



**St Mary's Matters
Let's Connect**

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Edition 38 - September 2014

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Connecting: Chris and Annie married recently. Terry and members of both their families joined with friends to make this a great occasion.

From the Editor

The focus for this edition of the magazine is on connectedness. As a community we place a good deal of emphasis on inclusiveness and welcome. I see many people actively working on helping to ensure that people in the community do feel they are a part of it - and connected in some way.

Traditionally it has been the role of the pastor or the priest to be a pastoral presence in his sphere. And our two clerics are very good at fulfilling this role at SMX. However it is important for our future that we see this pastoral role as one that is to be embraced by all - those in leadership positions and those who are not. An ongoing commitment to being friendly and welcoming to strangers, visitors and each other will be the way we can continue to thrive and even to grow.

In this issue we have articles that express different ways of looking at connectedness. Carolyn speaks from her heart about how authentic conversation can dramatically change societies. Terry's excellent homily on gay marriage is here for you to read. David Pincus suggests we must continually get back to our roots, taking for our guide Jesus' words that 'we love one another', Shar talks about a personal relationship with God - there are echoes of this also in the excerpt from Joan Chittister's memoirs. Margaret Orange's short story is a lovely example of how important connecting is in the small ways of everyday life.

We have poems from Margaret Clifford and others, a series of book reviews and a small number of articles that are not about this month's theme but are simply interesting and timely.

Front Cover: This image is adapted from one on the Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Corporation website. Permission requested

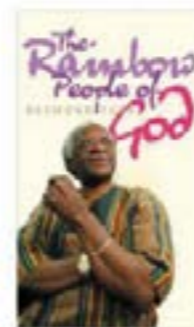
Learning To Embrace The Other.

Miroslav Volf is a Croatian. His family, along with hundreds of thousands of others in the former Yugoslavia - Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia - have been torn apart by civil war, and what has come to be known as 'ethnic cleansing.' Volf says 'ethnic cleansing' is 'a refusal to embrace the other and a desire to purge by ostracism or oppression, deportation or liquidation.' However, he says, the 'only way to peace is through embrace'.

'I open my arms to create space in myself for the other. The open arms are a sign of discontent at being myself only, and of a desire to include the other. They are an invitation to the other to come in and feel at home with me, to belong to me.'

It is not our 'mateship', but our 'embrace of the other' that is the sign of a truly humane society.

When Desmond Tutu visited Brisbane he spoke to a large crowd in King George Square, calling Australians to 'embrace the other' and learn to live as "the Rainbow People of God". Here are a few lessons I've learned on how we can



embrace one another.

1) Meditate on the oneness of the human family

There aren't many races, there is only one race. Beneath the differences we are all the same.

The most personal is the most universal. We all want to love and be loved.

2) Celebrate heterogeneity rather than homogeneity

There is one whole, but there are many parts. The differences are actually quite significant. The universal is not uniform. We all want to live different ways, not be forced to live the same way as everyone else.

3) Recognise the contradictions in our values

We need to be aware of unconscious egocentricity that could subvert our work for unity, and ethnocentricity that could subvert our work for diversity.

4) Acknowledge the limitations in our knowledge

We need to be aware of our ignorance. We all have blindspots. So we need to listen to the feedback that we get from others, to learn how they see the way we live our lives.

5) Revel in the role of a learner at large

To start with, we need to keep our mouths shut and our eyes and ears open. If we must speak, we need to ask open-ended questions, rather than make statements that close down discussion. An open person can learn from everyone, even a complete stranger.

6) Delight in the whole world as a teacher

If we are willing to learn, the whole world will be willing to teach us. It can teach us new ways of talking, that can unleash new ways of thinking. A new vocabulary gives us new categories to be able to understand our world anew.

7) Relish another worldview

Our worldview isn't the only worldview. It can be really exciting to compare and contrast the

vast array of perspectives that the worldviews of our numerous traditions provide.

8) Enjoy exploring the same world differently

Look at the world through another's eyes. Find the courage to step out into the unknown with others as our guide. And so experience unexpected wonders in our otherwise predictable world.

9) Rejoice in synthesis

A community world that is a unique combination of all our cultures is the best of all possible worlds. Not single cropping, but companion planting. Not ethnic cleansing, but inclusive living. Not concrete jungle, but global village. We alone can do it. But we cannot do it alone.

10) Engage in the practice of satya, ahimsa and tapasya

The first step towards a community world is "satya". Satya means seeking after the truth in every situation. We must seek before we comprehend, let alone realise the potential intrinsic in every situation.

The second step towards a community world is "ahimsa". Ahimsa means seeking a way forward together, in a way that is not harmful to the welfare of anyone.

The third step towards a community world is "tapasya". Tapasya means continuing to seek a way forward, accepting that it is a painstaking process, until we find a way to become the "Rainbow People of God".

These terms are in Hindi. I learned to take these steps in a multi-faith community in India.

Dave Andrews
Reprinted from 'The Westender'

Authentic, Meaningful, Conversations

We must all learn to live together as brothers and sisters or we will all perish together as fools.

We are tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.

And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.

This is the way God's universe is made.

This is the way it is structured.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

I grew up thinking I had to be independent. I have learnt that it is far more important to teach my children interdependence. To put my hand up and ask for help when I need it. To have the courage to make myself vulnerable with people. In a nutshell to really connect with people at an authentic level.

My passion for community also comes from my own journey of letting myself get isolated emotionally for most of my life.

Today I would like to share with you the importance of having authentic meaningful conversations with others and how that has the potential to transform our world. Sounds so simple and yet everything starts with a conversation. 'First there was the word.'

We only need to look around at all the crisis situations out there to know that something has gone seriously amiss. A few weeks ago Peter spoke about how, when we spend time in nature and connect

with her, we fall in love with her. Then we will spontaneously rise to save her because that's what we do. We will do anything to save what we love and feel connected to. Our kids, our families, our communities. And as I was listening to Peter, I couldn't help but draw the analogy to us humans. Perhaps if we first remembered how connected we all are as a global family and then felt it, we would be doing much more to alleviate all the pain and suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters.

And that's what inspired me to write about this.

Last year around this time, I was in India spending precious time with my dad who was diagnosed with cancer. He was given six weeks to live. I decided that I was going to be really present with him as much as possible. I took every opportunity to be with him, feed him, give him his medicines, take his blood pressure etc. He would have days where he would be very angry and rude to everyone, very uncooperative, refuse to take his medicines. Being his favourite, I was always given the task to go and calm him down so he would take his painkillers. And I did a pretty good job except this one time.

'I have never opened myself up to anyone. I feel alone.'

When I got close enough to him, he just snatched the tablets out of my hand and threw them out of the window and directed abusive language at me. As I stood there staring at him blankly, totally stunned, he said 'What are you staring at me for?' I said "What

Carolyn and her Dad



are you so angry about Dad?" I did not expect to hear what he said next. He said "I have never opened myself up to anyone. I feel alone and soon I am going to be dead." He said, "You can't make yourself vulnerable when you fight in wars." My dad was in the army. He told me he killed people. I had never had this conversation with him. Then he burst out crying, sobbing. We held each other tightly, both crying. I realised in that moment that I had done pretty much exactly the same thing in my life.

Since then my passion to build community, connect people has become stronger. I have also become more aware of the reality of our interconnectedness to each other and our environment. And I say 'reality' because it is not some 'woo woo' fairy tale concept. Quantum Physics has proven that everything in this entire universe is connected by an invisible net which can be referred to as an energy field.

Starting from that initial big bang, that tiny singularity that burst forth into billions of galaxies and down to every tiny insect, plant, animal creature, including us humans, everything is connected. What a miracle!

Try to imagine a net and if we tweak one end of it even slightly

every part of it gets affected. The whole thing changes shape.

That is why when a catastrophe occurs at one end of the planet, we feel it at this end. People spontaneously rise to help. Maybe not as much as we could, but we do. The Brisbane floods were a great example of this.

This space right here is that energy field which connects us all and is constantly being affected by all our thoughts and emotions and depending on what we are thinking and feeling at the moment, we cause the field to be tense or calm or loving or buzzing.

However, because it appears to be empty, it gives the illusion that I am separate from you because there is nothing visible that connects us.

This gives rise to the expressions 'The air was so tense you could cut it with a knife', and 'There was a lovely buzz in the room'.

This idea that we are separate from each other, of me and mine instead of us and ours is the simple cause of every crisis situation we face today.



Yin-Yang Tree

All life is ruled by the interplay of two dynamic forces known in traditional Chinese medicine as yin and yang. Even though they're opposite, yin and yang can't exist independently.

I would highly recommend watching a YouTube movie clip by scientist Gregg Braden called Secret Ancient Knowledge-The Divine Matrix, where he clearly explains with scientific evidence the reality of our interconnectedness. He also explains how the knowledge that we are all connected was written in that part of the scriptures which were discarded or altered by Constantine.

Many of us have come to believe that we will be bothering somebody else if we ask for help. We have slowly, over many years become more and more emotionally isolated from each other. I realize that there could be many that do not fit into this category, however the vast majority of us do. We only need to look at statistics on loneliness, depression, suicide, homelessness, broken families, juvenile delinquency and most commonly, the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol to numb our senses, for confirmation of this. We say we need a drink to relax. What we are actually doing is relaxing those nerves that have become tense due to unexpressed thoughts and emotions.

If we each really understood how connected we all are, there would be less "me" and more "we". There would be less "mine" and more "ours".

And what could our world look like with this shift in thinking from separateness to connectedness? We can't afford to call it wishful thinking anymore.

More importantly what can each of us do at an individual level to make it happen?

Ernesto Sirolli wrote a book, a true story called "Ripples from the Zambezi". It tells how an entire town had become very depressed. Businesses had gone bankrupt,

people had lost jobs and a cloud of sadness hung over the town. One man decided to do something about it - he set up a table, a couple of chairs, a jug of lemonade and an umbrella in a prominent position in town. He would boldly stop people as they walked past and invite them for a chat. He asked them two questions, 'What's important to you?' and 'What's your dream?'

Before long he got to know the entire town and he started to connect people that he thought could work together. People started to collaborate. Businesses were born and jobs were created. The village was buzzing again.

We cannot make it alone. We were never meant to.

Remembering our interconnectedness and therefore our interdependence is the key.

To me, it's about having authentic meaningful conversations with people. It's about having the courage to ask the questions that make the difference instead of some of the superficial meaningless conversations we often tend to have. It's about getting out of our comfort zones and asking people what matters to them?

And then it's about listening as though every word is a life saver; something I need to learn.

It's about really connecting with another at an authentic level. Because when enough of us start to do that we will realize that all we want is simply Love and Peace in our world.

We need a grass roots movement and it's going to take each and every one of us. Who will you get to know a little better today?

Carolyn Vincent

Salute! Cheers! Skol!

Here's to building better relationships!



(haven't had to resort to it since my altar boy daze), but I think the origin of the word 'companion' is someone you share bread with. And 'symposium' was an eating and drinking party with good conversation.

Good food and good friends can help to build even better relationships and lead to living a longer, better life. So, combining those two essentials whenever possible seems like a good

'Shouting' is a cultural thing for most Aussies. I don't mean yelling out, but sharing among others – as in, 'It's my shout' or 'Can I shout you a drink?' or 'Do you want to join in the shout?' Not so across the Tasman. I remember my first trip to New Zealand, where drinkers in a bar would buy their own jug of beer and consume it while they were chewing the fat with their mates. 'No shouting here, Bro', was the explanation I received for what I thought was strange behaviour.

The social aspect of drinking and eating is not new. The Greeks, for example, were clear that, at dinner, the mind as well as the stomach must be present. The French emphasise that we should eat well (Il faut bien manger), and that invariably included 'good' company. My Latin is a bit rusty

idea. In the words of W.S. Gilbert: 'It isn't so much what's on the table that matters as what's on the chairs'. Keep in mind, however, that any indifference to the food in favour of the conversation will not by itself guarantee an excellent dinner. The quality of what's presented is always going to be important.

I find it fascinating that cookbooks are such good sellers; especially because very few of their buyers claim to have ever referred to the recipes. It's as if it's a version of Rene Descartes', 'I think, therefore I am'. 'I've bought the latest Jamie Oliver cookbook, so this will qualify me as a great cook'. Could it be, however, that cookbooks are really selling conviviality rather than mere cooking instructions? If you cook these recipes you will

be rewarded with good times, brilliant weekends, and big smiles all around the table.

Not only is breaking bread with good friends important for building and maintaining relationships, but the practice also contributes to a longer, better life. It takes effort, however, on your part. More than 2,000 years ago, Aristotle reckoned one and a half bushels of salt needed to be consumed together before a friendship became solid. That's more than the occasional dinner party, eh? And, at about the same time, Epicurus emphasised the importance of who was at the table rather than what they were served or consumed. Friendship, to him, was numero uno in the Importance Stakes. And much, much later, the pseudo-philosopher Alain de Botton claimed that he preferred to feed his guests ready-made meals so that he could spend the maximum time with them and engage them in conversation. (I wonder if he 'borrowed' that idea from the Bible's Martha and Mary story?)

It'll come as no surprise to you, that research studies are now starting to confirm what we've known all along. The quality of what we eat, and who we eat it with, adds to life quality – and the food tastes better, too. Even junk food, we're told, can taste better when friends are involved. And one of the additional benefits is happiness. After all, 2,300 years ago, Epicurus regarded simple sustenance and friendship as essential conditions for happiness.

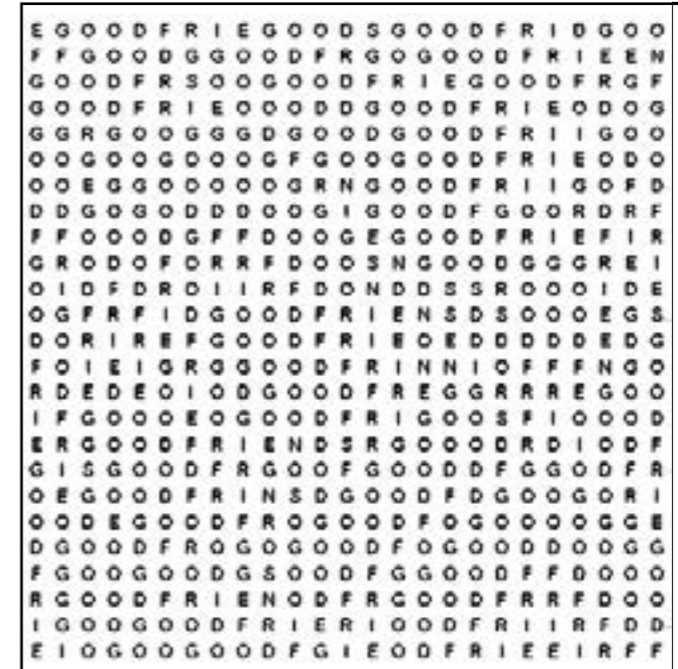
Salute! Cheers! Skol!

(continued)

There's a Scottish Proverb that says, 'Be happy while you're living, for you're a long time dead'. Good food and friends, it seems, can be a BIG help to achieving happiness.

Neil Flanagan

Dr Neil Flanagan builds and maintains relationships by regularly breaking bread with friends. You can read more about Neil at www.neil.com.au and, while you're there, you can download a free copy of one of his bestselling books.



Here's a post-script on Friendship that might interest and challenge you. You've probably heard the saying, 'Good friends are hard to find'. So, here's a jumbled list in which are contained five 'Good Friends'. They're hard to find (as you'd expect).

Letter to the Editor

I have really enjoyed reading *Five Years On...* The cover is clever and says so much! I think the contributions all tell interested readers of our story, our struggles after our walk to freedom and sum up the present stimulating time.

Peter mentioned that a copy of each edition is given to the archbishop by one of 9 am community members. What will he make of this issue?

I belong to the Tarragindi Cluster and at our recent meetings our topic has been Spirit Filled Women. Perhaps we should devote another meeting to Spirit Filled Women in the SMX Community.

Margaret Lawson



"The Answer you seek is 'No.' When asked, 'Does this make me look fat?' the Universal Answer is invariably 'No'."

An Ode of Thanksgiving

An ode of thanksgiving
As the journey unfolds
In relationships
And connections

I need the connection
With the Mystery of Being
To the pen in my heart
For the words to flow

Call it Father, Son and Holy Spirit
There's a Mystery of Being
That Knows Itself
And the nexus of Love that flows

There's a yearning in the heart
Of the Spirit-being, having a
human experience
To be and know the nexus that
flows
To the seeming other and Itself

The energy is there in everything
To work together for good
To be, to know and love in the
other
What is already there within

Thanksgiving abounds
To parents, friends and to the
Eye that sees
Beyond appearances
To the Self That Is

Thanks to Mother Consciousness
That nourishes and flourishes
Its web of connections
In the joy of Life

Thanks to the loneliness
That pines for the relationship
That enlightenment unfolds
To be HERE and NOW

The journey ends where it began
And never left
Yet with the knowledge of Beauty
Born of Relationships

HOME in One Being
Resting in love and abounding in
abundance
Bliss is experiencing
The SELF has no limits

Barbara Fingleton



Only Connect!

Two facts about me: I'm an introvert, and I'm a widow. Why am I sharing these particular pieces of information, and what bearing do they have on the topic of connecting? I'll explain.

My husband Scott died two-and-a-half years ago. He, like me, was an introvert—a more reclusive one than I am—and he didn't think he had a lot of friends. So he was surprised and touched by the steady flow of visitors who came to see him at home and at the hospital in the weeks and months before he died—people who felt the urge to spend time with him, reminisce about the past and, most importantly, show how much they loved, esteemed and cared about him. It was my turn to be astonished, and deeply moved, by the crowd of people who packed into the chapel where his funeral was held, exceeding its capacity.

It's all too easy for us quieter types to fall into the trap of underestimating how much other people value us. We spend a lot of time inside our heads, thinking things over—sometimes overthinking. In the presence of those who are more confident and outgoing, we have a tendency to assume our company won't be wanted. And we often find it hard to ask for help when we're in trouble.

Which is where the two facts I've revealed about myself come together. When Scott was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and during his illness, I found it easier than I expected to be open about the experience with the St Mary's in Exile community, and to

accept their sympathy and support as the disease inexorably took away the man I loved. After his death, though, it was different. The inevitable had happened and my grief now had to take its course. It was a stony path, well-worn by many before me. I assumed I had to tread it alone. Sharing it at SMX would be self-indulgent and inappropriate. My tears belonged in private.

Not only had I done myself a disservice by making these assumptions; I had also underestimated the SMX community.

Grief is a strange and unpredictable thing. You think you're getting over it, then it creeps up behind you and hits yet again when you least expect it. I'd been doing pretty well. Life had been getting back on track. Then, for no reason I could pinpoint, I found myself sliding into a dark pit from which there seemed no exit. It was a lonely, frightening place to be. Up to that point depression had been mercifully absent from my varied grief experiences; now I was in its grip.

For one reason or another I'm a far from regular attendee at SMX these days, but there came a Sunday when I felt a powerful desire to be there. By then I'd been struggling on for weeks, obstinately determined not to resort to medication. There was comfort in being among the familiar faces, but I responded to the usual friendly greetings with a stoic 'Good', or 'Fine' or 'All right, thanks', assuming they wouldn't want an honest answer.

As I've said, I underestimated them. One—a man who treads a similar path himself—looked me in the eye and said with feeling, 'You're not all right, are you?' whereupon tears started to roll down my face. Another put her arm around my shoulders and gave me a reassuring squeeze. Both listened sympathetically while I blurted out how I felt.

Throughout the service I mopped my eyes and blew my nose, but no-one stared. I continued to weep on and off for most of the day. By next morning I was starting to clamber out of that dark pit. People who understood and cared had helped me to overcome my reticence and connect with them. It had been a turning point.

I don't delude myself that all the pain is over now, but these staunch friends at SMX have convinced me that I need not endure it on my own. As E. M. Forster's Helen puts it in *Howard's End*, 'Only connect!' It's an important lesson, and one that we introverts should do our best to keep in mind.

Barbara McKenzie



A Meeting with Emmanuel

Anne wakes to a cold winter day. In spite of feeble early morning sunshine she feels depressed. There is a chilly southerly wind blustering through the garden and she wishes she didn't have to go out. However, the pantry needs replenishing and there is urgent business to attend to at the Bank on Main Street.

After a delaying second cup of tea she drags on her warm coat and scarf and drives to town. There are car parks aplenty. Few people are about this morning. She takes her time to get out of the warm car. She'd rather watch passers by as they scurry along the footpath, leaning into the wind and, she suspects, wishing they were indoors. Time ticks by and at last she forces herself to face the weather.

As she reaches the pavement she notices a man limping towards her. He's a big man, Maori or Pacific Islander, dressed in black jacket, shorts, black socks and solid shoes. He walks with a limp using a stick

for support. As he draws near he smiles.

"Are you okay?" he asks.

Anne is a little taken aback by this stranger's concern. "Yes, thank you," she answers, and she wonders whether she looks as old as she feels.

"Great!" he replies. Another smile as he adds, "Have a good day!"

As he starts to walk on Anne is prompted to make some comment. She would like to prolong this friendly encounter. She grasps at the weather, always a safe topic of conversation. "It's cold isn't it?"

"Not as cold as it was," the man says.

"Huh! D'you reckon?" How could he say that? And anyway, he's wearing shorts, for goodness sake!

"It's definitely warmer!" His eyes twinkle. "Because the hairs on my legs are lying down now! They were standing up earlier!"



Anne laughs and he laughs, too.

Suddenly, the day is brighter, cheerier, and as he limps away with another "Have a good day!" Anne's heart lifts.

"You, too!" She calls. Yes, the morning surely is warmer, and as she hurries to the Bank she feels a surge of gratitude for this joyful man. I wonder who he is? she thinks. Emmanuel seems very appropriate but she doubts that he would respond to that. Its meaning, however, embodies all that this rare human being has revealed in a chance encounter. For a moment he brought the presence of the Divine to the street of a small country town.

Margaret Orange

Melbourne Readers

Are you interested in celebrating Eucharist with an inclusive community?

Inclusive Catholics invites you to celebrate with them.

Greg Reynolds conducts celebrations and he and his community will make you most welcome.

Check out the webpage www.inclusive-catholics.com or read about it on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/inclusivecatholics>



LOVE

I am in those who care for each other
I am in the tenderness of the patient mother
I am with those who strive for world peace
I am in those who seek refugee release
I am there along with kindness and caring
I am beside those in forgiveness and sharing
I am in music played deep from the heart
I am in the child innocent from the start
I am with you who sacrifice your life
I am the balm midst chaos and world strife
I am the world changer for all of time
I am in your soul and heart sublime
I am here when your earthly life has ended
I am here when your soul has transcended
I am eternal flowing round and above
I am the being known as Love.

Anne Maguire. July 2014.

No Man is an Island Entire of Itself

According to one source, a man was very impressed when his companion paused his golf swing and took off his hat when a funeral passed by on a nearby street. The friend completed his shot and explained "It was the least I could do. After all, we had been married 40 years."

This picture of selfishness and poor interpersonal relationships forms a contrast to Donne's lines "no man is an island entire of itself" or to W H Auden's lament that many children "do not know of any world where promises are kept, or one could weep, because another wept."

I was reminded of the fact that empathy and kindness are thought of as the norm in our society, and particularly in such organisations as SMX, when I recently read a

book called What Muslims Think. In it, one of the authors defends Islam from the accusation that it is unfeeling by quoting 2. 142 of the Koran. "Whoever transgresses against you, respond in kind."

What a contrast with Jesus' words of forgive your enemies and the golden rule to do unto others as you would that they would do to you. Of course, I am not so naive as to imagine that the Iraq war – by a supposedly Christian country – is an example of forgiving your enemies, nor that the many Islamic charities do not carry out the injunctions of the golden rule when they perform the many



social justice works for which they are justly famous.

I think that SMX, in its support of Micah, is a living example of the good that is done quietly and individually by so many people. It all starts with the thought of others' needs and comes to fruition in personal actions by one person for another.

Unfortunately, we are a post-christian society, but we will be the poorer if we forget our roots.

David Pincus

The Sense of the Presence of God

The Sense of the Presence of God is almost natural to many and a real struggle to some. But whatever our natural inclination for God, there are, nevertheless, some givens: We must be open to the God within us.

'forgo everything we have been told about God to this point'

We must be free of the shackles of the mind. We must be willing to forgo everything we have been told about God to this point. Count all of them wrong. Realize that all of them are inadequate, partial, well-meaning, but fallacious to

a fault. We must not fear to go beyond proofs for the unprovable, or beyond belief to the unknown. Just because we do not know does not mean that we do not "know." As the Tao says, "The Way that can be told is not the eternal Way."

Once we empty ourselves of our certainties, we open ourselves to the mystery. We expose ourselves



to the God in whom "we live and move and have our being". We bare ourselves to the possibility that God is seeking us in places, people and things we thought were outside the pale of the God of our spiritual childhood. Then life changes colour, changes tone, changes purpose. We begin to live more fully, not just in touch with earth, but with the eternal sound of the universe as well.

Joan Chittister

Extract from her spiritual memoir "Called To Question"

Marriage is for Whom?

It was a sad day one Thursday when the High Court in Canberra threw out the ACT (Australian Capital Territory) same-sex marriage law, declaring the 27 marriages performed in the small 5 day window of opportunity to be invalid.

The High Court argued that the ACT same-sex marriage law was inconsistent with the Federal Marriage Act, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman.

The ACT law challenged this definition and lost. Attention turns now to the Federal Parliament where Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young has introduced to the Senate a Federal Bill for marriage equality.

Australia has reached a crucial turning point in the debate on Marriage Equality. It is now squarely on the national agenda.

In May last year Kevin Rudd wrote about his change of mind on the question of same-sex marriage. He described himself as the last of the Mohicans, where, in his own family, all were in favour of same-sex marriage except himself. Quoting Aquinas where faith is informed by reason, wherein if the latter is diminished we are reduced



to varying forms of theocratic terrorisms where the stoning of heretics and the burning of witches would still be common place.

We know that the Bible says very little about marriage as we understand it today, and nothing at all about same-sex marriage. The Reverend Margaret Mayman, now from the Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney, says that 'the texts that are used to condemn homosexual acts were written by people who had no understanding that human sexual orientation is a continuum. They also thought that the earth was flat and that demons caused illness. Marriage in the Old Testament included polygamy and sexual relationships with slaves. Rape victims were required to marry rapists. In Deuteronomy 22:13-21, "a marriage shall be considered valid only if the wife is a virgin. If the wife is not a virgin, she shall be executed." This is the word of the Lord. Marriage in the New Testament encouraged celibacy, forbade divorce, and required subordination of women.

We have to move beyond literalist Christianity where slavery and polygamy would still be regarded as the norm; wives would be submissive to their husbands and people stoned to death for adultery.

The mainstream Christian Church has moved beyond these propositions. Christian ethics is subject to change. A hundred years ago people believed that a person chose to be gay. Many still believe it, but most biological and psychological research has found that a certain proportion of the community is born gay, whether they like it or not. Given this, should not our brothers and sisters



who happen to be gay be fully embraced as full members of our wider society by being allowed full status as full members and allowed to marry?

Attitudes by the official church expressed by Archbishop Mark Coleridge who appeared on the ABC's Q&A programme this year opposing not only same-sex marriage but any civil recognition of same sex unions and describing homosexuality as "a WARP in the CREATION" and an impossibility in God's plan, only perpetuates officially sanctioned ignorance within the community.

The truth is that marriage has been evolving as a civil and religious institution throughout human history. For many centuries, neither church nor state were involved in celebrating marriages. While there have always been loving marriages, marriage has its origins in the more mundane realities of property, procreation and patriarchy.

But the move, in more recent times, of marriage from being mainly an economic arrangement to a relationship of love and support has meant that gay and lesbian people are seeking to join in. Over time, changes in the way we view marriage have occurred to recognize the humanity of people and their moral and civil rights, within marriage. In

the past, neither the State nor religion recognized divorce and re-marriage, inter-racial marriage or gender equality in marriage. (Who gives this woman away not who gives the man away; and woman to love and obey husband.)

Rather than threatening marriage, the changes of the modern era have strengthened it. And I believe that as our society embraces Same-Sex Marriage, where all members of our society have access, its potential to create stable and committed relationships is increased and where not only the couple is nurtured but any children they may have. Good marriages benefit the entire community.

Dr Peter Catt, President of A Progressive Christian Voice in Australia has said, "Opening marriage to allow committed same-sex couples to express their commitment is an important way of increasing social cohesion. To have one's relationship legitimized

by the society in which one lives is both encouraging and life-giving."

Many have balked at same-sex marriages, arguing that there are unforeseen consequences for children who would be brought up by parents in a same-sex married relationship. For the care, nurture and protection of children in loving relationships must be our fundamental concern. Thirty years of research has seen the Australian and American Medical and Psychological Associations acknowledge that same-sex families do not compromise children's development. They found that there were no Child Behaviour Checklist differences for these kids as against the rest of the country. And many of us who know of same-sex couples raising children would more than vouch for these findings.

The disciples of John the Baptist were sent back to John by Jesus with these words "Go back and tell John what you hear and see:"

Those of us who know of same-sex couples raising children, we can go and tell others of what we see and hear. We see children loved and cared for, protected and provided for in supportive loving relationships. We see healthy and balanced children, vibrant and happy. We need not be afraid when we are countering the fear mongering by those who do not know better. Many of these people do not know any same-sex couples.

As one banner at one of the rallies I attended stated:



Terry Fitzpatrick

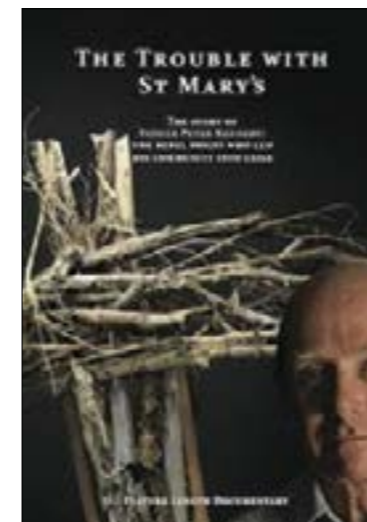
Faith and Reason

On the same day last week there surfaced two very different perspectives on a Christian presence in the life of modern communities, one full of promise, the other searing.

In the morning mail arrived the magazine of St Mary's-in-Exile in Brisbane, celebrating five years since two priests and their Catholic congregation marched out of their parish church to model an alternative way of being Christian in our 21st-century world. It is a story of courage, community and hope.

Later, in a cinema, the movie Calvary told of the excoriating experience of a priest in a remote village on Ireland's Atlantic coast.

The title, recalling the site of Jesus' execution, suggested this could be another Hollywood blockbuster about the crucifixion, along the lines of Mel Gibson's gratuitously violent The Passion of the Christ.



Thankfully, not so. John Michael McDonagh's screenplay is far subtler than that, and in its own way carries an even greater punch through its setting among people of today. In both Brisbane and the Irish village the priests are good men intent on living with

integrity and compassion in the spirit of Christ. In Brisbane this led priests Peter Kennedy and Terry Fitzpatrick to move beyond the mildewed doctrine and ritual of another era to foster a communal experience that is truly shared and life-affirming.

"A spiritual bond of love and friendship, compassion and celebration has replaced traditional Catholic ritual," says one layman.

And another: "We have changed the liturgical expressions not to be different from those of the Catholic church, but to better reflect the 21st century and our continuing struggle to live the life of Jesus, in all our doubts, queries and limitations of understanding of 'who – and where – is God.'"

In the Irish village, people are still reeling from the scandals of clerical sexual abuse that have shamed the Irish church. Yet all acknowledge that James Lavelle is a good priest – which makes him a striking contrast to everyone else.

Indeed, it is his very goodness that leads one of his parishioners to tell the priest during confession that he intends to kill him one week hence. As a young boy he was sexually abused by a priest, his innocence destroyed. Now he wants revenge. But there would be no point in killing a bad priest, he says. Only a good priest would do.

This is obviously a warped echo of the church's traditional teaching that only the death of a divinely good man could ensure forgiveness for sinners.

And sin, as estrangement from good, abounds in the village. Father James tries valiantly to stop the butcher beating his wife,



to deter her from finding solace in adultery, to help the rich man of property, desolate in guilt and detached from wealth, life and family, to counsel the young man bent on either killing himself or joining the army so he can kill somebody else.

Quite beyond the priest's reach are the cynical doctor motivated by "one part humanism, nine parts gallows-humour", the blatantly promiscuous gay man, the arsonist who burns down the church, the Buddhist publican who takes to James with a baseball bat, the unknown who slits his dog's throat.

They all delight in mocking the priest's faith and rubbing his nose in the church's scandals, though he is innocent of them. He absorbs the derision, visits a serial killer in prison, cares for an elderly writer. He can also be sharp with a greenhorn fellow-priest, and at one point drinks too much when the burden of his role weighs him down. And over all the action looms the threat of James's murder with which the film opened.

Continued on page 16

A Thought

God does not just love us

GOD IS LOVE

What is love?

We cannot define love. We can experience it.

We can talk about it.

We can see how it acts.

St Paul enumerates its qualities,

But we cannot explain it.

God is the creative Spirit; the life-giving force that animates the universe

And that life-giving force is LOVE

Oh Friend

Had I known you are in the breeze
I would have walked more
Had I known you are in the stillness
of now
I would have sat more
Had I known you are everywhere
and in everything
I would have lived more
Had I known that you are eternal
I would have died more

Amire Hessien Imani

Faith and Reason

Continued from p 15

There are softer moments, but even they have a darker tinge. Before becoming a priest, James was married, and his daughter is now a troubled teenager. She is resentful that when her mother died, he left her for the church. So now she says: "I belong to myself, not anybody else." That is the polar opposite of any sense of community.

Yet amidst the village's trail of bleak and corrosive relationships, only James and his daughter find moments of warmth in each other's company. As James says in another context, "Forgiveness is highly under-rated."

In the manner of a parable, Calvary holds up a mirror to a contemporary community living without the binding virtues of trust, hope and love. St Mary's-in-

Exile puts its effort into making those virtues central in its common life, and projecting them into the surrounding community. Give me that option any day.

*Ian Harris
The Otago Daily Times, used
with permission*

The Minimum Wage

It is a strange quirk of human nature that we like listening to the same piece of music again and again, but once we have heard a story one or twice, that is enough. Which is a big problem when you have followed the news for decades - the same story, or small variations of it, occur again and again. Every year or so, some obscure government commission decides that the minimum wage should be increased. This news is always welcomed by the trade unions, and decried by the chamber of commerce, who always say that they want people to have a decent wage, but that this will damage the country by increasing unemployment. This little scenario has been reported countless times in the media over the years, and attracted zero interest from me after the first few times I heard it, until recently. For some random and unknowable reason, the thought occurred to me that since we employ people at work, I should be interested in this story. It wasn't something that just happened in TV land - it affected me!

When I took an interest, an anomaly immediately occurred to me. When we decide to employ a new person at work, we do it because there is work to be done, and we haven't got enough people to do it. How much they cost comes into the equation, somewhere down the line, but it is hardly the primary issue. We certainly do not want people hanging around without much to do, simply because they are cheap. But on the other hand, we all know that the more expensive something is, the less of it

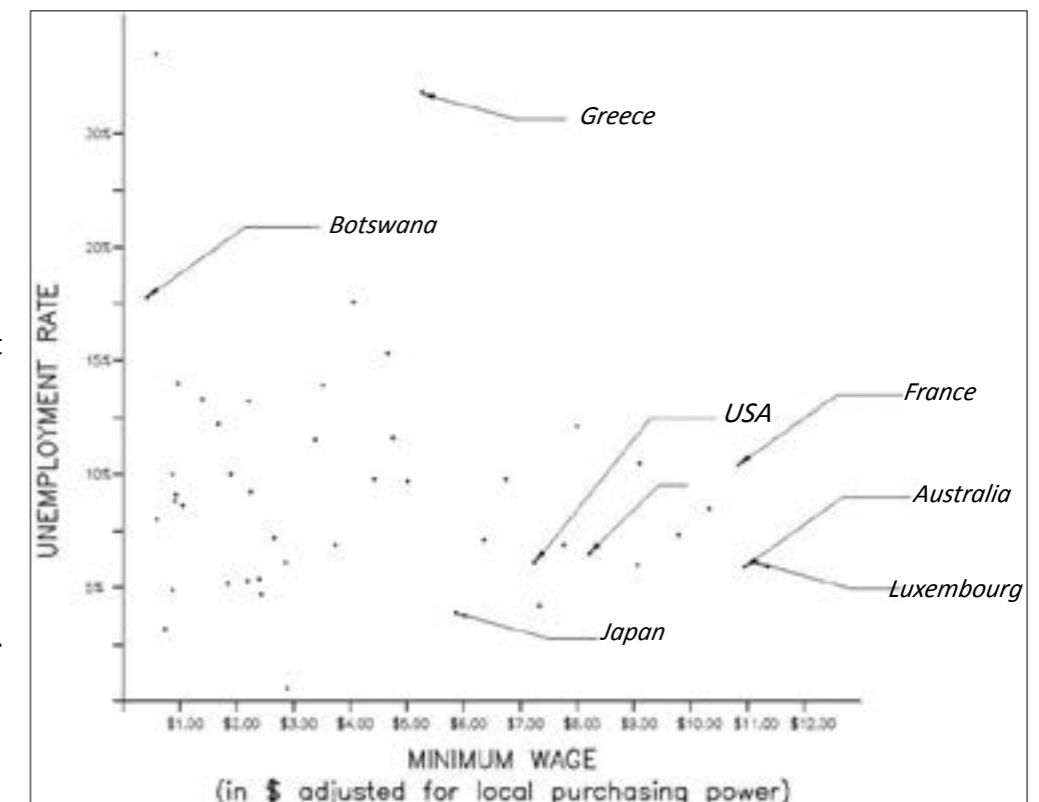
we will buy, and the chamber of commerce's position seems self-evident.

I am sure an economist would have a lot to say about this issue, but since I am more in the hard sciences, as distinct from the social sciences, I decided to conduct an experiment on the issue. There are lots of countries in the world who are sophisticated enough to gather economic statistics, and if the chamber of commerce is right, they should show a clear trend where the countries with the lowest minimum wage have the lowest unemployment, and the countries with the highest minimum wage have the highest unemployment. I gathered some statistics, and here is the scatter graph. The statistics are pretty rubbery: every country has its own way of measuring unemployment; the year measured is not

consistent; the dollars per hour have been adjusted by the cost of living in the country, etc. But they are good enough to show a trend. The trend is that there is no correlation between minimum wage and unemployment. My interpretation of the figures is that (1) most countries have an unemployment rate of between five and ten percent; and (2) that some countries are in a mess, and have both high unemployment and low wages.

Why is this so? I don't know, but I suspect the lack of correlation predicted by the chamber of commerce has something to do with wage earners and consumers being the same people - the same group to a large extent. And it also looks like an unemployment rate of about five percent is the best you can hope for.

Peter Brown



MH17

The world
weeps
and waits

and struggles
to comprehend
the horror of it all

people and debris
falling from the sky like birds
the children said

a smouldering site
fragments of bodies, belongings and aircraft
scattered and strewn

local militias
blocking, tampering, trampling
deaf to pleas and outrage

fields of maize
shimmering with life
concealing the wreckage and the dead

a train
not fit for travellers
stacked with bodies and body parts

families
shocked and shattered
children lost, forever young

countries
shaken to the core
united in grief and resolve

coffins
carried reverently shoulder high
commence a slow journey home

and so the world
weeps
and waits

for all to know
that love is stronger than hate
and we are all one.

Margaret Clifford



Can You be an Atheist Priest?

New congregations that don't do God may be a sign of the times

Ollie Killingback spent most of his career as a clergyman for the Church of England—and for much of that time he was an atheist. “I had doubts before I entered the Church,” he says. “The study of theology [during ordination training] was supposed to relieve those.” It didn't and he entered the ministry anyway. “I'd been on that track for so long... [but] I found myself with more and more unsatisfying situations where I couldn't, with what I had been taught, find an adequate answer.”

Other priests go further. “Iain” still works as a Protestant minister in Ireland. In an interview with the Irish edition of the Sunday Times, he referred to God as “total and absolute nonsense,” adding that trying to instil religious faith in children amounts to abuse. His congregation doesn't know this, only his wife; he can't look at her while he's preaching. Ollie and Iain are members of the Clergy Project, an international online group of more than 530 clergymen and women who do not believe in God. Many have left the ministry, but about a quarter have not and use pseudonyms online. The project, founded in 2011, receives about 50 applications a month (although not all join—the group has a stringent screening process to protect the anonymity of its members). Some of the newest members are imams in Islamic countries.

Daniel Dennett, the philosopher, and his collaborator Linda LaScola published a study in 2010, “Preachers Who Are Not Believers,” for which LaScola interviewed six non-believing Christian clergymen. Dennett wondered then how many secret non-believers there were still

standing in the pulpit. Research is limited, but Catherine Dunphy, Executive Director of the Clergy Project who formerly trained to be a Catholic chaplain, has watched the group grow 10-fold in two years. “If you speak to members of the Clergy Project, the one thing that is heard over and over again is that ‘we're the tip of the iceberg.’ This is something that we believe is pretty rampant,” she says. “The majority of clergy people know what it's like to doubt, and there's a good percentage that are in the closet with their doubts and have relinquished their faith.”

A survey conducted by the Free University of Amsterdam in 2006 found that one in six Protestant priests in Holland were either atheist or agnostic. But while ministers like Iain feel that they are lying outright to their congregation, non-belief among clergymen is not always perceived as a problem. Some follow the tradition of “Christian non-realism,” most famously expounded in the UK by Don Cupitt in the 1980s, which holds that God is a symbol or metaphor and that religious language is not matched by a transcendent reality. This position was supported by the Dutch priest Reverend Klaas Hendrikse in his 2007 book *Believing In A Non-Existent God*, which led to calls for his removal from the Church; but a General Synod found his views were widely shared.

In 2011, Canon Brian Mountford of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in Oxford, published *Christian Atheist: Belonging Without Believing*, containing interviews with a dozen “Christian atheists,” among

them the author Philip Pullman. When Mountford spoke about these interviews to his congregation, he was surprised by how many approached him afterwards to say they thought they might be a Christian atheist; the book became a Blackwell's bestseller.

Such arguments are more easily accommodated within mainstream Christianity than within evangelical traditions, which may explain why the majority of Clergy Project members are former evangelicals. But in some mainstream traditions, non-realists have even risen to senior positions—Reverend Gary Hall, for example, who was appointed as Dean of the Washington National Cathedral (an Episcopal church) last year, once told Richard Dawkins that, “I don't believe in the God you don't believe in either.”

“I think the Church has to take very seriously indeed all those who don't believe in a metaphysical god but value community, the moral compass of Jesus, and the elevating, religious experience of beauty in church music, liturgy, poetry, art and drama,” Mountford told me. “The Church has to risk engaging with the spirit of the age even when that threatens some of its most sacred cows. In doing so it will find that many people want to rediscover spiritual value,



seriousness and community in lives isolated by the TV and computer screen.”

Even some clergy who have left the Church because of their atheism feel there is value in the community and the time for reflection offered by religion, and have set up secular congregations.

Gretta Vosper, a member of the Clergy Project who previously led a United Church congregation in Toronto, took most of her parishioners from the Christian congregation to a humanist one. Another member of the Clergy Project, a Lutheran pastor in Houston, set up a secular congregation after he left the church called Houston Oasis, which describes itself as “a community grounded in reason, celebrating the human experience.” Some of his former parishioners left the Lutheran church to join the new atheist one. Harvard University’s humanist chaplaincy (founded by a former Catholic priest) has opened a 3,200 sq ft “humanist hub” for a “godless congregation,” and there is another in Arizona.

“Atheist churches” have flourished this year in Canada, the US, the UK and Australia. Congregations attempt to draw out the socially and psychologically beneficial aspects of traditional church gatherings without the need for God. Alain de Botton’s “Temple for Atheists” in London, proposed last year, never got off the ground, but several successful projects have done so.

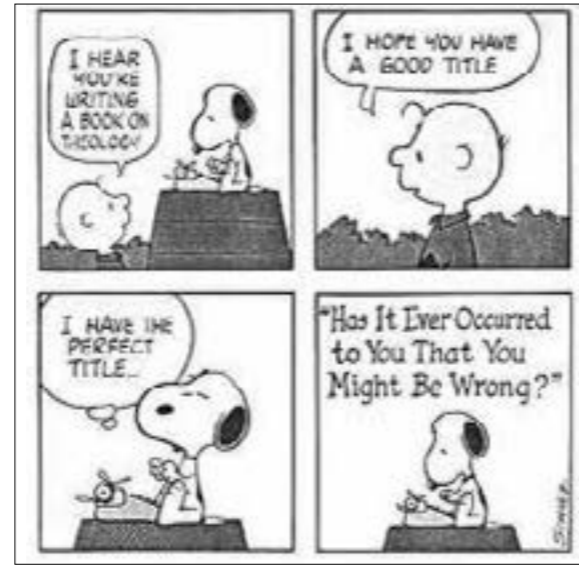
One of the most popular is the Sunday Assembly, founded at the beginning of 2013 by comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans in London, but now with branches all over the country, as well as Melbourne and New York. When I went to one meeting I found a congregation of around 250 heathens—Evans claims it is

up to 600 some weeks. Services are themed; this time it was “stargazing,” which began with well-known “hymns”—“Reach for the Stars” by S Club 7 and “Starman” by David Bowie—accompanied by a band. There was a lecture from an Oxford astrophysicist on the universe, and an acappella group performed a song about the solar system. Afterwards, we were encouraged to commune with our neighbours over tea, to join book groups and voluntary organisations.

“I spend most of my time sat at my desk on the internet,” Evans says. “I’m no sociologist, but I’m pretty sure that’s not good for us.” We live in isolation, she says, not knowing our neighbours. “Community is what the church used to provide,” and though many of us no longer believe in God we still want that sense of community.

Dunphy agrees. “I think that what Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans have established with the Sunday Assembly is that there’s this need to have a communal experience, to have some fun, to talk about shared values, to articulate things that we find interesting and to have a discussion.” With organised religion declining, “you need to have something to fill that gap,” she says.

The Sunday Assembly was originally held in a former church, but the land was still owned by the Church and they were asked to leave. It’s now held in a larger venue in Bethnal Green. But there’s a historical symmetry about the idea of a humanist gathering taking place in a former church. Religions tend to recycle the buildings, symbols and rituals of their predecessors: pagan temples



were transformed into Catholic churches; Catholic churches taken over by Protestants; and Protestant churches now adopted by secular humanists. Some may balk at the idea of a church being repurposed by atheists, but it’s part of a tradition of such conversions.

“I do not know if the [traditional] church will survive,” says Dunphy. “Just over a century ago Robert Green Ingersoll predicted that in 100 years churches would be dead... That has not happened. But I think the influence of religion will decline and some churches may morph. If we look at the phenomenon of the Sunday Assembly or the Houston Oasis, those [groups] are speaking to the need or the desire for community among human beings.” In that way, the Sunday Assembly—a group of atheists gathered in a former church for a sermon from a university lecturer—may offer a glimpse of what religion might look like in the future.

Jessica Abrahams

Published in January 2014 issue of Prospect Magazine

What People are Reading

Mysticism for Modern Times: Conversations with Willigis Jäger *Liguori/Triumph Missouri, 2006*

People with painful doubts about the doctrines of the church could be encouraged and nourished by this book. An extended interview conducted by Christopher Quarch with the aim of making Jäger’s work and thought more widely accessible, its style is conversational and direct. Though small (158 pages) it is also full of possibilities for the reader. Early on, I thought I might highlight the most important bits, then realised I might be highlighting the whole book. The discussion in my parish-based spirituality group has never been more animated.

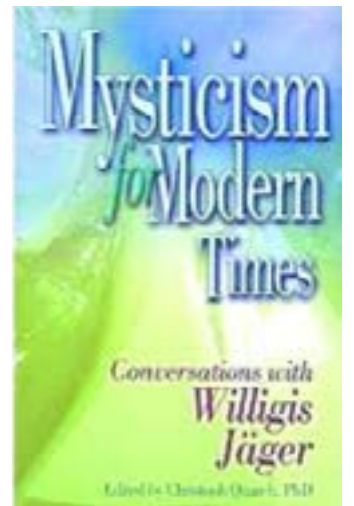
The book is profound. Jäger speaks with the authority of his experience. Now aged 89, a Benedictine monk since the end of World War 2 and a Zen master since 1980, he runs a meditation centre in Wurzburg Germany. Well-known in Europe, he is scarcely known here: this review is an attempt to spread the news.

Jäger’s starting point is that due to the developments of modern science, many people have difficulty in accepting doctrines formulated over the centuries. The old certainties are gone and many ditch the practices and rituals that accompanied them and provided spiritual nourishment. So, many are spiritually homeless or starving. This can lead to fearful, defensive, even fundamentalist, attitudes and practices, both in the church and in other groups encountered in the search. Numbers of searchers arrive at Jäger’s centre in Wurzburg.

In Jäger’s view people hunger for an experience of the divine. Uncertain as to what this might be, my group looked at his chapter, “The Wave is the Ocean: What Mystical Experience is in its Essence”, and came to the conclusion that mystical experience is not so far away as we had thought: it is just that we have not been noticing or naming it. My experience in leading Intensive Journal Workshops, over several years, confirms that many have little awareness of their own inner experience.

Replying to a question about why theology and mysticism “have such a hard time with each other”, Jäger describes theology as “founded on a fundamental dualism between God and the world” and mysticism as founded “in an experience of unity where separation between God and the world disappears.” Nevertheless, theology begins where the experiences leave off, each is indispensable to the other and they are the two legs on which religion stands.

His attitude to doctrines is refreshing. Take this, for example: “Our ideas of faith were formed when human beings still believed the earth was flat and the stars were holes in the firmament. We can no longer speak about God in the way it was still possible to do in the nineteenth century. There’s a need now for answers to basic questions. What is the significance of humankind in the evolutionary process of the cosmos? Long overdue are new interpretations of original sin, resurrection and salvation, about the personality and a-personality of God, timelessness and eternity. But there are other pressing questions requiring answers”(p 46)



A highlight for me, in his chapter on A New Interpretation of Christian Doctrines, is his thought on the Immaculate Conception. He sees the insight, and the doctrine, as not going far enough toward a deeper realization - that it is true for all of us. In his view, perhaps surprisingly, this doctrine might not be rejected, but extended.

In the face of crises over doctrine, Jäger brings a new emphasis to the mystical tradition.

In the forms of contemporary Christian piety, contemplation is not taught. There are neither mystical teachers nor spiritual ways that are directed at an experience of the divine.(p35)

Neglected for a couple of centuries, while humanity emphasised the rational/intellectual at all costs, the mystical tradition is still often regarded with fear and suspicion, perhaps as being irrational. Jäger reminds us of respect due to other human capacities as well as rationality. Citing figures such as Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, Nicholas of Cusa, Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Teresa of Avila, as well as many figures from Asian traditions,

Jager thinks humanity is “on the cusp of a millennium of the spirit”.

Mysticism is a human capacity found in all religious traditions. Along with Christianity and Buddhism, he mentions Judaism, Islam, Hinduism but he sticks to the traditions he knows. With his deep experience in the traditions of Christianity and Buddhism, he proposes a transconfessional spirituality, arising from human nature. While this is not a new idea, he brings his unique experience and authority to its presentation.

“Transconfessional spirituality does not mean a religion beyond religions, but rather a religiosity beyond religions. And this religiosity is a basic element of our human nature. It is a predisposition, a part of our own nature on a very deep level, to open ourselves to wholeness and one-ness. We share this predisposition with all living things. It is the driving force of evolution..... I meet more and more people who are deeply religious without professing faith in a particular religion.” (p.31)

In the second half of this book, Jager explores Christian mysticism as a transformative practice.

“The Spiritual Practice of Mysticism” includes such headings as “What steps can we take along the spiritual path?” and “Off to Paradise - How spiritual experiences affect our actions.” He has no time for humbug, warm fuzzy feelings or nonsense. Jager’s voice is clear, vigorous and uncompromising. Asked how to tell the difference between genuine and pseudomystical experience his reply includes the following:-

“Genuine experience leads to a freedom that transcends



everything, while a pseudomystical movement can lead to addictive behaviour where the ego that faded out momentarily always wants to return to that nice feeling of losing itself. Anyone who extols this as a mystical or spiritual way and makes people dependent on such a way is a charlatan, and a dangerous one at that.” (p.40)

If doctrines are not compatible with modern science, where does mysticism stand? In his chapter “Waiting at the bottom of the cup is God: How science corroborates the experience of mystical spirituality”, Jager refers, among much else, to the work of Nobel prize winner Gary Zukav, who researched subatomic particles - “Do not be surprised if physics curricula of the 21st century include classes in meditation.”(p.77)

Jager maintains his Buddhism and his Christianity comfortably. Like the Dalai Lama, he recommends staying with the tradition of upbringing, stating that there

is plenty of mystical tradition in Christianity, and that at depth they are similar. “I, for my part, was only able to realize, as a result of many years of Zen practice, that Christian mysticism essentially teaches the same thing as Zen. It was only by way of a “detour” through Japan that I was able to realize and value the treasures in my own Christian tradition.” (p.36)

Asked whether he sees any potential inside the Christian churches for a new spiritual awakening Jager says:-

“Institutions always lag behind.... What we need is a transformation of religion ... a new orientation – a metanoia toward the mystical dimension..... The old paradigm says, ‘We are beings who have developed spirit but who have strayed from God through error.’ The new paradigm says, ‘We have never fallen away from God.’ What we call God extends like a fan in evolution. We are an epiphany of God..... A turning point in the history of religions has been initiated”. (p.42)

This book, offering both perspective and a way for searchers, indicates that Jager has a substantial role in this turning point.

Jan Watson



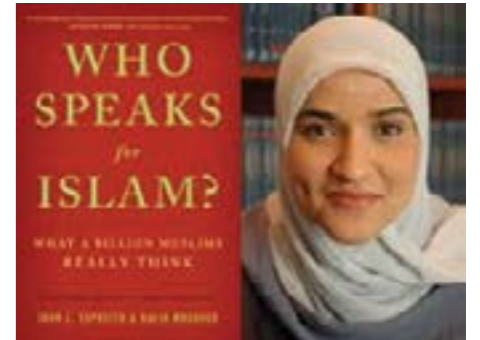
Who Speaks for Islam

by John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed

Who Speaks for Islam is based on a 7 year study by the Gallup organisation of the 1.3 billion Muslims in the world. There are a lot of interesting facts in the book e.g. that 15% of Muslims are Shia and the rest Sunni, that the Muslims who become suicide bombers are, on average, less devout, better educated and more likely to have a stable family than the average Muslim. The authors usually quote the actual percentage found by the survey and this gives their statements more credibility. I consider that they sometimes act as proselytisers for Islam; the section discussing the accusations often levelled at the Koran that it advocates killing unbelievers and advocates no mercy for your enemies were the most interesting part of the book for me. I believe a long line of writers who consider that Jesus’ messages

to love your enemies and to do good to those who hate you are the vital parts of Christ’s message and distinguish Christianity from other monotheistic religions. I personally consider that this idea is at the heart of Christianity. This is the reason that Christian and post-Christian societies embrace democracy and why there are no Muslim or Buddhist nations that have a functioning parliamentary democracy. In this context, *Who Speaks for Islam* defends the Koran by stating on page 18 that Quran 2:194 says that ‘Whoever transgresses against you, respond in kind.’ Anyone with a knowledge of history knows of the senseless damage done by generations who never forget an imagined or actual wrong and never cease to seek revenge.

The book has many great messages. In particular, it highlights the average Muslim, for



whom the West is not monolithic. Muslims can distinguish American foreign policy from Europe’s, etc. In comparison, Americans in particular and Western people in general see Islam as one, uniform and threatening system. The authors state that the best approach for the West would be to know more about the Muslims e.g. that only 25% are Arabs, and to seek to engage with Muslim people.

David Pincus

Benedict, Me and the Cardinals Three

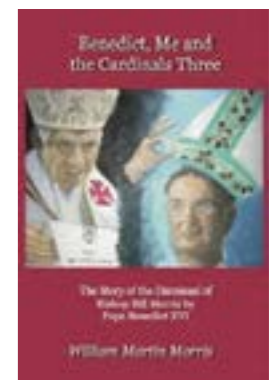
by William Morris

This book is an account of the sacking by the Catholic Church of Bill Morris. It has all the usual suspects. There are the conservative Catholics in his diocese who write reports to Rome on any ways they consider Bill is straying from the strict letter of the law – the Temple police. There is the expected lack of any due process or justice on the part of those in the Curia who sit in judgement. There are the short sighted views of so many of the Cardinals who would prefer a bishop who will not rock the boat over one who is pastorally caring. (Bill was attempting to

jump through the ridiculous hoops that Canon Law erects, but had practical policies and did what he knew was best for the Catholics in his diocese). I had the honour and the pleasure of hearing Bill Morris one night at SMX and he is an intelligent, flexible and thoughtful pastor. I know some of the Catholics in his diocese and heard for years of the great work he was doing in making the Christian faith modern and useful for those in Toowoomba and surrounding districts. I guess that Bill was unlucky in having Ratzinger as pope as his reputation of being head of the modern-day

Institution showed that he lacked judgement, was arrogant and totally lacking in any knowledge of how to make Christianity relevant. Read this book and weep!

David Pincus



Someone

**I met a girl today;
I have met her before.**

On a tram.

In a street.

Outside a shop.

She is always the same.

**A wondrous smile and
sparkling eyes.**

**She touches my heart and
makes it flutter.**

I need to know her better!

Anonymous

Leviticus as a Moral Guide??

On her radio show, Dr Laura Schlesinger (America's most popular talk show host) - said that, as an observant Orthodox Jew, homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstance.

The following response is an open letter to Dr. Laura and posted on the Internet.

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example,

I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination ... End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are from neighbouring nations.

A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians.

Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7.

In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of Menstrual uncleanliness - Lev.15: 19-24.

The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord - Lev.1:9.

The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

5. I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death.

Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality.

I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there 'degrees' of abomination?

7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight.

I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27.

How should they die?

9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev.19:19 by planting two



different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend).

He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10-16.

Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help.

Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your adoring fan,

*James M. Kauffman, Ed.D.
Professor Emeritus,
University of Virginia*

Waiting for Justice (I Am)

They come in, when called, one at a time. Heads down and wearing a frown. It is a parade of sorts! But with no applause.

Under guard they enter a glass chamber or dock, cuffed at the hands they awkwardly look up and face a Magistrate perched on high, with all the dignity they can muster but fright and vulnerability take over.

“How do you plead?” But what is the charge he would like to ask but verbal exchange is not allowed in the master class.

Perhaps there is no time to debate the rights or wrongs or words or such; there are another five or six waiting in the cells outside and closing time is in the offing.

“Not guilty,” he utters in a muted tone. There is then a simple debate around the need for a trial, setting a date and what about bail?

A not guilty plea is not what the Prosecution wants to hear. The

Prosecutor smirks to herself, how can this be. It is insanity. The case is clear cut.

Now the Prosecutor is someone I have seen go back and forth all day. She seems to be someone who is never at play. Madam serious to the core. Keep ‘em in jail and off the street is her beat.

Quick as a flash she jumps to her feet and opposes bail. And approaches the Bench and produces a file a size of a widow’s hump.

The man on high commences to read and shuffles the pages and grins and grimaces and lifting his head he invites the Duty Solicitor to speak. He stands for the umpteenth time before the Court of Petty Sessions and whilst he has had the briefest of briefs, he seems well across the case and battle lines are drawn. He stresses that the accused has been in custody for over two months, a trial has been set and the Police case



opposing bail is not compelling and rambles about desires and delusions as the basis to keep him in gaol. Curious stuff indeed but the man in the dock cannot erase or forget the 60 days already spent in the pen.

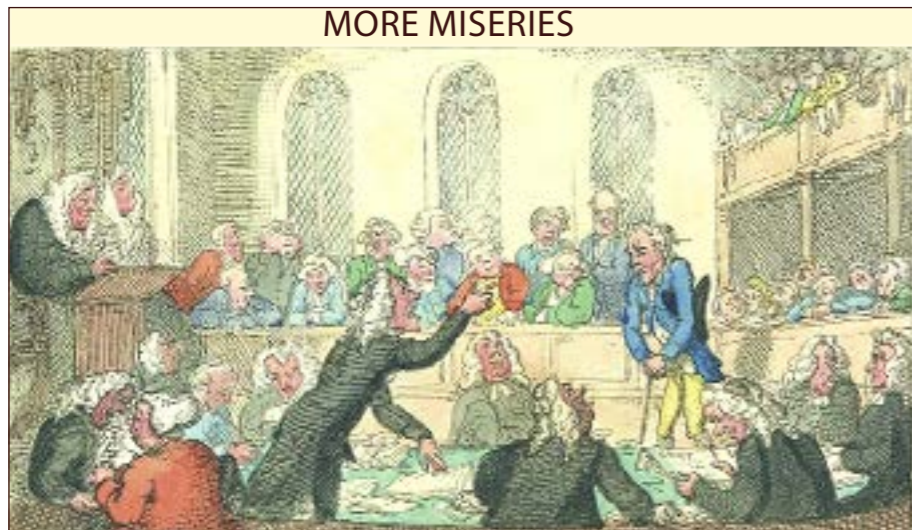
The Police case seems strange and weak and bail is granted without much ado, much to the chagrin of the Prosecutor who turns and gesticulates to the family of the accused. She seems to offer a copy of the Police file.

The parents look at each other in a bit of a haze. “But what should we do?” they gasp and ponder. But before they can gather their wits the offer is scuttled like it was a step too far.

As the Prosecutor gathers her books and things and begins to leave, “but what is the charge?” the parents would like to mutter.

Does anyone know?

Terrence F Byrne



On a Very Personal Level

Relationships are not and cannot be one sided. I had come to a period when I craved for the relationship with God that some saints seemed to have. I am no saint and it seemed that I was being rather forward in even desiring this sort of relationship. When I read of the experiences the Catholic charismatics in the US were having I wanted their certainty that they were loved by God and prayed for some experience that would assure me that someone (something) was out there and cared about each and every one of us. There was no Catholic Charismatic movement in Australia (and I am still ambivalent about some elements in movements like this) but I prayed to that God (if he was there and could hear me) to give me some sign.

I found I was challenged to accept God and put absolute trust in this being whose existence I was questioning. Remarkably I realised that the God-I-wanted-to-know was the essence of Truth and Love. It was not easy to accept God unconditionally and place absolute trust in that still small voice within and though I was sure my prayer had been heard and answered, I had had no shining light from heaven - that is until I opened the back door next morning and

it was as if the trees, plants and even the clouds were singing the praises of our God. It was as if the psalms of the old testament were being acted out in my own back yard. I realised that I too, just by being, had always been part of this glorious hymn of praise and it was not long too before I realised that everyone,(and indeed every thing), just by their very



existence is giving glory to God and is part of this glorious song of the universe. God’s love is completely unconditional and though we are called to LOVE we are certainly not judged. We are called to take that step into the unknown and put our trust in this Spirit of the Universe who encourages us to give expression more and more in our lives to the unlimited love

that we can experience. I became aware that I did not have to earn God’s love. It just IS. I was and forever would be loved but any experience of love calls on us to reciprocate and so we should want to do as much as we can to show our love too.

We must love every other human being and do as much as we can to influence our community to do the same. How can we see children being abused without crying out at the injustice meted out to these innocents and especially as we become aware how negative experiences can affect us for life? How can we not care for refugees when we know that is where God is. How can we not care about our environment when we know that God is in every pebble and every grain of sand to say nothing of his presence in the plants and animals? Yes, God is there too even in those pesky insects that attack our fruit and vegetables.

I am far from perfect but God loves me just as I am. It is a wonderful freeing experience.

Shar Ryan

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Reflections on Prayers of the Cosmos

O Birther of the Cosmos
your breath gives life to all, you are in all
your Shimmering Sound flows through us.

Help us recreate the silent space within
so that your song of wisdom and love
can shine forth in all the moments of our lives.

May our desires be in tune with yours
so that in unity with you, we can give birth
to a new world of harmony and peace.

Grant us the insight and the bread we need
for this day and may we share and protect
the precious gifts of Mother Earth.

Forgive our failures and heal our hearts
free us to forgive ourselves and others
and to release all that binds and burdens.

Do not let surface things seduce us
or self absorption consume us
but may we act humbly, justly and mindfully.

For you are the song that beautifies all
the vital force, producing, sustaining
and renewing from age to age.

May we be truly grounded in you.

Amen

From Prayers of the Cosmos By Neil Douglas - Klotz Adapted by Margaret Clifford