afraid, by our physical limitations and the constraints our growing age puts upon us.

In the last edition I promised to tell my story of hearing a voice and I think it does in some ways fit the topic of this edition. Answers to our questions come in many unexpected ways – and are often answering the more important unasked question.

Back in the 1980s there was a Cenacle Sister from Orminston who ran Home Retreats around the Brisbane parishes. A dozen or more of us would gather in someone's home one morning a week for seven weeks and were urged to pray and meditate on a series of scripture passages during the following week. She also encouraged us to put ourselves in the story as a spectator or one of those playing a part in the story. This particular retreat was nearing its end and the week's passages were from the passion.

I enjoyed being one of the women who must have been at the Last Supper. (Who else would have kept the food coming and cleared the tables?) But it was the next day's meditation on The Agony in the Garden that really had an enormous effect on my thinking. The apostles went to sleep so it seemed useless being one of them, and an angel was quite out of my

ken, so I wondered what Jesus would be praying about. I felt that, were I Jesus, I would want to know why it had come to this- so that became my mantra. "Why did it have to come to this?" "You sent prophets through the centuries and no one appears to have fully understood your message." "I've

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Why don't they listen to you?

been preaching for three years and even my closest companions still don't fully understand what I am trying to tell them." "Why don't they listen to me? Why don't they listen to you?" I found myself coming back again and again over the next couple of days to this question, "Why don't they listen to you?" At Mass on Sunday I lost myself again in this scene and was asking yet again – "Why don't they listen to you?" when a voice-over asked the question with me as I silently repeated the question. The words were uttered in unison with me but one word was changed. The voice asked: "Why don't we listen to you?" It was said with such encompassing love that I was overwhelmed.

Of course it did not answer the question I was asking but I found life- changing the idea (knowledge?) that Jesus was identifying himself so fully with
Continued on page 17

Reflections on an On-going Journey

Many things, events, and people shape who we are, what we believe and what and who we choose to become. Our family of origin – not only our immediate family but the intergenerational family with its history, values and choices play a critical part in this. Alongside this are other things like our childhood experiences and childhood family experiences; the attitudes, values and personalities of our parents; our own personality; the experiences that are ours over our lifetime; choices we have individually made and their outcomes; the things we valued and our own choices especially those made as a young adult; the ups and downs of life – what we have learnt from them and where they have led us; and who we are in the ever-changing, yet ever-present “Now”. My reflections on these many aspects of the ‘who’ I have become have taken me down many memory paths which has been both interesting and enlightening.

Marg has said that “the thought that what we do is more important than what we believe has been something of a mantra for our community”. If that is so, I think I must have missed those times of hearing this as I believe that what we do and believe comes out of how we have shaped ourselves and the level to which there is a congruence between what it is we value and who, what or how we individually name God for our individual selves and the actions we take to implement this in the living of our lives.

Justice, the seeking to understand social issues bigger than my immediate knowledge base and the desire to do something or take a stance on situations of injustice has been very important for me since my early high school years and in many ways determined the people I most associated with, the people I felt most at-home with and determined to a large extent the choices I made. For example, as an 11yr old I remember becoming very conscious of and aware of the incredible work that women living on properties in rural Queensland did – how they helped their children with distance education at home, how they taught their children their faith, how they helped their husbands out on the property, were involved in wider issues through groups such as the Country Women’s Association and other issues in their local areas and still did all the usual things any mother does related to home

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**the limitations people
faced in terms of services**

management and parenting. I became aware of these things when I was staying with my grandparents on their property south of St George and pondered on all that I had seen after staying on the property of my father’s



cousin and his five daughters who were my age and younger. That awareness led both to a desire to work in rural areas, knowing of the limitations people faced in terms of services, at some time in my life, and an awareness of my own being “drawn by the land.” When I was much older and considering religious life it was the final determinant of which religious order I would join – not the particular missionary group I really liked and had come to know, but the Mercies by whom I had been educated and whom I knew had houses in western Queensland. The strong justice stance in me has largely determined the many different work places I have been involved in over the years when I was a Mercy and since I left in recent years, and issues I have become involved in over the years.

In terms of faith, as in Catholic faith, I was very fortunate in having parents who weren’t “letter of the law” or scrupulous type Catholics, but were practical, community-

Reflections on an on-going Journey

minded people very involved in the local parish of Gordon Park and by extension Woolloowin, where the Sisters of Mercy travelled from each day to teach at Gordon Park. They were people who got involved in whatever groups we kids were involved in. Being involved in the various liturgical events was important for us as a family, not because it was expected or the “right thing” to do but because it was meaningful to both Mum and Dad.

Who I am has determined how I have viewed various things within the institutional church and determined the actions I have taken all through my life and the emphasis or lack of emphasis that I have chosen to place on various church statements and actions.

Many things continue to shape who I am, my beliefs and what I value. In terms of belonging to a church or religion I still think of myself as a Catholic – where catholic really means universal. I have good friends who belong to various Christian Churches and feel at home in many of these depending upon the community to which they belong and the liturgical practice of the group. However, it is from the Vietnamese Sangha of Thich Nhat Hanh – a Buddhist community of ‘Interbeing’ that I have received a practice that has further grounded my way of being and processing/reflecting on life. Through becoming more aware of Thich Nhat Hanh over the past 15yrs and reading a number of his books, hearing some of his dharma talks, and being involved with many Vietnamese since their arrival at Wacol in 1976 I have found an incredible treasure that

has brought me over the past four years closer to “my home” - myself, my God and compassion.

Life is a ongoing journey, just as our finding our own particular path and finding ourselves along the way is an ongoing journey – one that can open our eyes beyond the confines and limitations of who we think or name God as being, into a horizon that stretches us beyond where we can see. It is a journey that takes us beyond the “doing-ness” of the everyday – if we are game to travel there – and who knows where it will lead us!

Lorraine Brosnan

P.S. I am currently working with the Salvos with women and children who are homeless, and have worked in the past with a number of projects aligned with different faiths – all part of the journey and learning!

Ted's Wisdom

the people
the heart
St Mary's

What we believe does influence what we do and how we do it

Continued from page 15

humanity, with each and every one of us that we might come to know his Father (Being Truth and Love) as intimately as he knew him,.

It has taken a long time to tease out a fuller understanding of my experience - that Jesus did not

die to “save us” but to help us to know his ABBA - or is that really the same thing?

I suddenly realised that people were standing to go up to communion and I had not been aware of anything around me since just after I came in - (a little

late I must confess. The priest had processed up the aisle and was just walking to the altar!)

If anyone around me had noticed the tears they probably thought we had just had a death in the family. Quite the contrary - someone had just become far more fully alive.

“WHY DON'T WE LISTEN TO YOU?”

Shar Ryan

Meeting the Archbishop



Wendy Brown, Natasha Rodriguez, Karyn Walsh, Terry Fitzpatrick and Peter Kennedy have morning tea with Archbishop Collieridge at Common Ground.



A Different Homily

Michelle Shelldrake has us all meditating and singing during her homily.



Letters, Emails, Comments

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After a viewing of The Trouble with St Mary's at the university in Florida

The film was very well received. I was there for the Florida A&M University - Law School screening and had a particularly engrossing discussion with one of the law school faculty members. The impact of the film was deeply felt. And I enjoyed screening the film again. It captured a significant moment for all involved and did so without exploiting or mocking the conflicting and contradictory emotions and gestures of those followed. It created a rare portrait of an existential crisis shared by this priest and his flock.

*Kelly Devine, artistic Festival
Director of the Global Peace Film
Festival*

Feedback for magazine Extra ordinary People

Hi Marg,
Thank you so much for sending me the 'Spring' edition of St Mary's Matters. It was a lovely surprise and a tribute to a Catholic Community that is alive and *'listens to what the spirit is saying to the church'* Rev 2:29. Please be assured of continued prayer and support. I often visit the website to keep up with any updates. Many thanks again and please pass on our promise of support and prayer from our little community of St Gabs here in Liverpool UK

Nick and Lorna Young

After watching the Utube of Peter speaking at TedX

The Peter Kennedy talk was inspirational. I have read the book and follow St Mary's in Exile closely thanks to the bulletins you send but I have never heard or seen him speak before. I was struck by his fluency, clarity and calm and thoughtful authority. (Authority in the RC Church is often now used for an authoritarian, centralised attitude which lacks compassion.) I don't mean that use of the word here: by authority here I was struck by his humble and clear way of "just knowing" what he was saying is right, drawn from years of prayer and experience.

Best wishes as always. I have told loads of people about your church community. It also very much influences my thinking. I do some media work for Catholic Women's Ordination (into a reformed RC Church.) Recently I was on Channel 4 TV talking about the disconnection between the hierarchical Vatican and the people, the simplicity and collaborative flat structures that our church should be, i.e. returning to Jesus' time. I didn't mention St Mary in Exile but it influences my thinking and gives me courage. So thank you.

Pippa Bonner

Talking about Faith and Belief

As an outsider from St Mary's can I say that I think that belief is

about trust in God, not about right belief. I would suggest that right belief is an impossible intellectual demand to place on human beings in the face of a transcendent God. This may well be the reason that the Buddha warned his followers against speculating about absolutes. Can I suggest that such a demand is the source of many of Christianity's problems and the origin of clerical power and its abuse.

Yet we think that God is always with us. To some extent this is a response to our innermost need for spiritual reassurance in presence of the difficulties of life and our mortality. But it is also a matter of human experience. And in Jesus we meet someone who had a profound sense of God's closeness. Thus he called God, Father, or better still, Papa or Daddy. In our less patriarchal age we might also call God Mother, or Mummy. Such terms reflect the intimacy which God wishes us to enjoy; and the reality of our ultimate origins. Thus I suggest that hope and charity flow from this realisation, the realisation that we are all expressions of God's creative power, generosity and God's search for meaning in his/her own existence.

I suggest that everything else is redundant.

Dr Lee Boldeman



Eucharist and picnic lunch at Dutton Park



What to do? What to believe?

What comes first – chicken or egg.....faith or works? Many of us glean personal belief from the four “accepted” Gospels - even if it’s “just” the Golden Rule: Do as you would be done by.

In general, we, the people of St Mary’s in exile do what Jesus did and also what he told us to do. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked – the hungry are fed, the homeless are housed by St Mary’s in association with Micah.

That simple - that complicated. To heal the sick and sorrowful was part of the ministry of Jesus. The heart of St Mary’s in Exile has been wounded just like Jesus’, the Wounded Healer. Our capacity to heal increases, I believe, with/from our own wound/s.

The church as established by the Emperor Constantine and a few faceless men has kicked out *The Man Who Threatened Rome* - Peter Kennedy, in case you’ve been living under a rock for the past five years or so. He is not alone because we all are still standing in solidarity with him.

Belief in the marriage of Mary Magdalene and Jesus and the resulting Holy Grail (their bloodline carried on, perhaps by the Merovingian royal lineage of southern France) and her role as a teacher in the early Christian community is still strong in southern France to this day.

A positive result of the popularity of Dan Brown’s ‘The Da Vinci Code’ is that this possibility has

been revealed to readers of fiction who would eschew nonfiction tomes both theological and archaeological.

Australian Barbara Thiering was an employee of the Catholic Church in Sydney in the 1970’s. She became disillusioned with the hierarchy and left the job to obtain a doctorate in theology to make up her own mind about questions of faith. Barbara studied the Qumran documents and published her findings in a book ‘Jesus the Man’. She featured in an episode of ‘Compass’ (ABC TV) and unfortunately made no other impact on popular culture in Australia or Christian belief anywhere of which I am aware - besides teaching theology at secular universities in Sydney.

On the Isle of Mull of Scotland, in the small village of Dervaig, there is a stained glass window in the Kilmore Church. It is said to be Mary Magdalene and Jesus. A pregnant Mary Magdalene. Immediately below the stained glass, there is a Gospel text. It reads: "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her". This statement was made by Christ, and refers to Mary Magdalene. It is found in the Gospel of Luke, ch.10, v.42.

<http://visionaryfiction.blogspot.com.au>



I have ascertained that most people will believe what they want to believe. That’s a paraphrased quote from someone whose name is unknown to me. (I wish I’d said it though).

In conclusion: we each act in accordance with our consciences (on a good day). Our beliefs inform both our actions and our consciences. I am grateful and joyful to be a part of St Mary’s at TLC where I share the same Spirit, if not the exact beliefs and actions, with Peter and Terry and the SMX community.

Joan Medlum

The Bicycle

My cousin Mausie was my best playmate. She lived with her parents Tappy and Bunchy and her sister Vonnie at Buffalo Patch, now part of Carindale. It wasn't all that far from our place – I could walk it today in less than an hour – but when Mausie and I and my brother John were children it was a long and exciting, sometimes terrifying journey. Bunchy's tin lizzie was very unpredictable. But when we got there it was pure magic.

Back then our house was at the edge of suburbia, and Bunchy's house was right in the bush. 'Bunchy' was short for Bunchy Top, and he was so called because he had a mop of thick curly hair. My father called him Jack. Tappy was a corruption of Kathleen. Mausie was a little older than I and Vonnie was eight years older than that.

Tappy and Bunchy owned land out at Buffalo Patch, but not much else. Bunchy was a clever person, but he had had very little formal education and consequently was unqualified for most employment opportunities. He built their cottage from stones hewn from the hills nearby and rendered it with mud from the creek bed. The year I turned seven my brother John and I were invited to spend a week at Buffalo Patch during the school holidays. They had a cow named Strawberry. We had cream on our porridge, cream on homegrown strawberries, and every day fresh butter which Tappy made by shaking the milk in a tin, and we would see the little blobs of butter appear. Then she salted

it. It was delicious. They had a crystal radio set which crackled so badly that it was impossible to really hear anything. Two people at a time, with one earpiece each, could listen, and pretend to hear something.

The most exciting activity was the games in the bush. All day long we explored; we gathered branches and grasses and flowers for our cubby house. And it was during that week of my seventh year that I learned to ride a two-wheeler bike. It was Vonnie's bike, a three-quarter size, and to this day I can't imagine how she allowed us three ruffians to use it. We had a narrow, stony, steep, uneven track on which to practise our skills. One person was supposed to hold the seat of the bike and keep it steady while the rider careered off down the track. The assistant invariably had to let go, with usually disastrous results. The overhanging branches flung themselves into my face, my knees and elbows were cut to pieces from the endless busters. But by the end of that week I could ride unaided.

Mausie was the most delightful playmate anyone could wish for. Six months older than I, she was everything I was not. She was a strong, well-built girl, while I was a scrawny, skinny kid. She had never had a day's illness, while I was forever coming down with tonsillitis or stomach-ache. And – she was pretty. She had a fine olive complexion and beautiful blonde hair. My hair was like rats' tails, and worst of all I had freckles.



"Tappy, can we go down to the creek today?" She always called her mother Tappy when we were there. "You be back by lunch time, then, and be careful. I'll bang the saucepan lids and you come straight back." "Yes", we yelled back, racing off. Tappy was great fun. In the evenings she would tell jokes and make us laugh, or take out her violin and play to us.

Later that year I sensed a cloud of disquiet and sorrow in our home. My mother looked worried. Tappy was there more than usual. My mother told me that Mausie was ill, very ill, and she was in the Mater Hospital. One day I was taken up to the hospital, but was not allowed in. Terrible screams were coming from the room where they said she was. I was afraid. Back home we prayed for Mausie every evening.

A few days later my mother said to me in a quiet, breaking voice, "Mausie went to heaven last night. Come, we'll say a prayer

for her.” I was very afraid. I had heard about death, but it had never before entered my life. What was heaven, anyway? What was Mausie doing now?

The following day there was an atmosphere of gloom and sadness, then a terrible scene in the house. Tappy was there. She was lying on a bed, and she was weeping, sobbing loudly. Then she would call out, in a loud voice, “My poor little Maureen! My poor little Maureen!” Again I was frightened. Babies cried, children cried sometimes, but I had never heard an adult cry. I was getting ready to go to school. My mother said to me, “Say goodbye to Tappy.” I crept up to where she was lying,

I whispered goodbye, gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, and sped off.

Soon afterwards I heard that Tappy, Bunchy and Vonnie had gone to live in Newcastle, and they went right out of our lives for a long time.

When I was about eleven I reached the age when corresponding with pen friends was the thing to do. All my school friends had pen friends, about whom we would compare notes. I sent my name and address to a paper with a national circulation. Soon afterwards, who should reply to my advertisement but Tappy, asking if she could be my pen friend. So began a

correspondence that lasted several years, and became a very pleasurable and fruitful episode in my growing up.

After Mausie’s death Vonnie’s bike arrived at our place, along with a few other items. My brother John and I shared it and rode it for several years. Until I was about sixteen I went every weekend on excursions all over Brisbane. Eventually it fell to pieces. My younger brothers dismantled it totally, and the wheels served for many more years as supports for various homemade contraptions.

Joan Mooney

John and Marie Ellis celebrate 50 years of marriage



What People are Reading

Saving Jesus from the Church

Robin R Meyers
Harper One 2009

The conviction of the followers of Jesus that he was still with them was itself the resurrection (p76)

Jesus is a much underrated man --- To deprive him of his humanity is to deprive him of his greatness (p74)

The greatest threat to Christian discipleship --- is a supernatural vision of Jesus that one can only worship (p151)

Robin Meyers' book provides a neat fit for the editor's guidelines for this summer edition, and for discussions in progress towards a Faith Community Council.

Meyers has since 1985 been Minister of the Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ in Oklahoma City. He is a member of the Jesus Seminar and at ease with 'fearless biblical scholars' such as Crossan, Borg, Funk, Spong, Fox and Armstrong. In the absence of a hierarchy he and his 800 strong congregation have a freedom to explore new ideas in an atmosphere free of interference from authority and power.

At the outset, Meyers asks, 'Why haven't I done enough to promote biblical literacy and to invite others to consider an alternative way of being church in our time?'

Accused that he doesn't seem to believe anything, he responds, 'We are not believers at all, not in the sense of giving intellectual assent to post biblical propositions --- we are trying to get back to something fulfilling and transformative: following Jesus'. (prologue)

He is dedicated to a faith that becomes 'biblically responsible, intellectually honest, emotionally satisfying, socially significant'. (prologue p7)

In ten chapters Myers goes back to the beginning of Jesus' life and his teaching, to find a new way forward that is faithful to those early followers of Jesus. eg Jesus the Teacher, Not the Saviour; Religion as Relationship, Not Righteousness; The Cross as Futility, Not Forgiveness. There is a thread that holds these chapters together and Meyers ties it up vigorously throughout.

Meyers starts with the seemingly simple notion of the pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Christ. Consistently through the topics of the respective chapters he pursues the domination of the post-Easter Christ. 'Adoration of the post-Easter Christ so dominates the language and liturgy of the church that the wisdom of the pre-Easter Jesus is all but lost'. (p19)

Throughout the book there is a clinical analysis of the New Testament. It may be clinical but it is not tedious. 'How a Jewish peasant went from being a teacher



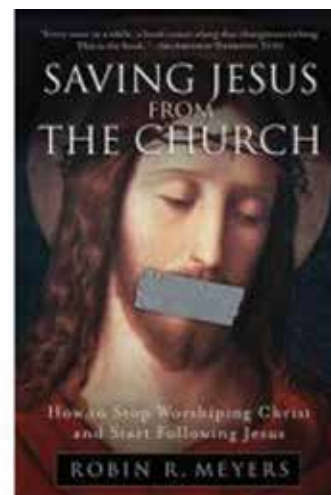
of wisdom, a social prophet to the Only Begotten Son of God requires a clear and courageous approach to the study of the New Testament'.(p15)

Meyers concludes his final chapter thus, "The most important question we can ask now is not what we believe. It is about how we relate.---'He has told you O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)' ". (p221)

Hardly a wasted word, easy to read, thoroughly recommended.

On line: www.mayflowerucc.org
good for Mayflower community.
Google: 'Robin R Meyers': good for Meyers himself.

Jim Lawson.



Abercrombie and Fitch

I toured England a while ago, and visited many castles, palaces and great houses. The history and architecture were very interesting, but their art collections and magnificent decorations were a little outside the range of what I can appreciate. The intricately carved gilded furniture and extravagant table settings often seemed a little over the top to me. Maybe tastes have changed over the years; or maybe they were over the top even when they were made. Maybe some of these past aristocrats had more money than taste.



Requirements for employment as a steward in the A&F jet being demonstrated by a row of hopefuls.

If these great houses are spectacular now, how much more so they must have seemed a couple of centuries ago, when most of the people around them were living in hovels. It seems that the people of those days saw nothing incongruous in this situation. Of course we would not accept it now.

Or would we?

When Michael Jeffries, the CEO of fashion retailer Abercrombie and Fitch, travels on the company's corporate jet, a model agency called Cosmopolitan Management is contracted to provide four male models to serve as stewards for

the flight. As befits a large modern corporation, their duties are documented in what they call the 'aircraft standards manual'.

The manual specifies that the stewards should be clean shaven, and be dressed in an Abercrombie and Fitch polo shirt, jeans, boxer briefs, thongs, gloves, and a touch of Abercrombie and Fitch aftershave. It specifies that the steward should say "No problem" when a passenger asks for something. The stewards do not have to look after Ruby, Trouble and Sammy, Michael Jeffries' dogs. On the plane, they are looked after by a 'houseman.'

I won't go on with the details of the corporate jet. It is probably not something you want to think about when stuck in a narrow economy class seat with a screaming baby in the row behind. At least we don't live in hovels anymore.

There is something else. I can hardly bring myself to mention it, but Abercrombie and Fitch is a stock exchange listed company. Michael Jeffries is not the owner – he is the CEO. So if you have a superannuation policy, it is probably your money he is spending, not his.

Peter Brown

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News from the Clusters

Paddington Cluster Group

The Group started in January 2012 with 8 people and have met monthly. We now have nine people with the newcomer joining us in August.

Each month the members would email their topics on what they would like to discuss and the meetings would take place from there. We have discussed such diverse topics as 'What is Prayer'; we have discussed some of the homilies, the different interpretations of the Lord's Prayer, Meister Eckhardts' teachings and non-dualism.

We had dinner at the Jazz Cat at Paddington prior to Christmas 2011. It was a nice night, but we got thrown out before dessert and coffee, not because we were unruly, but because the staff wanted to go home! How rude!

In July, we had another dinner where everyone brought a dish; it was quite an international affair. We had lasagna, curry, risotto, baked vegetables and desserts. This was all well washed down with red and white wine. It again was a great night.

This December we are going to meet at the Il Posto at Paddington Centro for an Italian get together and to celebrate the year.

The success of the group is because of the respect the group has for each other – not to mention our growing liking

for one another's company. We are struggling with the questions of life that are proposed. We sit and wrestle with them; we don't have the answers, but we try and listen to what others have to say in the hope that we hear and move closer to the truth whatever that may be! Our self-appointed task for next year is to read, discuss and implement in our lives Karen Armstrong's "The twelve steps to a compassionate life".

After Mass Dinners

People have been attending After Mass Dinners for about 12 months now. The numbers ranged from 3 to 28. They have been fun noisy nights!

Lunch together for the Group who will be visiting Laos in Feb.



Greenslopes Cluster

Our cluster has had a good year, in which we read and discussed each month a section of Greg Jenks' book, *The Once and Future Bible: an introduction to the Bible for religious progressives*.

We will be continuing the group next year, discussing Hal Taussig's book, *A New Spiritual Home: the grass roots movement for religious*

We have eaten at the various Restaurants on Hardgrave Road, and tried others around the West End area. This year we are going to try restaurants further afield to Rosalie, Paddington, Stones Corner and Graceville so we can cater for people who live on both north and south sides of the river.

November was the last dinner for the year; 12 attended and a few of us celebrated by having dessert at Cold Rock. The rest watched their weight and went home!! It was fun.

Margaret Wheat.

progressives. We meet on the first Monday of each month at 7pm, at Greenslopes. There may be vacancies in the group next year.

Gwenneth Roberts

Reports from the other clusters will be in the next edition: Tarragindi, Kenmore, Western Suburbs, Cannon Hill and Central.

News from the Clusters

Southern Cluster

We meet each second Monday of the month at Sunnybank Hills. There is a core group of eight people who have become close friends over the years we have been meeting.

In recent times we have eschewed doing anything remotely cerebral and simply meet to talk while we eat and enjoy a glass or two of wine.

I think our cluster is a good example of how we can get to know each other so much better when we meet in each other's homes and simply relax and accept each other the way we are.

Marg Ortiz

Northern Cluster

Our cluster has met for the last time this year, and as ever, it was a lovely evening, with good sharing, prayer and discussion.

As a group we constructed a set of suggestions about the Faith Community Council which we forwarded to the Board for their consideration. We consider this input very much a part of our role in the community.

We regularly read articles and excerpts from books and view DVDs on a range of spiritual matters, mostly from current theologians and thinkers, lay and religious. Members turn up with material they've found helpful. Our numbers vary considerably - just off hand, this year we have ranged from 3 to 12, not that we see that as a huge problem as smaller numbers often make for more open discussion. New,

Theatre Group at Lipstick and Dreams



past and occasional members are always welcome into the mix.

We've had a taste already of next year's possibilities and voted for a series of John Dominic Crossan DVDs put forward by a member, for discussion.

Mary Long and Melissa Cloake

Fairfield Cluster

Our current membership is nine. There have been absences each month so that we rarely have the full membership around the table.

Even though people have come and gone from the Cluster, the effect of getting to know one another is that the connection remains and we can continue to be alert to one another's joys and trials, and that includes hospitalization.

We meet on the last Monday of the month at 6:30 for a potluck dinner during which time we take the opportunity to relate what's been on top for each of us in the past month.

From 7:30 to 9 pm we have a stimulating discussion of a pre-determined topic/seed. We started off the year with a book discussion but have decided that with two chapters per month over a period of ten months it is difficult to keep the commitment, interest and enthusiasm going to get through the book. The conclusion is that any book discussion therefore is better organized separately as a special interest, ideally once per fortnight to which people can choose to subscribe.

Ingerid Meagher

Convenor Fairfield Cluster

Melbourne Cup Party

Melissa and Trish entertain us all.



First Communion and Confirmation



Thanks to Ian Ridley for these great photos and to the families for allowing us to publish them.