

REALITY or ILLUSION



St Mary's Matters

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From the Editor

I have been reading a book by O'Murchu called *Quantum Theology*, which gave me the idea for the theme for this magazine. I found the book rather complicated when it discusses quantum mechanics, and it is full of realities that seem quite impossible but are apparently true. The subject of what is real and what is illusory fascinates me as it clearly has a number of our SMX writers. It has also inspired some beautiful poetry. I hope you enjoy this variety of responses to the theme of Reality or Illusion

It is so good that we can read, think about, discuss and even experience completely new things, often as a part of belonging to the SMX family. We have intellectual stimulation and a great freedom to have different ideas from one another and from mainstream religions. Peter talks about the wisdom of the community, one of the reasons why the liturgy group invite community members to give homilies. This edition is further proof that the wisdom is certainly there.

Marg Ortiz



Freedom from the illusion we call reality!!

Hello, I 'm Carolyn and I came across this whole concept of what is reality and what is illusion seven years ago. I was going through some very challenging times in my life and like many of us, it is challenging experiences that push us into a life of enquiry... into questioning what the real meaning of life is.

After reading several texts by different authors I started to realize that I was definitely not my body or my mind or anything I could identify with the word 'Carolyn'. I realized via a very simple exercise that I was purely the awareness in which everything around me was arising. The exercise that helped me grasp this understanding went like this:

If I closed my eyes and started to watch out for the next thought that came into my head, I thought I could watch it come from the outside of my right temple and across my forehead and out through my left temple. Try it yourself if you like.

I found that no thought came. I waited a little longer and although I watched out for it, it never came. I realized it was the 'awareness' that was watching out for the next thought to come was what I really am. This is referred to by many of the gurus as being the 'I am ...ness', which is a constant, which is always there. It is often referred to as 'consciousness'. That which we cannot touch, is not tangible, cannot be seen. This is what we would normally describe as an illusion.

So I realized first of all that I was simply the awareness in which all of my life was arising. And that even though that 'awareness' appears to be an illusion, it was slowly becoming and has now become my reality. I am simply that 'awareness'.

So to draw an analogy. If I went to a movie and it was a really sad story, it would make me cry. I would walk out feeling sad and maybe, even for a few more hours, that sadness would linger on. But then the next day I would be back to normal.

And similarly if I went to a comedy or a love story ... I would experience happy feelings while I was at the movies, maybe a bit longer but they would be gone the next day. I have that ability to drop those feelings quite easily as we all do when we go to the movies.

We could consider that movie to be an illusion because we experienced it, but then it was gone.

'Would that not be real freedom?'

So if I were to consider my life to be like a movie, I (the awareness) am watching it. Just as I was watching out for that thought. Then, if something sad had happened, for example my marriage broke down. I would allow myself to feel the sadness of it as much as I wanted. Then I had the ability to drop it and allow myself to experience other aspects of my life as they came along



without the sadness clouding my new day experiences. Would not that be real freedom?

This very simple analogy of referring to my life as a movie in which I, 'Carolyn' am the main character and I 'the awareness' is watching, has been a great way of experiencing glimpses of freedom for myself.

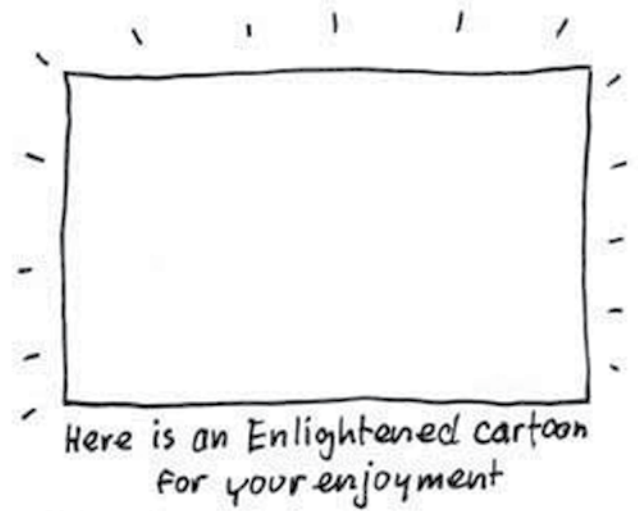
Of course I very often catch myself thinking that I am my body and my mind and the rest of it but then as soon as I feel any sense of fear, pain, sorrow, I immediately know that I am identifying with the self, 'Carolyn'. And all I do is just stay with it as I would at the movies. But then very soon I can drop it and again remember that I am that 'awareness', that constant. And that to me is now my reality and everything else is an illusion. I have realized that it is extremely important to experience my feelings when I am identified with the self 'Carolyn' and not discount or run away from any of them whatsoever.

I recently gained a little more understanding through reading some of the work of Ken Wilber's Integral Theory where he suggests that all life is there to be experienced in all its fullness. In fact every aspect of our human

Continued on next page

I am that You are that Everything is that

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj



Some years ago now I was cleaning up the sacristy at St Mary's when I came across a book entitled *My Most Extraordinary Summer with Sailor Bob Adamson* by James Braha. I was about to throw it in the bin – you know how it is when you have a bit of a look at something before your ditch it! I found myself, to my surprise, somewhat gripped by what I began to read. So instead of consigning it to the bin, I kept it, read it and then went to Melbourne to sit with Bob Adamson for a couple of days. So began an extraordinary journey which continues to resonate with me at an even deeper level. I began to read similar writings by Tony Parsons, John Wheeler, Eckhart Tolle, Nirmala, Belsekar, Ramana Marshi, Denis Waite and the one by David Carse entitled *'Perfect Brilliant Stillness – beyond*

the individual self. This book has become a sort of bible for me.

I have over the years endeavoured to get people interested in this philosophy/ spirituality without much success I believe. Recently I began to offer a cluster around this philosophy known as Advaita – Sanskrit word for 'not two'. It is held at Carolyn Vincent's home every second Monday from 10.30 -11.30. You are most welcome to join it any time provided you have a copy of *Perfect Brilliant Stillness* by David Carse. The cluster is more like what I imagine a Book Club meeting might look like.

There is no teacher. In fact there is 'no-one' at this meeting – only Consciousness or Presence. To quote David Carse, *'This presence is what streams or flows, to use*

the image, through the mind/body apparatus, animating it, rendering it conscious; so conscious that it actually thinks, as most others like it also think, that it is an individual autonomous entity, a separate being which is conscious'.

'But it is not. That is the illusion. There are no separate beings. There is nobody home. There is always only Presence/ Consciousness creating this illusion. 'Me' 'myself' 'David' do not actually exist except as a mistaken idea, a misguided and totally conceptual and never 'real' separating off of Consciousness/ Presence into an illusory separate self. And what is realised is that this Consciousness/Presence, all that is, is what 'I' truly is'.

No wonder they threw me out of the Catholic Church, except of course they didn't, because there is no 'they' to throw and no 'me' to be thrown, and for that matter no Catholic Church.

As Robert Adams writes:
I can assure you there is no such thing as God. There is no such thing as creator and there's no such thing as the universe. So there's no such thing as the world, and there's no such thing as you. There's no such thing as 'I'.

What is left?

Silence.

Peter Kennedy

Freedom from the illusion we call reality!!

existence (this illusion), especially the areas we tend to avoid are the areas we really need to go towards (also referred to as 'shadow work').

If we can truly achieve that - to experience all of life, however it may seem, but not attached to any of it, I believe that would be the true essence of what life is all about. As Jesus said 'be in this world but not of it'.

The Dalai Lama was once asked, *'What is the purpose of life'*. He said *'The purpose of life is to embody the transcendent'*.

I am able to write this article because I was recently in the wilderness and all of the pieces of the puzzle slowly fell into place as I simply sat and did absolutely nothing for many hours. I could breathe in the sounds of nature and feel my own 'I am-ness'.

Carolyn Vincent

Illusion

To one with both feet
planted firmly,
and happily, she would add,
on this most beautiful Earth,
Illusion is an illusory concept...
Encouraged as a child
to believe only in
the tangible and obvious,
Discouraged from questioning,
wondering or thinking for herself.
Encouraged, nonetheless, to love
and value the beauty
of the known world
and to be tolerant of the fragility
and foibles of humankind.
This life, this world, our
understanding
of it, an illusion?
Some argue readily that



God is the illusion...
She has learnt over the years
that shades of grey are more
often true
than black and white,
learnt to listen in the silence for
the still, small voice which
convinces her
of 'the more'.
So for now she is content
with the answerless questions,
content to wonder,
to believe in beauty and love,
and the possibility of the divine.

Kerry Lawrence

Illusion and Reality?

How often have we seen products boasting '95% real meat', etc? One wonders what other kind of meat could be on offer – unreal, illusory, false? Surely a case of 'unreal' advertising?

I must admit, though, that the line between illusion and reality can be not only blurred, but interchangeable.

Take dreams, for instance, real enough while we are in them, with real effects persisting into waking hours, like fear, sweating, anxiety; but nevertheless phantoms, which can be put to flight on awakening. The Sultan of Salamandragore had to be kept perpetually awake, for when he fell asleep the spectres of his countless victims rose before him to confront and threaten – an example of 'reality' enshrouded in the 'illusion' of nightmare.

The things that we believe in are generally, from our own perspective at least, founded on reality. But then we can wake up, arrive at some greater awareness, and find that our beliefs have been based on shadows all the time. When I was eight years old my mother, thinking it was time I put away the things of a child, informed me that Santa Claus did not exist, in fact had never existed. I did not, I could not, believe her, because my idea of happiness at that time depended on the existence of Santa Claus.



Eventually, realising she was indeed speaking the truth, with many tears and immense sadness I had to believe her, and move on to the more real world of the older child.

An even more traumatic collapse occurred when the Jesus of the angels, the stories, the holy pictures, the statues, the Jesus constructed over centuries of devotion had also to be relegated to the dustbin - was he too a myth? It seemed so. Yet I could not give him up entirely. This Jesus is still there in some mystical, yet inexplicable form.

From Copernicus to today's scientists, cosmology has made, and continues to make great strides, and it is helping mankind to sift the wheat from the chaff, to discard former views and push on to an ever more accurate view of our universe. Now they are telling us that the two major realities, the vital pillars, of our existence – time and space – are themselves hurtling at break-neck speed

towards extinction. The prospect of this glorious universe, our home, being itself an illusion, can very well fill us with dismay and sorrow. Shakespeare puts a similar view on the lips of Prospero,

*We are such stuff
As dreams are made on,
and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep
The Tempest, Act IV*

But wait! All is not lost –yet! Our universe is still in the stage of its youth. We have yet ahead of us some trillions of years.

Meanwhile, what real reality can we cling to, on what can we depend? The meditation teacher, Goenka, advises us, '*Life is so precious; we cannot afford to lose a single moment.*' I'll go for that. I'll take that present moment as my lifeline, my reality.

*Joan Mooney
20/08/13*

Illusions and Mystery

The task is to unlearn
to let the certainties crumble
to let them flake and fall away
all those long held viewpoints
those judgments and prejudices
the expectations and defences
the strong sense of separateness
the illusions of my own making

and to surrender
to the unfolding mystery
within and without
too incomprehensible to know
too indescribable to explain
that whispers wisdom
in the realities and richness
of this exquisite speck of life.

*Margaret Clifford
July 2013*

Mystical Moments



Today I want to say a few words about the mystery, awe and wonder of the mystical. Often a neglected part of Christian life, mysticism can be an amazing way to experience the Divine in the deepest part of our being. This can happen anywhere, at any time.

Now to an old Chinese story: *'Under a pine tree, a boy-servant, when asked where his master was, answered, "He went to collect medicinal herbs; I only know that he is somewhere on this mountain." "But where?" The boy replied, "Mist hides everything."*

The essential point is beyond words; all that can be spelled out can never fully describe a spiritual experience. Words are so inadequate, but we must communicate with them as best we can.

There have been many well-known mystics in the Church, but mystics have appeared in every major religion, in all ages, and in all parts of the world. We are all potential mystics and many people do have wonderful, deeply spiritual moments.

An example of these awe-inspiring moments comes from John's Gospel when Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb, after the resurrection. At first, when Mary sees a man nearby, she thinks he's a gardener. But when Jesus calls her by name, she 'turns' and immediately 'knows' it is the Lord. Before that moment, she 'knew Jesus was dead,' but immediately Mary 'knows' and needs no explanations. Mystics generally have a direct experience of God, or the unity of all things. For the person who has the experience, it is absolutely valid, completely certain. The mystic 'knows.'

To people conditioned by scientific and rational thought, this may seem nonsense, but acceptance of a fact is not the same as an explanation of it. One way of moving towards the mystical, I have found, is through poetry, as in this poem by Denise Levertov.

*As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them:
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float*

*into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all surrounding grace.*

In medieval Europe, mystical knowledge was recognised as completely different from anything previously known and at the same time more real than any other teaching. It was as though a new clarity – distinct from the reasoning mind – had been revealed. Centuries earlier, this state was alluded to by St. Augustine when he said, My mind in the flash of a trembling glance came to Absolute Being – That which is.

**'I'm on a mountain top
with a panoramic view
over a huge green valley**

Robert Waldron, in his commentary on Merton's poetry writes: *'only in stripping ourselves of all that is egotistical are we prepared for an encounter with the Divine.'*

That letting go of all thinking is one of the essentials. But for me, this was always difficult, until I had an unforgettable experience.

I was reading a book at home one Sunday morning. Suddenly, I'm on a mountain top with a panoramic view over a huge green valley. The whole valley is filled with green, as if the air itself is green but I know immediately that the 'green' is God's love. However, I am quite alone and in a frightening predicament, hanging by my fingertips to an outside ledge of a timber lookout that projects out over the valley.

I feel like a full-grown eagle pushed out of the nest to start flying, and I know this has to be done. But I'm resisting a powerful urge to let go, to trust I'll be supported by this beautiful green ocean of divine love. Can I really risk everything and trust totally in God? After agonising for ages, I can't hold on and I can't let go, until it just happens, and I'm floating and moving effortlessly through this warm, supportive and divine space.

There is an amazing sense of peace and I'm at one with the divine love that surrounds me and supports me. The endless green bliss fills my entire universe.

I don't know how long this lasted, but without warning I was back in my chair at home. This experience was so overwhelming that I was unable to speak about it for weeks, and there are still no adequate words to describe this most blissful time. It was extraordinary, being immersed in divine love, an amazing blessing that wasn't earned by anything I had done; it just happened.

Welsh poet R.S. Thomas gives a further insight into mystical awareness in these words from *The Bright Field*.

*Life is not hurrying
after a receding future
nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside
like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush. To a brightness
that seems as transitory
as your youth once,
but is the eternity that awaits you.*

The poet uses the word, 'turning' turning aside to the miracle, while the Gospel said Mary Magdalene 'turns' and immediately 'knows.' In this sense, 'to turn' means shifting from rational thinking to a full acceptance of the 'now.' It means surrendering oneself fully to the immense reality of all that is, now, seeing without thinking, at one with the divine infinity.

A true mystical experience is a gift of pure grace and cannot be arranged. The Cloud of Unknowing presents 'the negative way,' the way of not knowing, of deep humility. But the author moves on to 'the positive way,' the way of love. In using both these traditions he shows that to human reason, God remains a mystery, but through heart-felt love, God becomes accessible. The practice of humbly letting go of all opinions and judgments can bring us closer to an awe-inspiring, mystical experience.

Truly, mysticism is love, both the acceptance of divine love for us, and our genuine love for God. As the Indian mystic, Kabir, put it in

one of his many poems: The flute of the Infinite is played without ceasing, and its sound is love.

Let me conclude with Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and brilliant author. In 1958, when he made a rare visit to the city, he was living alone in an abandoned caravan at the monastery in Kentucky. Hear just a few of his words about that day.

Yesterday, in Louisville at the corner of 4th and Walnut streets, in the centre of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I was theirs, that they could not be alien to me even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation... Thank God... thank God

*Eric Miles
13/08/2013*

Reality that shines away illusions

A reflection of what opens us to the Spirit; to Reality that shines away illusions. As I have enjoyed and seen at SMX.

B is for 'Be still and know that I am God' psalm 46:10.

'In God we live and move and have our Being' Acts 17: 28.

'Be what we receive, The Body of Christ and Become what you are, The Body of Christ.'

Haven't we sung many times the first quote with the emphasis on 'Be'?

Meditation/ stillness is highly valued. *The Power of Now* is much appreciated.

Along with homilies and books recommended, so much has alerted me to *'The Eternal Now'* to shine away conditional false beliefs and useless obsession with past and future. I find in SMX a focus on 'I am' presence opening to what eternally 'is', the Being that permeates everything, without which nothing exists. I admire the freedom for all of us to be ourselves and to enjoy the uniqueness of each one that enriches the wholeness. It is a wonderful atmosphere to open to Reality and let illusions go.

C is for Christ. There is no doubt that SMX is a Christian community. The scene of everyone invited to stand as equals around Christ's Table, all focused on the Eucharistic celebration, gives witness to that.

Jesus Christ by his presence, grace and teachings, along with his life, death and resurrection, beams a Light that takes us from illusions to being home in Reality and assures us, *'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life'*.

O is for Oneness. In the ultimate Reality: God is the ONE without a second.

I recall Jesus' words: *'Flesh and blood cannot reveal this to you but my Father in Heaven'* also, *'Separated from God I can do nothing'*. Thankfully, separation is an illusion.

The Truth of our oneness I see as the basis for the joy of our friendships, our connections. The Peace we extend to one another is effective and life-giving. *'Lord, make me an instrument of your Peace.'*

It is also the basis for inclusiveness and compassion for those who are marginalized and suffer from the effects of ignorance –not knowing the reality of oneness. It also opens to honour: listen, and respect everyone and everything. *'This is what God asks of you – to live justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with our God'*. Micah.

L is for Life. God is Life. *'This day I set before you, Life and death, choose Life.'* Deut 30.

Happiness in God's Presence. *'I have come that you might have Life and have it more abundantly.'*

I was impressed when I read in *A Course in Miracles* that a little sigh is a choice for death.

I sense in the community a passion for life for all.

I recall: *'It is in dying (to illusions) that we are born to Eternal Life (Reality).'*

Reality (The Truth, my true Self) was fully present even when I believed I sat alone in the 'shadow of death'.

Thankfully, we are companions on the journey to where we never left. Let us celebrate.....

Barbara Fingleton



Celebrating in our old church

Reality or Illusion?

I look at everything around me and it is real but the scientists tell me that matter is nothing but another form of energy. The meal I am about to eat looks pretty solid as does the book I have been reading but the scientists are discovering more truth about the world around us and I certainly have to reconcile what they are finding with what I experience.

This concept is mirrored in my experience of my faith. I have told you the story of having to step out in faith - how I had to say yes to God before I could 'know' God or really experience God in my life. This trust in the Goodness, (Love) that is behind (in, through and beyond) all things is what I think of as my 'Faith.' Faith is stepping out, in trust, beyond our comfort zone to embrace 'life.'

As I see it many/most of the things we have accepted from our childhood have to be rethought if we are to come to terms with this new vision of who we are and what life is all about. It may be that I could get all the 'energy' I need from a few pills but we would be much the poorer if we were not able to enjoy the aroma as the roast is taken out of the oven or the myriad experiences of taste, sight, smell, texture etc as we enjoy our meal and that glass of wine that may accompany it. These experiences have an importance of their own that cannot be underestimated. In the same way we can live full lives doing good but we miss out on an enormous amount if we do not accept the reality of our experiences of that which is beyond our understanding. They



Designed by Karen Tonkin

might too help us to accomplish even more!

Just as we can be attracted by the aromas of our feast, we can be warned by the slightly 'off' smell to avoid eating that fish. We must trust our instincts – perhaps the voice of God – when we feel that to go down that spiritual path may be dangerous or not for us. It may however be the right path for someone who is travelling their

own spiritual journey. SMX may not be everyone's 'kettle of fish!'

At the TLC though, the 'fruits' of cooperation, understanding, empathy, caring, help and concern for others are certainly in evidence and for me these are like the enticing smell from the kitchen as we wait for the delicious and satisfying food to arrive. *'By their fruits shall you know them!'*

Shar Ryan

When the sh hits, sit!**

Falling into chaos

Breathe air into your lungs

Until the form and substance arise

In stillness

Seeing through

With

Clarity, depth, insight.

Penny Wearne

St Mary's Community Council

Who are they?

The Community Council has been meeting each fortnight since its formation at the end of June.

The following are short accounts of each of the members who make up the council.

Margaret Clifford

I moved from the Rockhampton area to Brisbane three and half years ago and since then have been a regular participant in the St Mary's in Exile Community. Prior to that, I visited St Mary's regularly over a period of 25 years, attending Mass on my frequent trips to Brisbane, accompanying groups of students to the community and gathering with family for weddings and baptisms. I loved my job.

I spent over forty years teaching secondary students and for half of that time, I was in leadership positions in Catholic schools. I now work casually as a mediator and enjoy having the time to read and to respond to whatever unfolds - which keeps me very busy!

Bob Aldred

My roles in the community include being the Coordinator of SMX Connections, a member of the Faith Council and chair of the Promotions Committee. I have been coming to St Mary's since 1992.

I am a mad follower of the Manly Sea Eagles, love gardening, and



Community Council clockwise around table: Bob Aldred, Marg Ortiz, Terry Fitzpatrick, Brian O'Hanlon, Chris Harkin, Margaret Clifford, Ingerid Meagher. Sophia Kimmins absent. Her photo is on the next page.

I am a volunteer Research Assistant with the Redlands Genealogical Society. But, most of all, I love being the husband of Dorothy, father to my two children and Poppa to four grandchildren.

My past experience includes twenty years as Chief Executive Officer of the Alcohol and Drug Foundation - Queensland. Prior to this position I was a Minister in Churches of Christ, and Chaplain to prisons, psychiatric hospitals and industry.

My passion for social justice includes extensive experience in working in policy advisory committees, media advocacy and government lobbying. I was a President and a member of the Board of QCOSS for a number of years.

I lectured in Community Development and Organisation and Administration Skills at TAFE, and presented guest lectures in policy and media to Universities.

Brian O'Hanlon

I have been attending St. Mary's since 1988. I am retired 18 months, after 36 years in the practice of Psychology. I am encouraged by the move to the TLC to engage in developing a truly Christian Community in the Spiritual tradition, including knowledge, meditation and service. While serving on the Council I want to listen, plan regarding our future and in various ways contribute to the development of the community.

Chris Harkin

I was born in Melbourne and am 67 years of age. I hold a Business Degree from RMIT and most of my career has been spent in senior educational administration in the Catholic and Independent sectors in Victoria and Queensland.

At the end of 2008 I retired to be full-time carer for my wife, Christine. I am currently Oncology Ward Chaplain at Princess

Alexandra Hospital. I have recently been elected to the Board of Directors of Catholic Super.

My involvement in St Mary's began in 1995 and during that time I have been a musician (pianist) at 9:00am and 5:00pm Masses.

Terry Fitzpatrick

I have been part of St Mary's community since I started working in the Jails with Peter Kennedy in 1983.

Prior to training as a priest I was a Registered Nurse, and in the days of official titles one could say, a Sister who became a Father.

I worked in the Toowoomba Diocese for five years prior to coming to Brisbane to reconnect with St Mary's. Working in the Diocese of Toowoomba was an opportunity for me to work in country parishes which covered many 100's of kilometres. This country experience provided valuable Pastoral training for my next task of working in the inner city parish of St Mary's South Brisbane.

In the mid 1990s I undertook and completed a Masters in Social Work at the University of Queensland. These studies have assisted me in the task of working with the poor and vulnerable people in and around the St Mary's Church.

I have been part of Micah Projects, who attempt to provide a more structured and ordered response to those most marginalised in our community. I have been on the Micah Board since it was founded in 1996.

Ingered Meagher

I thank you for placing your trust in me amongst the other people elected to the SMX Council.

I can assure you now that I passionately love this Faith Community and all it represents and stands for.

It is a place where my inter-denominational wanderings have fused. The various stop-offs along the Way have provided me with an expanded awareness of a universal love and desire for the holy and wholeness. It has allowed me to appreciate the richness and wisdom of the various Christian traditions that have been my home. They have been the building stones in my spiritual life.

I keep my theological and spiritual curiosity alive by taking a great interest in all that the Progressive Spirituality organization, Sea of Faith and the Wellspring Community offer by way of exploration and discussion of faith matters and ultimately the challenge of living out the Judeo-Christian principals as set out in Micah 6:8.

And so it is my hope for you and me, as part of this St Mary's in Exile Community, that we continue the quest for an enduring truth and that we be able to walk together the Way of Jesus of Nazareth. May we find challenge and food for the soul each week at SMX as well as an assurance of love.

I promise to earnestly and carefully listen to you and to represent your views, needs and hopes.

Thank you all again.



Sophia Kimmins

I have been a SMX member my whole life, and some of the older members may still remember my voluntary interpretative liturgical dancing during my younger days. Throughout my time at St Mary's I have experienced a lot of support and compassion and my time at St Mary's over the last 15 years has certainly contributed to my understanding and ideas of the world for the better.

Throughout my time at St Mary's I have seen many changes to the community, most for the better and mostly natural progressions as we change as a community. What I have noticed however in the past few years is a massive decline of young people attending St Mary's compared to past years when we were based in the church. As a member of the community faith council my aim is to reengage the youth and ensure that the mass remains meaningful to them. I want to also be a voice for the existing youth members of SMX on the issues we face as a community in the future to ensure that their ideas and opinions are heard.

Thank you SMX for choosing me to be one of your representatives on the faith council and I hope that my decisions can help to create a community in which every age bracket feels comfortable and accepted.

Continued on page 14

Coat of Arms

I see the Queensland Coat of Arms is back. I picked up a state government form the other day and I was overcome by waves of nostalgia. There was the same coat of arms that was on the cover of my Grade 2 Copy Book which taught me to write in the approved Queensland style. If my memory serves me correctly, we wrote on slates in Grade 1, and graduated to real paper in Grade 2. Of course the approved Queensland writing style has changed over the intervening years, but I see the coat of arms has not.



Coats of arms first appeared in Europe about a thousand years ago, to identify knights in battle, back in the days before most people could read and write. They gradually lost their military significance and were adopted by institutions as a certain traditional style of logo. Queensland acquired

her coat of arms in 1893. There is a hint of military heritage, the knight's helmet and visor sitting on top of the shield, but the four items on the shield show what was important to those early politicians – sheep, cattle, wheat and mining. That is where the money came from then, and probably still does in the minds of some of those National Party politicians.

Of course the now deposed Queensland Government logo was no different in terms of inspiration, or may not have been different, depending on what it was supposed to represent. If it really did represent a flock of worms attacking a beach ball, this would, I suppose, call to mind the state's achievements in tourism and organic farming.

The shield in the coat of arms is now supported by a brolga and a deer, which strikes me as a rather random combination of animals. Maybe the explanation can be found in that these animals were not officially added to the coat of arms until 1977. My theory is that the kangaroo and emu were already taken by the Commonwealth, and probably



all the other eligible Australian animals (koalas, wombats, platypuses...) were taken by other government instrumentalities. Maybe the committee was confronted by the choice between crocodiles and brown snakes and felt no one could object to graceful deer, even if they are European. An alternative theory, one I find more appealing, could be that those were the days of Bjelke-Petersen, who was proud of his own lack of formal education and liked to make his own decisions and was too strong a leader to change his mind once made up. I can see a certain potential for random outcomes from that situation.

Peter Brown

St Mary's Community Council

Margaret Ortiz

This community is very important to me. I have been a part of it for nearly thirty years. I love the liturgy, the people who have become my friends and the challenges that come from being part of a leadership team.

My background is in education, almost all of which was teaching early childhood classes. I had small digressions into consultancy work and tertiary education with ACU and the Institute of Faith Education.

I hope to be able to contribute as a council member to the smooth running of our community and help it to flourish as a place where people can experience what it is to celebrate and live as people of 'The Way'.

In the Beginning?

For my birthday this year my daughter gave me an e-reader. It's a cunning little item with its own internal light source – very helpful to my not-so-young eyes. In no time I had it stocked with a whole collection of books I hadn't yet read; even an obscure work by someone I was once at school with. And they were all stored in a device as small and light as the slimmest of slim volumes. Miraculous.

'...collections of hieroglyphics assembled in particular ways can channel such delights'

But last night, settling myself against my pillows and switching on my e-reader for another

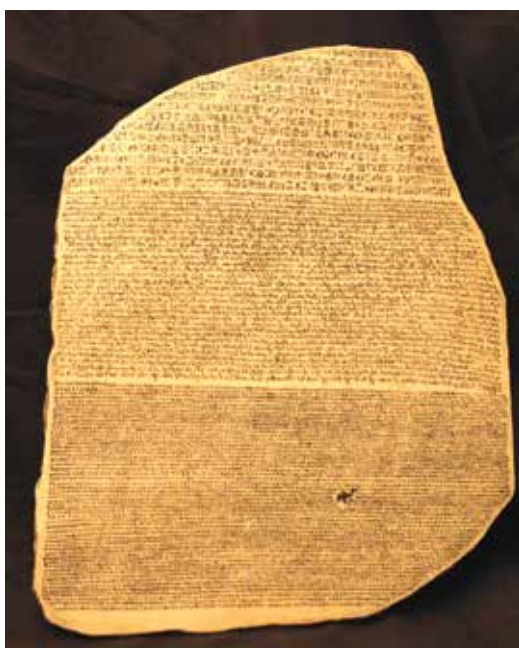
pleasurable session of bedtime reading, I mused not only on the wondrous invention I was holding in my hand but also on the magic of the written word.

It struck me afresh what a marvel it is that collections of hieroglyphics assembled in particular ways can channel such delights. It doesn't matter whether the words are the outpourings of a lover, jottings on the back of a bus ticket, a school assignment or the Complete Works of Shakespeare; whatever the context, they have the capacity to convey a wealth of meaning. They represent thoughts held captive. Read them or hear them spoken, and we set them free. Once released from captivity, they're again at liberty to stimulate our emotions, our memory, our

intellect, even our innermost spirit. Words hold the potential to anger or delight us, depress us or inspire us, or ensure we don't forget to give the dog his worming tablet. They can transport us to different times and places, other worlds, new planes of existence.

Yet the words themselves are mere illusion; just marks on paper, gouges in clay, electronic impulses in a computer, blips in cyberspace. So what about 'In the beginning was the Word'? How can it be true?

Barbara McKenzie



The Rosetta Stone is an ancient Egyptian granodiorite stele inscribed with a decree issued at Memphis in 196 BC on behalf of King Ptolemy V. The decree appears in three scripts: the upper text is Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, the middle portion Demotic script, and the lowest Ancient Greek. Because it presents essentially the same text in all three scripts (with some minor differences among them), it provided the key to the modern understanding of Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Get on the pill!



Back in the 'sixties, Bob Dylan alerted us to the fact that times were 'a-changin'. Bob could not have known that the reality would become flight attendants being able to get pilots pregnant; Viagra, botox, and anti-ageing cream becoming part of everyday life; picking your nose (from reputable cosmetic surgeons' catalogues, of course) was OK; and ignoring parents' instructions to eat everything on your plate and always acting your age.

Chances are, however, Bob subscribed to the modern illusion that we should live as long as we can—die young as late as possible, if you like. This post-Enlightenment illusion does not constitute new-age thinking, though. Almost two thousand years ago, Seneca observed that 'One is never so old that one does not honestly hope to live another day'. He went on to say that adding years to life without adding life to those years was a waste of time.

A reality for most of us has become that we want to lead a longer, better life. The good news is there's a pill that can help you to do just that. I'd like to claim

credit for developing it, but I can't: it's been around for thousands of years.

For too long chronological age has been regarded as the most important determinant of age. This age-old stereotype is a hangover from ancient Greek society in which youth, beauty, and physical perfection were valued and the elderly were lampooned by poets and playwrights of that time as ugly, feeble, and worthy only of social derision. Early Roman society (despite its Senate) wasn't much better. In general, the Romans thought of old age as a time of lost opportunities and a time of mental and physical deterioration. In the middle ages some Christian theologians viewed the decrepitude of old age as a divine punishment for Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Even Shakespeare said (in *The Passionate Pilgrim*), 'Age I do abhor thee; youth, I do adore thee'.

' a positive relationship between lifestyle and health and well-being.

The 'pill' I'm referring to is what I call a life-quality pill. And it's one you don't have to 'pop' like you do other pills. Pnigophobics (those that fear choking) aren't the only ones who'll find this news easy to swallow. In a world where we've been conditioned to believe that all self-respecting painkillers provide 'fast-acting relief' within minutes or hours of the

pill been popped, nil-by-mouth is a refreshing alternative—particularly for such a life-changer.

There's a plethora of evidence showing a positive relationship between lifestyle and health and well-being. (Details of this research are included in a free, downloadable article at neil.com.au)

If you've lived long enough, you'll know that things have a habit of not always going to plan. So this life-quality pill has an extra-special, individually controlled release mechanism that allows you to start small and gradually incorporate more and more parts until you're realising the full benefits of the pill. Or you might find it easier to make whatever changes are required all at once. Either way, you stand to feel much better; if not instantly, almost certainly in a few days. This life-quality pill is a DIY's dream-come-true—perfectly safe, powerful, inexpensive, and up to you the speed at which it is introduced into your life.

This pill delivers the best results when taken in a stress-free environment. Stress helps to accelerate the ageing process. So, if you want to get the best results for your efforts, you need to do whatever it takes (sensibly, sensitively, and within the law, of course) to remove all, or as many as possible, stressors from your life. This may inevitably require making a few changes, but you don't need someone else to tell

you what those changes are. As George Burns told us: *'The best advice we can take is our own.'*

The life-quality pill is made up of five key ingredients, which I call the 5Fs—Fitness, Food, Friendship, Future, Finances. (These ingredients are dealt with in much more detail at neil.com.au)

Two of the ingredients (Fitness and Food) are familiar to most of us. Even though there's more to living longer than exercise and muesli, there's no escaping the fact that life-quality demands maintaining the machine on the inside in good working order, even if the body may not be in showroom condition and the paintwork might be starting to show signs of wear 'n' tear.

The three other ingredients are an abundance of Friendships, Future (always having something to look forward to), and Finances. With the exception of accidents and severe medical conditions, few people die of something called 'old age'. Instead, research has identified lack of friends, absence of future, and inadequate finances as three of the main exit-contributors.

Making and maintaining friendships, we're told, have some amazing powers, helping to add up to seven years to our life. Friendships require working at. Aristotle, for example, claimed that one-and-a-half bushels of salt needed to be consumed together before a friendship became solid. That's quite a few coffee catch-ups and dinner parties, methinks, but go easy on the salt.

Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl identified having something to look forward to (being re-united with his wife) as a key source of motivation for him during his period in the death camps. He observed also that those inmates who lost track of any future gave up the ghost, smoked their last cigarette they'd been saving for that occasion, and called it quits. Having something to look forward to is a key source of motivation for each of us. That 'something' could be a round of golf, time in the garden, hugging grandkids, or getting 'lost' in a great book. The late 'n' great artist Margaret Olley said that she couldn't wait to wake up in the morning and resume painting. For many males, the backyard shed provides a place to go to engage in activities

'If you know what is enough, then you will have enough. But if you wait until you have enough, you will never have enough.'

of importance to them. And many of those shed-dwellers' life partners consider the sheds as sources of their salvations, too.

Adequate finance is BIG-deal. The eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau drew attention to what most of us have come to realise: wealth is not a question of having lots of money; it's about having what we want. Confucius' words of wisdom are worth remembering here. He said, *'If you know what is enough, then you will have enough. But if you wait until you have enough, you will never have enough.'* (The free, downloadable article at neil.com.

[au](http://neil.com.au) has more specific information if you want to explore how to make sure the buck stays with you.)

Once the release mechanism of the life-quality pill is starting to work its magic, and you're starting to feel (almost) bulletproof again, your focus can become the development of your inner self. Eckhart Tolle, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Maxwell Maltz are good starting-points for further exploration.

The life-quality pill won't be found on the shelf at your local pharmacy. The result of your efforts in 'taking' the pill, however, will soon be there for the world to see. George Burns must've been on the pill. He said, 'You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old'.

Neil Flanagan

Neil Flanagan is an active participant in the ageing process. His book BLINK! The Speed of Life (How to add years to your life and life to your years) and more detailed information about the 5Fs can be downloaded for free at neil.com.au and, while you're there, check out some of the many articles he has written for various publications.



The Ego

While it seems that the major religious traditions prefer, within their orthodoxy, to emphasise their differences, referring to how 'this one is correct and that one is not', it seems that within the mystical streams of the major religions there is much more communion, many different paths towards the same gift, closer to God. Even within the many streams there is much common ground. All traditions would agree for instance that a seeker of the spiritual experience is required in some way to quieten the activity of the mind. In the Eastern traditions mind activity is known as monkey mind; in the Western traditions it is commonly known as mind chatter, more formally understood as the 'ego'.

A very old definition of prayer is described as *'The raising of the heart and mind to God'*. What is the mind? What is the heart? The mind is what thinks - it questions, plans, worries, fantasizes. The heart is what knows - it loves. The mind is the organ of knowledge, the heart the organ of love. Mental consciousness must eventually give way and open up to the fuller way of knowing which is heart consciousness. Love is complete knowledge.

St. Paul writes *'We do not know how to pray but the Spirit prays within us'* This suggests that we learn to pray, not by trying to pray but by giving up or letting go of our trying and instead learning 'to be'.

It seems that both the mystical and prayerful themes are implying the same message; to transcend our human limitations, we need

to let go, to turn down our monkey mind, our ego.

In this article I shall explore the question; what is the ego. What needs to be turned down, to allow the Spiritual sense of the seeker to arise? Perhaps a starting point is the work of Steve Taylor. In his book, *The Fall*, he states that across 300 current archaeological sites stretching from 40,000BC to 8000BC there is no evidence of war, or control or inequality. However by 4000BC there is consistent evidence of hierarchy, individualism, power and control, and discrimination, 'I am more important than you are'. Taylor argues that around 4000BC the major populations on our planet included the middle East, middle Europe and middle Asia. The descendents of these people including us are the ones with ego.

In *The Fall* Taylor suggests that around 4000BC there was a huge climate change event. The big dry enveloped the population, food became scarce, hunting became dangerous and sub populations spread far and wide. The scientific record shows the first signs of competition for scarce resources. Hierarchy, individualism and discrimination inform the notion 'I am more important than you are', the beginning of ego. Taylor suggests that the ego in its modern form sends a constant stream of mind chatter, a chorus of memories, worries, fears and daydreams which disturbs our being and creates a constant stream of anxiety. Perhaps more importantly such mind activity provides us with a 'normal' state of disturbance, negativity, isolation and incompleteness. For many of us on the rare occasions when we



Gwion painting shows time of prosperity and peace for early Australians.

do attend to our internal world, we experience a strong sense of discord, what the Buddha called suffering. Our response is often to distract ourselves with short term excitement from the external world.

Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk and mystic, proposes that our life experience (particularly from our mid adolescent years onwards), our personal history, is full of ego-chasing security, power, control and approval. In adulthood these possessive attitudes towards ones self and others can only possibly cause conflict in the world. The real problem according to Keating is that we live with 7 billion other people who have the same problem. No wonder we have world conflict says he-that is why to take a determination not to contribute to such messiness of the world by adding our own 'false self' project to it is one of the greatest gifts you could give to humanity. If enough people do it, then society will be transformed.

Fr. Laurence Freeman in various ways consistently states that *'to reduce our sense of ego is to put our mind into silence which brings us closer to the experience of God, to being in unity with the Divine'*. Freeman proposes that what keeps us from this unity, the knowing of

our true self as a treasure of the Kingdom, is our ego. A self image of our ego is not very pleasant. It is our anger, our recriminations, our vindictiveness and fearfulness, our deception, our guilt, our criticism of self and others. It is surprising how judgmental are the religious of the Catholic Church. Jesus said 'do not judge'; all of these are our identification with the ego. Reducing the influence of our ego through meditation or other spiritual practice centres us towards our true self, closer to the Christian mystery.

'to reduce our sense of ego is to put our mind into silence which brings us closer to the experience of God, to being in unity with the Divine'

Eckhart Tolle is on the same theme when he points out: Spirituality is the stepping out of identification with the stream of thinking. Being in the present is an experience not a thought. He says there is another dimension deeper than thought inside you which has nothing to do with your future or

past- an experience where you and the present moment are one. The ego arises when I identify my thoughts as myself-when I accept that my thoughts are me. However you are not your story, your personal history, your explicit memory. There is a deeper sense of consciousness, your true self.

Here is an exercise from Eckhart Tolle (with some small additions) which highlights the thinking self and this deeper sense of consciousness, the true self.

1) Which is your primary mind channel where you gain your inner sense of communication, where you experience your inner world: visual memory (mind pictures), auditory memory (self talk/mind chatter), kinaesthetic memory (emotional sensations/physical feelings)? For our purposes olfactory memory- smell and tastes shall be disregarded. Visual processes are usually used when retrieving memories. However some people use it prolifically; auditory processes are usually used when engaging in criticism of self or others, or when one is in a general negative state. However

some people use it prolifically. Kinaesthetic processes are often present in association with visual and auditory memory, they place personal value on experiences. Some people have an ability to use Kinaesthetic memory as their primary channel.

2) Think of something or remember something, an internal experience, something that engages your primary mind channel.

3) Now, become aware of, pay close attention to this question: how do you know that you are having 'that' experience? Pay attention to the awareness, the consciousness, the space, the knowing behind the experience- that which knows you are thinking. That is your true self, your deeper sense of consciousness.

Through enhancing our awareness of our true self, with a spiritual practice we gradually soften the ego and enhance our closeness to the Divine within, moving closer to the Christian mystery.

Brian O'Hanlon



When the climate change began there was competition for scarce resources and fighting began in previously peaceful lands. This Gwion painting from the Kimberly shows early Australians in battle.

Connecting

In her homily Marg speaks of what she believes to be the heart of our community. This includes the role of small groups in fostering mutual support, theological discussion and making connections.



Some years ago, in the old church, the gospel reading was the one about Mary and Martha. I'm sure you know it well. Jesus was talking, Mary was at his feet and Martha was working on lunch. Later, while discussing the homily with a few friends over coffee, my friend said to me that I was a 'real Martha'. I smiled, rather forcedly as I was somewhat offended. Had I thought about it I would have imagined myself more like Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his words and probably throwing in a few intelligent comments of my own. My friend (friend!!) saw me in the kitchen doing the washing up. However, she was probably right. I did tend to be a doer rather than a reflector. For me, I believe, one of the great gifts of St M's is that it has taught me to be reflective. To meditate, to be still and to think more deeply.

Recently while in Melbourne, we celebrated Eucharist with another group of ex-Catholics who are called Inclusive Catholic Community. They have not been together very long and were engaging in discussion of their core beliefs. I recognised that conversation as we had it

too in our early days, and it is something of a constant hum in the background of all our liturgical thinking. The questions of who we are, why we are here and how we should do it all keeps floating around in our collective heads. This homily is my current response to those questions.

'a celebration of the life of a literary figure named Jesus'

We are here in this place to celebrate Eucharist together. This beautiful ritual that has been developed over the years has different meanings for each of us. For me it is a celebration of the life of a literary figure named Jesus. We are at table with our friends and we break bread and drink wine together. We remember that the Gospel, the Good News, is all about how to live life to the full, how to be aware of the divine in each one of us, how to love – even those we don't like too much and how to be kind to ourselves. When I am standing around the table singing the 'Holy, holy' I do have a sense of the Divine. And an

amazing sense of being one with the rest of the people here. I simply love this liturgy, just love being here and celebrating it with my friends.

So that, I believe, is who we are. In a nutshell – we are a group of people who gather together to celebrate in our Eucharist this literary figure named Jesus. Not the son of God as is traditionally understood, but a story about a man with an unusual relationship with the divine. A man of compassion whose life and message we connect with. And whose path we try to walk.

And why are we here? We are here to celebrate and gain understanding about how we should live the life that Jesus talked about. We are especially sensitive to what is called Jesus' preferential option for the poor. We want to be a community that speaks of Justice and we want to be a bunch of people who practise living justly. We need to be the voice of the more vulnerable. For me personally, I know how hard it is to understand and think well of someone who has maligned me. Trying to be understanding and be generous to such people I

Connecting

find quite a big ask. Living this way every day is pretty daunting. As a community, as a shared vision, it is not so daunting. We have, and need to continue to have, really strong links with Micah, the organisation that was spawned from our people and which has outreaches to the marginalised of our city. We have many individual links with Micah, and this aspect of our identity as a community seems to me to be of critical importance.

We gather together to learn and reflect. We celebrate and enjoy our liturgy and our meeting together. But then we go out and work at what we believe to be right. This can be quite a task, one that requires energy. And the place to keep topping up the energy level is with our friends in the community.

This segues nicely into our third thread: our relationships within the community. It is important, but not easy, to develop a strong sense of community where people feel they belong. We want to be welcoming, inclusive, caring. We each want to feel valued. How we do this is the responsibility of us all. We do need to be proactive – not to assume it is the task of someone else. It is a task for us all. It is a mind set to develop. Welcoming arrivals in the lobby here, as Mary and June do, is one way. This initial welcome is very important, especially to people who are coming for the first time.

So let us be positive, be truly welcoming and be supportive of each other.

How can we be supportive if we don't know each other? One of the other ways of helping us

all get to know each other really well is through the small groups. And I would like to talk about this concept for a short while. This might even encourage those who don't belong to one to either start their own cluster or join one.

Many years ago we started the Connections group. The purpose of this group is to help people connect. Bob Aldred does an excellent job of coordinating this group. Out of the Connections group arose some time ago the idea of Clusters. Originally they were based geographically, of people whose homes were in suburbs that clustered together. Now we have some of this type but we also have other small groups who get together for more specific purposes.

In his book *'Is Jesus God?'* Michael Morwood tells us of two problems that can be encountered if one

'It is better to have opinions that are based on what we have read and thought about.'

seriously starts moving along a path away from conventional church teaching. The first is that by associating only with those who think as we do that we become a movement or cause and lock into the beliefs of the group and become as narrow minded as the group we left. The other is that of being caught up into what 'I think' which can be rather shallow. It is better to have opinions that are based on what we have read and thought about. Small groups and clusters can help in this. In one group we read Jenk's 'The Once and Future Bible' and learned about textual criticisms, others read Crotty and discovered the concept of the Literary Jesus ,

another read Armstrong's Twelve steps to a compassionate life and talked about what this might mean in their lives. A couple of weeks ago the Study group at Greenslopes heard Sr Rosemary Grundy talking about feminist theology. All these and many others do help us become more educated and less likely to be too narrow in our thinking. As well there are the meditation groups, such as the one at Brian's, where we learn to get in touch with our right brain.

I believe that the glue that holds this community together is friendship, trusting each other and taking care of each other. As a group we display a huge amount of trust in each other. This is often revealed in the prayers of the faithful when people are willing to open their hearts as they speak. We can't easily trust anyone that we don't know. And how do we get to know each other? One of the ways that I would like to recommend is by being part of a cluster. Or even hosting one.

If you celebrate here and feel you would like to get to know others in the community better, what else to do but join or start a new cluster.

So, to finish. Let us continue to celebrate Eucharist together, let us keep our focus on Jesus' path of justice and love and let us enjoy our friendship with each other. Maybe – even start a small group.

*Margaret Ortiz
Homily 21st July 2013.*

Getting Together

What some of the Clusters and small Groups have been doing lately

Camp Hill Cluster

The Camp Hill Cluster meets from 7 – 9 pm on the second Monday of the month at the home of Jo Marsh. The meetings normally comprise a discussion about a chosen topic. Currently, the group is discussing passages in the Gospel of Mark with reference to William Barclay's commentary.

From time to time, the group goes to a restaurant for a social night.

The Cluster comprises Jo Marsh, Peter Moss, Gerry and Anne O'Connor, Brian and Angela O'Hanlon, and Bob and Dorothy Aldred.

Contact Jo Marsh Tel 3843-5442

Paddington Cluster

Reality or Illusion?

We've been considering what is real, what is true, what we would like to remain unchanged from over the years. What are the illusions or reality we prefer to hold on to, and we have considered/discussed at great length why/whether we should change our name from 'St Mary's in Exile' to something else.

We believe that the name 'St Mary's in Exile' encapsulates our story and our identity, and is known already by those inside and outside the community. When talking about our community, it is common to say just 'St Mary's', so those who feel that the subtitle 'in Exile' has negative connotations should not worry too much. That's the small print, and in any case, for others it carries a positive message.

So, for us the reality is -

- The current name carries the history of our journey where we have come from and in years to come the story and understanding of our journey will always be clear in history. Also many of our members still regard themselves as 'Catholic' and want that link to be retained.

- The brand name of 'St Mary's in Exile' is well known as a consequence of very significant exposure by the media. To change the name would result in the profile of the entity becoming near invisible. The cost of rebranding to achieve the existing profile is well beyond our means.

- The action of changing the name of 'St Mary's in Exile' would ultimately result in the entity ceasing to exist due to the reasons mentioned above, in particular the loss of our brand and image.

- We believe that we need to be true to our Vision and Mission.

Of course the group does address other topics than the name change. Our major group preoccupation is fulsome discussion around the questions posed by Karen Armstrong's 'Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life', such as, 'Why is it important to the practice of compassion to understand the functions of our old and new brain?', 'The importance of listening', 'What would be the realistic criteria of a compassionate company, organization, school, or community?' And the action of 'Spending a day tuning in to how people around you are feeling' and 'Treating others as you would wish to be treated yourself'.

Margaret Wheat



Northern Cluster is convened by Mary Long :maryd@people.net.au

Greenslopes Cluster

This cluster has been discussing Hal Taussig's book 'A new spiritual home: Progressive Christianity at the Grass Roots', a description of the groups of so-called 'progressive Christians' meeting in the U.S.A. This has enabled us to reflect on our own

community in the light of the characteristics of these groups that Taussig describes: spiritual vitality, intellectual integrity, transgressing gender boundaries, vitality without superiority, justice and ecology. His strong statements on the influence of Christian feminism

on our current spirituality, liturgy and theology prompted a recent presentation by Rosemary Grundy, deputy leader of the Presentation Sisters, on that topic. Rosemary's comprehensive presentation was very well received.

The group has several vacancies. It was set up as a Scripture discussion group and will maintain this basis for our discussions in 2014. We meet on the first Monday of the month, 7 to 9pm.

Contact: John and Gwenneth Roberts

Tarrigindi Cluster

Our cluster started with over a dozen people who met to share their disappointments and deeply held convictions on our position in the wider Church. These were times of great change and many found issues of doctrine were confronting and their needs were not being met so went to other clusters or ceased attending St Mary's TLC.

From this start a core group of nine have travelled together, discerning matters of spirituality, current topics in progressive theology and specific issues such as priesthood and personal journey to name a few.

While books from the library and drop shop, and other sources, attendance at lectures and the SMX weekly homilies have underpinned our discussions we have been free to do our own reading and download reviews presenting to the group when it is our time to lead the group. The leader rotates each month and

chooses with consensus/approval what they would like to share. We usually receive study or prayer notes in advance.

Support for one another is paramount and takes many forms. This may be practical help or through email.

Each member treasures the opportunities for growth in our spiritual journey provided by our group and would welcome others to join us.

We meet on a Tuesday from 10.30-noon and then share a pot luck lunch, latest 'going ons' and wherever the Spirit takes us. We are flexible about dates as it is important for as many members as possible to attend

Jude Larking

Contact: a_jlarking@optusnet.com.au

Western Cluster

We begin the evening with a social time, with a general chat and catch up. This sometimes has a pastoral care dimension. We share a cup of tea and food

contributed by group members. We share the venue (our own homes) and take it in turns to lead the discussion. We sometimes have special events during school holidays to allow for those who are workers to participate – a retreat day at Camp Mountain (Margie and Tom's place), Christmas meals at a chosen restaurant, a daytime meeting at Camp Mountain etc.

This year we have discussed the book by Karen Armstrong – Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life. Earlier we have chosen different topics eg What do we think prayers are and how have our views and practices changed over time?

The group is dynamic and all members have the opportunity to contribute to the direction of the group. We welcome new members and accept that some members sometimes find the group no longer suits them. We care for each other in times of need.

Kathi Hilderbrand, Wayne Sanderson

greygum2@bigpond.net.au



Southern Cluster is convened by Marg Ortiz :margdoc2@gmail.com

What People are Reading



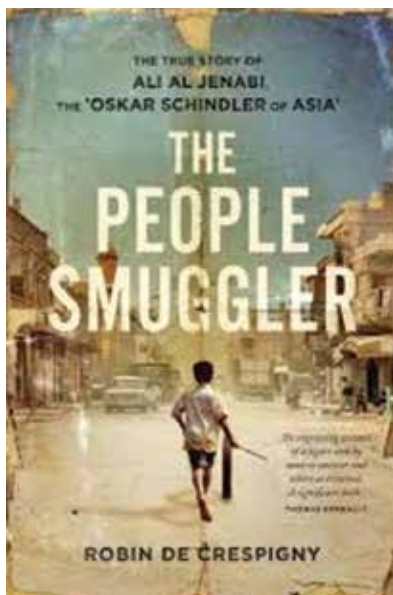
The People Smuggler
by Robin de Crespigny
(Viking, Penguin Group
Australia 2012).

At the age of 20 in 1991 Ali Al Jenabi was imprisoned in Saddam Hussain's notorious Abu Ghraib prison with his father, his grandfather and his younger brother.

After 4 years he was released. His father remained in prison. There was no news of his brother whom Ali last saw having his fingers chopped off one by one with an axe. Ali joined the resistance to Saddam Hussain and moved to Kurdistan.

When his resistance contacts started being imprisoned or murdered he realised that he must get out of Iraq.

He made several unsuccessful attempts to walk into Turkey usually with assistance of



someone who, for some money, would assist with transport and knowledge of the less dangerous crossing points. He managed to get his family to Kurdistan and after several unsuccessful attempts he crossed into Iran and made more unsuccessful attempts to get into Turkey. He had taken many jobs over the years to stay alive, to finance his escape attempts and bring his family to Iran. Eventually he was able to get false papers and pay the airfare to Indonesia. There he was defrauded of his remaining money by someone who promised him a place on a boat going to Christmas Island.

In desperation he decided that the only way he would get to Australia (he had a sister there who had married an Australian) would be to organise a boat himself. Thus he became what some would term a people smuggler (Smuggling is an act of covertly bringing something into another country. Those who arrive on Australia's shores by boat come openly to places like Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef or, as we have seen recently, sail into a mainland harbour.) Because there was such a demand from fellow Iraqis he organised a succession of boats. All were seaworthy and completed their journeys without loss of life, in part because he only sailed when the weather was good and took a route through smoother waters to Ashmore Reef. He charged what people could afford - in many cases that was nothing. Eventually he was betrayed to the AFP and arrested in Thailand when travelling on a false passport. As soon as his

short sentence was complete his detention was extended and he was 'extradited' to Australia. He had never been to Australia and arranging for people to get on boats to Australia is not a crime in Indonesia.

Subsequently he was tried in Darwin. The prosecution amongst other things asserted that he was helping people to 'jump the queue'. When the judge asked for evidence to justify that assertion they had none. The trial was adjourned and the prosecution went back to Canberra for a week. When they returned they admitted that they could produce no evidence to support the queue-jumping claim. He was found guilty of people smuggling. It is evident that the judge had some humanity. He noted the predicament that Ali had faced, that he only took what people could pay, that he had not made significant sums of money for himself, that he used seaworthy boats and that most of the passengers were eventually deemed to be bona fide refugees. His sentence of 8 years came with a recommendation that he be given parole after 4 years. With time he had already been in prison he had only 21 months to serve.

On his release he applied for refugee status. He was assessed and then heard no more. Only when a pro bono lawyer took the immigration minister to court for failing to reach a decision after more than a year (when



Ali Al Jenabi in Villawood detention centre

the government's own rules stated that a decision must be made within three months) was it revealed that his assessment had concluded that he met all the criteria for refugee status but the official who made that

decision was moved elsewhere whilst everyone who Ali contacted about the decision claimed that the official was away or would be back soon but they could not help. Then when the minister (Evans) made a decision, Ali was

declined refugee status and given a bridging visa which in practice means that he depends on the charity of his relatives who had by then been accepted as refugees.

In the words of Ali's lawyer, '*The only conclusion that I can draw is that he (the minister) has it in for you, or that he did not appreciate being forced to make a decision.*'

An appeal to the next minister (Bowen) was dismissed.

Ali remains in limbo. His fiancée of many years was refused a visa to visit Australia. His father was eventually released from prison a broken man. Of his brother there is still no news.

Peter Bore

Disturb me O Lord.

*Jesus make me a channel of disturbance;
Where there is apathy let me provoke;
Where there is compliance let me bring questioning;
Where there is silence let me be a voice;
Where there is too much comfort and too little action grant
disruption;
Where there are doors closed and hearts locked grant the
willingness to listen;
Where laws dictate and pain is overlooked;
Where tradition speaks louder than need;
Where we refuse to take control of our own spiritual growth,
Our own mission, our own poor, teach me to be radical.
O Divine One, grant that I may seek to do justice rather than talk
about it;
To be with the poor as well as for the poor;
To love the hard to love as well as the lovable;
To embrace the poor rather than kiss the feet of the crucifix.
For it is in giving we receive;
It is walking with that we truly understand;
It is in confronting evil that we achieve justice.
Lord, make me a channel of disturbance.
Amen*

The prayer of St Francis adapted by WATAC

COFFEE ANYONE ?



Have you ever given much thought to the present day phenomenon of coffee and the proliferation of coffee shops ?

I came from a generation that knew very little about coffee. I recall a school friend whose parents had a coffee tree in their yard and it was a bit of a joke what they were going to do with any crop. I am still waiting to hear 50 years later.

The principal drink in our house was a 'secret' pocket sized bottle of whisky that my father stashed and the occasional Tristrams' soft drink and of course tea. My mother took a lot of pride in brewing herself a cup of black tea. Visitors were always welcomed with the offer of a cup of tea.

Whilst tea held a prominent position within our household I can tell you I never touched the stuff and really had no idea of the mechanics of brewing tea or the art of sipping.

In fact at the ripe old age of 16 I gained employment at a local bank and I was promptly informed that one of my important duties each morning was to make morning tea. There was no mention of coffee.

I had recalled seeing an advertisement for making tea, one teaspoon per person and one for the pot. Now there were 15 staff

plus one for the pot and a couple more for good luck.

Funnily there were no complaints about my concoction. Nevertheless I was relieved when another recruit started work the following Monday and assumed the role of making morning tea and the other important task of collecting all the paper rubbish and placing it in daily bins which were kept for exactly one week and then destroyed.

Whilst there was the daily morning tea ritual the prospect of afternoon tea was never raised. The prevailing attitude after lunch was, well, the doors will be closed at 3. How quickly can we leave the premises ? There was many a day I would be home washing the car by 4 pm.

After 6 months at the branch I was transferred to the 'big smoke' otherwise known as Queen Street. This particular department took up a whole floor and had its own morning tea or lunch room.

Each morning a tray of coffee buns (note coffee) would arrive and around 10 o'clock all and sundry would assemble from juniors to typists (from the typing pool no less) and all degrees of managers (strictly male).

It was all very convivial. The State Manager would actually ask of your welfare and you would

mumble some sort of reply and then awkwardly squirm away. This was of course not the venue to discuss our planned coup d'etat of management.

Nevertheless, morning tea in the morning tea room was a 'must do' event and staff of all levels mixed freely. The downside was that you could get jammed up against a creature that you or fellow junior colleagues just loathed and any excuse to leave the room was valid.

Despite all this the morning tea never had a coffee smell about it and perhaps take-away coffee cups had not been invented ! We are talking 1960's.

So where did this coffee phenomenon all start ? Sure there was a small spattering of coffee shops in the City but did anyone go there ? I don't remember anyone saying they were going for a coffee. I do recall drinking a cup of instant coffee at home when I was in my late teens but it was not a daily thing. I think it all comes down to social change, particularly in the work place.

With the so called modernisation of office space, morning tea or luncheon rooms became smaller or non-existent. This coincided with a flatter staff structure with everybody on the same level except the bosses. An us and them culture was able to flourish.



Once upon a time there was a clock on and clock off procedure. Now people are frowned upon if they want to leave work before dark and if you arrive for work at say 7 am, so what ? You are not Robinson Crusoe.

So coffee has become the daily prop you have to have. Takeaway tea does not have the same ring to it. I need a coffee to take into work at 7 and by 10 am I will need another with Mary and Joe. Note I am not inviting the whole floor, just Mary and Joe. I can't trust the others anyway. And I will need

another by four if I am working after six.

And the choice of coffee does provide a degree of daily mental stimulation The order could run to say a mug of flat white, a skinny half strength flat white, a regular latte on soy and a good old cappuccino. You ask of the barista with wry grin have you got all that?

There is also the politic of the coffee shop and its location. Will I be seen by the right people passing by or within the shop?

Come to think of it do I want to be seen! Do I need to more seriously consider my choice of coffee shop? This could be a career move.

To their credit coffee shops have given birth to one of the greatest modern inventions, namely the Rewards Card. The card monitors your coffee intake and after 5 or 6 coffees you get a free one. It is like cash at bank !

Anyhow, would you just excuse me please. I have to slip out and pick up my afternoon fix.

Terrence F Byrne



St Mary's Matters - Edition 34

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Printed by John Hallett
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*Articles, advertising, letters, photos are always welcome. Send to margdoc2@gmail.com
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... let it rise

**Beneath the noise and clutter of culture
beyond the ego, image and illusions
deep within
is the unique, naked 'I am'.**

**It is a pure, peaceful, sacred self
the innate core of our being
the essence
that longs for love and knows the truth.**

**It captures our attention at the times
when our hearts are stretched and shaken
and it seeps
into the cracks in our sadness and surrender.**

**Yet it is always there, un-resurrected
waiting for the false façade to fall away
so as to rise
and flood the very fabric of our lives.**

**So I seek to sink into this silent, sacred self
to be united with this divine within
and to let it rise
and flow like the swelling tide
into my heart, my being and beyond.**

*Margaret Clifford
Written after reflection at Easter 2013*