

St Mary's Matters Namaste



The sacred in me
acknowledges the sacred
in you.

We are one

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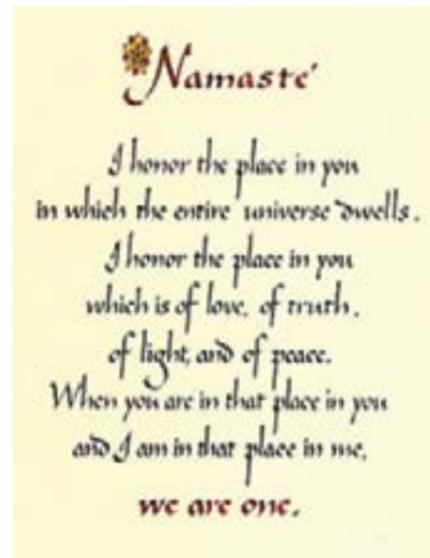
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silence beyond silence

There is silence that is deeper than deep. It is silence beyond silence. It is beyond the sounds of the earth, the birds, the bugs and even the trees. It is the very heartbeat of life. In this place, there is only connection to the Self. The place is beyond words. It can only be felt. Today, I bring this place with me no matter where I go. I ask to go deeper. I am not afraid. I am willing.



There is a reciprocal nature in Spirit. The more we open to it, the more it opens to us. This may sound dualistic, but it is not. It is all within ourselves: the opening, the reciprocal nature, the more, the allness. We hold the key to this secret garden. It is here, right here.

I really have nothing more to say today, besides I think it is important that I claim this place more often and spend more time here, no matter what I am doing and no matter what is going on. May we meet each other here. It's called Namaste...

*Rita Andriello -
Consciousness on Demand Blog*

The Door Sign at Unit 6



How has the sign “Namaste” on my front door blest me and what are the effects of my focusing on this word?

I have stood in front of the sign. It looks a very happy, dancing and alive sign spelling out the word: ‘Namaste’ with the love symbol above it.

The God in me honours the God within. I am invited to open the door and go within – to rest and abide in love’s Presence. Who knows how the Truth of that word will unfold? It seems to have a life of its own. I need do nothing. However I can honour what comes from within.

As I sit in a comfortable chair I may become aware of looking at an object that speaks to me of love, beauty or gratitude. It may seem external to me, yet what it inspires is within me. We are one.

It has, certainly, made a difference to me when I am standing in the kitchen preparing food. The wonders I am seeing in the variety of food and other ingredients are amazing. The deliciousness of the food is worth the honour of mindful appreciation. “Taste and see the Goodness of the Lord” and it is within. We are One.

When the doorbell rings and I go to welcome visitors, the sign is then beside and above me. I would like

to welcome them in the spirit of Namaste.

As I go out and close the door behind me may Namaste go with me where ever I go. May the God within me see and honour the God in everyone and everything, as well as in every situation- even the most challenging.

We are all in the Reality and manifestation of The One. May Namaste lead to the fullness of awareness and awakening to That which IS.

Barbara Fingleton

Unexpectedly

It disappeared one night -
This need of mine;
This need to be,
This need to make it right,
The necessity to see,
To know, to care, to find and understand,
To feel, to give, to make, to doubt,
To laugh or weep,
To keep on being me -
The whole thing just wore out
And I was free
It came to be, it fell out of the blue -
Permission to evaporate came through.

I suddenly became thin air,
Or even less;
Neither here nor there,
But everywhere I guess,
And nowhere too.
I turned to spirit;
The perfect shooting-through.
Beyond all space and time
A lifetime's wear and tear
Was made sublime.
A quick and airy little gasp was done
As up I went into the moon and sun
Like some fading floating song.
It made such perfect sense;
No stain, no trace, no evidence.
Not need to leave or to belong.
No need to think or calculate;
I simply just accepted it for free.
What life had given me -
Permission to evaporate.

Michael Leunig 2014



Light and Darkness

I thought that in writing about Light and Darkness I would start with an overall view of darkness – particularly how we use it symbolically, then have a look at the concept of the dark night of the soul and then I'd like to share my own experience and finish with a poem.

Later on, I am going to use the 'God' word and when I do I will clarify what I mean by it.

So what is darkness? Opposite of light? Absence of Light?

We use it literally – for places where we don't want light to penetrate such as darkrooms in old-fashioned photography and occasionally we embrace it as at the end of a long tiring day when we wish to sleep. We also welcome the dark for our meditation time at St Mary's on a Saturday evening. Paul Simon opens his song Sounds of Silence with 'Hello darkness my old friend'.

I'd like to suggest that there are two particular reasons why those places of darkness are positive. Firstly, they are freely entered into for a particular purpose and secondly, they are finite. When we go to sleep there will be only so many hours before sun rise. In our meditation time we know that soon someone will put the light on. Paul Simon liked to go into his bathroom where the acoustics were good and sit in the dark to compose music. At any point he could turn the light on or leave.

What I'm interested in are situations that appear to be beyond our control. We know that darkness is used to describe evil, the devil and - despite the light from all

those fires – hell itself. Even away from scripture associations are negative.

The C5th - C10th in Europe when there was little cultural or literary activity and a lot of emigration and decline in national wealth is known as the Dark Ages. During WW II reference was repeatedly made to the 'dark days' ahead. We continue to describe hard times as 'dark days' – periods when things go wrong or are challenging – whether with health, work, family, belief systems, loss or death of loved ones.

Emotions at these times are grief, sadness, hopelessness, despair. Sometimes there is loss of the mind, even loss of the will to live. This can be a terrifying place to be.

And just over two years ago, I found myself in it. I became so petrified by my situation that I lost my faith and everything I thought I believed was put to the test. Some might describe that experience as my 'Dark Night of the Soul'. Some might say, as did St John of the Cross who first wrote of it that I could or should embrace the pain and struggle as being necessary to achieve unity with his view of God; that it was a blessing to suffer as Jesus himself suffered although in fact nowhere does Jesus nor any of the disciples teach the necessity of 'the dark night of the soul'.

And it did not fit with my belief system. My God did not demand penance and

suffering in return for favour. My God, the Source of All Life, the Ineffable Presence, Shakti, the Primordial Cosmic Energy, Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit of the Lakota, was about energy moving and extending itself throughout the whole of creation, including me, in order to experience more of the Light from which it came. The example of a transfigured Jesus as described in Mark's Gospel was, and still is, much more in keeping with my beliefs than the example of a suffering one who wants me to suffer too.

So I went back to a passage from *The Curious Incident of The Dog in The Night-Time* by Mark Haddon where he talks about how scientists were puzzled by the fact that the sky is dark at night, even though there are billions of stars in the universe. This book has always been a favourite of mine. I first read it about eight years ago and was captivated by that image of billions and billions of stars being present but unseen. This time I was also comforted and inspired because another part of my belief about energy and creation is 'as above so below; as without, so within'. If the darkness of the night sky was really lit with the light of billions of unseen stars so was my internal darkness lit by the ever- present



Light. I had nothing to fear. I didn't have to beg favours. Every aspect of Waheguru (Var- he – guroo) – one of the Sikh names for God meaning Wonderful Enlightener – was available to me right there in the darkness – unconditionally. I remembered – literally remembered as in putting all the aspects back together again – that I had a big God – which was just as well because a small God was not going to be much use to me.

In the book of Kings we can read how Solomon brought the Arc of the Covenant to its permanent home. It describes how the overpowering glory of the place contrasted with Solomon's words: *Then spake Solomon, 'The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness. I have surely built thee a house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever'.* Solomon confirmed that he had built a settled place for God to abide in for ever. This God was not just popping in now and again when the sun was shining or turning up on the Sabbath and then disappearing – this God intended to dwell in the thick darkness for ever. For me, to dwell somewhere is to fully and continuously inhabit it; to fill every molecule of the available space. It is more than to live in a residence that can be sold or moved on from or demolished. It is a place where the energy settles, expands and puts down deep roots. The Hebrew word used for this settling of the Divine Presence is Shekinah. It derives from the word meaning to nest or nesting and it is a feminine word – which is why it is often said to represent the feminine attributes of

God. I imagine the Great Mother of many traditions, hunkering down over her children, protective and immovable. And there's further support for this approach in the fact that this event occurred in the 7th month, Eth a-nim, which means perennial, enduring. So what happened to this God? Where did he or she go? And would we like to claim him/her back? How big is our God?

I said I would finish with a poem. Some of you have heard me read it previously. It came from a conversation with my son eight years ago when we discussed the first reading. He was about 12 at the time. For me this poem summarises what I've been trying to say and incorporates both that Great Mother energy and the permanent presence of Light in darkness. It is called 'Mother of Light' and it was written at that time by my son.

Mother of Light
When your road is twisting



*through deep thick fog
And diving lower down than ever
before
You know it's time to remake your
path
Cuz life just won't wait any more*

*Just cuz the rope's been cut and
the weight's falling down
It don't mean the basket can't still
ascend
And when you hear the tune you
know it's coming soon
And now ain't the time to pretend*

*And heaven and hell are all very
well
But what's in the middle's bizarre
Its part above, part below and I
really don't know
Why we don't call ourselves what
we are*

*Even hell has its own light though
not very bright
Trying to shine out the front from
the back
Although sometimes the light gets
lost in the night
And then we are stuck with just
black*

*But in the darkness you'll find, in
the back of your mind
A truly incredible sight
A pinpoint of gleam waiting to be
seen
To show darkness is the mother of
light*

Fionnuala Smyth

Namaste!

There was a girl whom I taught who would sometimes come to the classroom for a chat before lessons began. She was quite a good-looking girl, of average intelligence, but lacking in self-esteem.

'Nobody likes me!' she confided to me one day. 'Are you sure?' I replied. 'Well, I like you, so you have at least one person. I think you're a very attractive girl.'

I could see she was grateful for my regard, but of course it wasn't enough. She needed the friendship, the esteem of her peers. She craved acceptance with the 'in' crowd, the seemingly most popular group of the class. 'They won't have me, they're just a clique, they won't talk to me,' she went on.

I considered the problem.

'Well, if they won't talk to you, try someone else, someone from a different group. -Better still, someone who doesn't belong to any

group. That's my suggestion.

'There's a girl who looks a bit lonely, but I don't really like her. She's too fat, she's awkward, she doesn't look smart.'

'She's the very person you could befriend. Talk to her, try to see something interesting in her.'

My girl – I'll call her Celeste – looked doubtful, but she agreed to give it a go.

I stayed on the sidelines, yet I couldn't help but notice a burgeoning friendship between Celeste and her new companion.

Some time later Celeste bounced into the music room before school.

'Sister Joan,' she announced, 'Felicity is actually a very interesting person when you get

to know her. She's kind, she's very artistic, and she's fun. And I'm sure she likes me too.'

Further developments surprised me even more. The self-styled superior group in the class seemed to be seeking out and befriending the two former outcasts. Seeking the Divine in the other person, though Celeste would not have been consciously aware of it as such, had enabled the Divine goodness to shine more brilliantly in her.

Seeing this Divine essence in the other can be the catalyst that ignites the spark of the Divine in oneself.

Namaste!

Joan Mooney



Life and Death – A Foot in Both Camps

This story began just over five years ago. In November 2009, I was diagnosed with an aggressive rare cancer, a soft tissue sarcoma of the uterus. It carried a very poor prognosis, with an average life expectancy of six to twelve months. As you can see, I have outlived that prediction- thanks to the help of skilled surgeons who have performed four operations over the last five years to remove ‘invaded bits’ of me. I also embarked on a major ‘spring clean’ of my mind, body, and spirit.

I knew however, that the day would come when further surgery would not be effective in warding off the recurrences. That time came in early January this year. I had been getting recurring bouts of abdominal and shoulder pain with fevers and fatigue. I had a CAT Scan which showed that I now have secondaries in my liver, one kidney, the abdominal cavity, and that my pre-existing lung secondaries have increased in size.

I decided to stop working- that I needed time to ‘smell the roses’ before I decline further in my health. I am a doctor, a General Practitioner. I have found General Practice to be full of ‘soul’, and I have felt very privileged to connect with the humanity of my patients.

So this is about how I am dealing with facing dying. If any part of this story is helpful to even a few people I will be glad that I have been prepared to bare my soul.

A keystone for me is that ‘my life is more than about me’. I am not just Mary Pease- I am my Soul, and the interactions and connections with the people around me, and with the beauty of nature. I think it is a trap to focus purely on yourself when your cancer progresses. Self-

absorption blocks you from caring about others, noticing the beauty and humour in the world around you, and from being a participant in life. And besides, self-absorption is downright boring!!

I believe that the person who has cancer or a terminal condition is the one who ‘sets the bar’ for relating to family and friends. Mostly, friends and family feel helpless and distressed, and don’t know what to say. It is up to the person who owns the cancer or terminal condition to set the scene for others to relate to us. I try to reassure my family and friends that their love and prayers are a huge comfort, that I remain interested in what is happening in their lives, and that there is still a lot more to me than just my cancer.

I acknowledge that Peter Kennedy believes that ‘we are all one, and as individuals, we do not really exist’. I have been very blessed to have experienced ‘oneness’, on a few occasions, and it is a very euphoric state. However, I still resonate with my own individuality.

I see myself as a 58 year old human being with a Soul, a woman, an Australian, a mother, a daughter and a sister. I am a retired GP. I live with my mad golden retriever dog. I go walking, go to yoga, belong to SMX Community, and I love life. I also happen to have cancer. But I do not want my cancer to define who I am.

If we brand ourselves as Cancer Victims, that is exactly how others see us and relate to us. All that other people can see is a cardboard cut-out version of us, with ‘Cancer Victim’ stamped all over us.

I now want to talk about the power of Love. For me “Love lifts me up”.



I believe that God IS Love, and that when we human beings act from Love, that God is acting with us and through us. Love is incredibly powerful.

This brings me to the ‘hot topic’ of intercessional prayer! Fr Peter gave a homily around 6 weeks ago about Polytheism and Monotheism. He talked about the fact that our planet Earth has no interest in whether individuals die, or what disasters mankind enacts. I do believe this, as I have often contemplated that it makes no difference in ‘the overall scheme’ of Mother Earth if I die. In fact, my dying means that there will be one fewer human being straining the earth’s resources!

However, I also believe that humans also operate in another sphere. We have another realm where the power of Love can connect us. By showing love and compassion to others, we send them loving energy which can be healing on an emotional, physical, or spiritual level.

So even though Mother Earth ‘does not give a damn’ about me, the love of my family, friends, patients, and the SMX Community helps me enormously. When people pray for me, I believe that they are sending God’s Love to me and enriching

and energising my Spirit. But for intercessional prayer to be of any benefit, I think that the individual has to be receptive- there seems to be something inherent about Love needing to be both ‘taken in and also returned’ for it to have benefit.

I also believe that Love never dies. Our Spirit/Soul/Essence continues to exist in some form of Energy after we die. I sometimes do Contemplative Meditation to Mary Magdalene and St Mary of the Cross. I can feel a tactile energy connection and can gain insights and strength from these Meditations. So for those of you who believe in Intercessional prayer, I would say- “keep it up”!

Many studies have shown that people who have cancer survive longer, and with better quality of life, if they have close friends or are in loving relationships. So there is even scientific evidence that love extends life.

I also find practising Gratitude is an enormous support. When I have rough days with pain and nausea, I now retreat to my bed for a few hours. I am grateful that I have the luxury of being able to do this, now that I have finished work. I am grateful that I live in Australia, have a roof over my head, and can feel the breeze coming through the windows and hear the birdsong.

I am grateful that my sister, and my son and daughter, will be there to care for me when that need arises. I am grateful they will have back up and support from my brother and sister-in-law and my parents, as well as my close friends. I am grateful for all the love that I feel coming to me, and that I have had a good five years since my cancer was diagnosed.

Occasionally, my pain flares and it is hard to get to sleep, so I will put on a Guided Meditation CD.

This really helps to ‘soothe the savage beast’ of pain, and gives me comfort.

For the most part, I aim to “Live in the Now”. However, it is necessary to plan for the future. I have tried to put my affairs in order, and have commenced the ‘difficult conversations’. These conversations are with my sister and children- about my future care, the details of my will, funeral plans. I am very mindful of how difficult it will be for my sister and my son and daughter, and I continue to remain concerned about being a burden on them for too long. I also feel distressed that their lives will be ‘on hold’ during my dying process. However, I have to accept that ‘It is what it is, and it will be what it will be’.

I have found that talking about these unpleasant topics gives a sense of relief afterwards. It has certainly desensitized that topics, such that it is less painful the next time we need to return to these conversations.

The trouble with looking to the future is that you also ‘connect’ with the declining and dying process and the pain. I have to discipline myself and remind myself- “Mary, by projecting to your future decline, you are bringing that decline into the here and now, and living it now.” I want to LIVE the remainder of my life, not DIE my remaining life. So I find that it is necessary to take forays into the future, but then return to Base Camp ‘in the now’.

I have accepted my situation. “It is what it is”. There is no point railing against it. There is no point expending energy on internal conversations such as ‘poor me’!

Despite accepting my situation, I continue to maintain interests, retain my sense of humour,

and connect with family and friends. I aim to live a loving and compassionate life which is respectful of other people.

I bought myself a fridge magnet which says “Life is all about how you handle Plan B”.

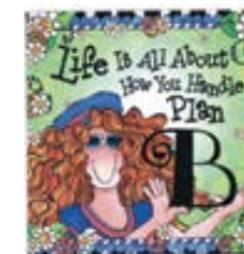
How true that is for so many of us. Life throws us curved balls. We need to be constantly evolving and problem solving. If we have as our foundations Love, Resilience, and an Acceptance that things don’t always go our own way, then we make our lives, and the lives of those around us, much more content and enriched.

If we live well, we may have a better chance of dying well.

In ‘winding up’, I just want to share a brief story about one of my patients. Rachel is a lovely 21 year old woman who has mild intellectual impairment. She had been my patient since she was 7 years old. She sent me a card and a lovely little bracelet she had made herself. The charm she had chosen was ‘Cupid with his bow and arrow’. The message she wrote in her card said “Sorry to hear you are not well. I hope this bracelet makes you feel better.”

Well, resistance is useless! Of course I am going to feel better from taking on all the love that went into that bracelet.

Mary Pease



Endless Anthem

My spirit leaps within
and joins the chorus
of spring birds
mindfully tweeting
thank you, thank you, thank you
for this gift of life

for the fireworks razzamatazz of it
the child-like wonder of it
the pylon-driving shudder of it
the unexpected-unknown of it
all of it
all its fleeting, precious breaths

I stretch to greet it
welcome it, embrace it
savour it, drink it, consume it
greedily
every precious morsel
every drop of it

and love grabs it
infuses it, highjacks it
and gives it away, generously
freely
a gift to others
all its finite, unfolding days

bread broken, offered
wine sipped, shared,
a sumptuous feast
of ever-changing seasons
an endless anthem
of oneness and love.

*Margaret Clifford
October 2014*



How Best to Pray for Other People



We pray for others when we gather around the table for the Eucharistic Celebration as well as during the Prayers of the Faithful.

At the Eucharist we are conscious of being one in the love that we call God.

Praying for others – intercession – is one of the very highest of human activities, and we can never do too much of it. When praying like this, God, out fellows, and ourselves are gathered together in a unique relationship, a loving unity of trust, need, and response. Intercession is never magic, nor even just telepathy. As St Paul tells us, the Holy Spirit himself joins our humble intercessions and takes part on both sides of the human-divine relationship; we must never underestimate his potential power.

At the same time this prayer must be utterly selfless: the effective intercessor empties himself of his own desires and preoccupations, seeking instead to become a clear channel of human love through which the love of God can reach the person and come into the

situation, being prayed for. Such prayer always creates a new situation. Even though things may seem to go on much as before, a decisive power has in fact entered in. Therefore, a new situation has already been created with effects for good that eventually will be obvious to all, or with effects we may never know about in this life.

Basic Truths

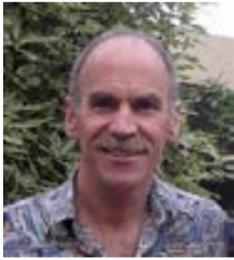
Of course, no two people will pray for others in exactly the same way, but there are a few basic truths about the whole vital and far-reaching subject worth bearing in mind and following in practice. No intercessions will be very effective unless they are inspired by, and based on, love – our love for the person or persons involved, our love for and faith in God – which is automatically reciprocated by God's

unending and unchanging love to us. As William Temple describes it:

Prayer is the giving out of our love, in communion with the love of God, towards those for whom we pray; but if there is no love in us for whom we are saying prayers, there will be no true prayer said. Yet where there is very little love, prayer can increase it; and by expressing in our prayer the very little love we have, it may be we shall come to feel more love for those we pray for.

*David Gunston
Submitted by Margaret Brand*

Being an Outsider with Jesus



An encouragement to dissenting Catholics

Our own experience:

I am indebted to a dissenting Catholic for a defining insight for my own life. In his book, *A Question of Conscience* (1967), the U.K. Catholic priest, theologian and seminary teacher, Charles Davis, explained his decision to leave the church. To him the Catholic church had become “a vast, impersonal, unfree and inhuman system”. But what struck me were his words: ‘I decided to make my becoming my own.’

Reading these words around the age of 20, I immediately felt a deep connection with Davis, as I was aware that I had to take the same responsibility for my own life. This intention was strongly reinforced through my own seminary education in the USA just a few years later, through a study of the question of authority. I imagine some dissenting Catholics share the same intention.

The motive for taking responsibility for our own growth is the compelling need to be authentic, to be true to ourselves. Just as the ‘authenticity’ of a text derives from the ‘author’ of the text, the same is true of our lives. To be authentic,

one must be the author of one’s own life – ‘to make our becoming our own.’

By contrast, we often face authoritarian voices, where others want to decide things for us. Now it is a good thing to consider and to decide what authority biblical and church traditions hold for us. We share a profoundly rich Christian heritage. Dissenting Catholics recognise this by retaining the name ‘Catholic’, even though you have rejected some elements of Catholic authority. But we need to maintain a conversation between ancient tradition and the modern wisdom we learn from our own lived experience. I think this is in harmony with the wisdom of Pope Francis that young people need to have wings and roots.

For Catholics, the role of priesthood is pivotal to the issue of authority. The affirmation of gender equality in ministry is at the heart of both the traditions of Jesus and the teaching of Paul. The stand of an inclusive Catholic community I think is not just about women being priests but it is about the basic notion of priesthood, which I believe is the priesthood of all believers. Greg Reynolds (Inclusive Catholics, Victoria) is quite right to affirm that the only way for renewal to occur is by empowering the laity, ‘to blur the lines’ as he says, for the lines do not exist in a gospel reality. “The spirit gives gifts to all for the sake of all”. (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Biblical traditions

Happily, the Bible itself has preserved many stories and texts that support alternative and minority views within the tradition, that are inclusive rather

than exclusive, and that affirm the salvation of the outsider. This is especially true of the Jewish traditions of the Hebrew Bible, now reflected in the comprehensive ethos of the modern synagogue where all Jews are welcome, even atheist Jews.

This Jewish ethos starkly challenges the ethos of an authoritarian church. I find it hard to avoid the observation that the authoritarian ethos of various branches of Christianity relates to the dominant place that theology and dogma have been given in Christianity, whereas Judaism has always emphasised orthopraxis, observing the law through authentic living, and is rather light on dogma and systems of belief.

This contrast is evident between the writings of Paul and of James around the relationship of faith and works, both of which are essential. It is equally implicit in the gospel where Jesus clearly warns people who call him Lord but do not live the way he taught. The way of Jesus was explicitly the way of dissent from the prevailing interpretation of the Torah by the scribes – the



Jesus with the woman at the well, who was a Samaritan. In doing this Jesus broke three Jewish customs.

Jewish theologians.

It also involved a radical change in table fellowship as Jesus shared food with the outsiders of his day and told parables in favour of those who did not observe the Torah as expected. The gospel itself is the basis for loyal dissent within the church.

From the beginning, the Hebrew Bible affirms the place of outsiders within the love of God, especially in the two powerful stories of Hagar and Lot. Unlike Abraham, the honoured father of the faithful, Hagar and Lot who live so close to Abraham’s household have no call, no promise, no blessing and no covenant. But both stories tell how God sends his divine messengers to save each of them. The ancient Hebrews well knew that there is divine mercy outside of covenant. Equally there surely is salvation outside of the Christian church.

Our consequent self-understanding

Our willingness to follow Charles Davis and Jesus, to make our becoming our own, relates closely to the way we understand ourselves. I want to suggest it involves an identity reassignment. In our different Christian traditions we have been offered a way of salvation through belonging to the church. This notion of salvation assumes we take on the identity of an insider.

However, the teaching and way

of Jesus clearly show that he took on the identity of an outsider. His focus was upon those alienated by the tradition and he died as such a one. As an outsider Jesus relinquished the privileges of an insider. So did Abraham when he left his Father’s house.

It is ironic that Abraham as friend of God has become a symbol of the ‘insider’ in three faiths, when his faith originated with a journey into the unknown, away from all that was familiar, away from the comfort of belonging. In today’s



St Mary’s move into exile from the old church.

pluralist and alienated world, as in the world of Jesus, it is this element of the story of Abraham that epitomises the Way of the gospel.

A journey away from the familiar was the journey chosen by Charles Davis. It seems also to be the journey chosen by Inclusive Catholics and by the community of St Mary’s in Exile. We must take this journey for the sake of the gospel that calls us to dissent from authoritarian structures that inhibit our journey of faith. As Greg has noted, the journey at the fringe of the church also enables us to see with clearer eyes.

It seems to me that reassigning our identity from insider to outsider will bring a revolution in Christianity. For it is not just a change in the content of theology but a change in the status of theology per se. This involves a change of focus away from the teacher – Jesus as the Christ – to the teaching – Jesus as a reforming Jewish rabbi. Christianity will then return to its roots as the community of people of the Way, characterized by journeys out, not by the comfort zone of mother church.

In order to take this journey, I have adopted a guiding rubric – ‘believe as little as possible’. I hope that by minimizing our dogmatic elements and maximizing our hospitality to all people and all ideas, we will be more truly faithful to the way of

Jesus.

Rev Dr Paul Tonson

Born in New Zealand, Paul treasures the freedom of conscience of his Baptist heritage. Paul developed a progressive viewpoint through his seminary studies in the USA and graduate studies in Hebrew Bible.

After years in pastoral ministry, theological education and interfaith endeavours, Paul now administers the PathWays presenting faith and freethought worldviews to Year 10 students.



We are All One

We are NOT all ONE. The Image is wrong.



Consider what One depicts...
Single, alone, a discrete entity
neither two nor a half, one of a
countless stream of numbers.
How can that image equate with
the All in everything but without
boundaries.

Think of a rainbow of colours each
individual colour is unique and
special though it may be like others.
Each is part of a whole ...Light.
That light would not be complete
without each and every colour. We
are the colours of God. This image
too is limiting.

Think of an Ocean it is made up
of many droplets of water. Each
droplet even when separated from
the Ocean is still part of the Ocean
but no droplet IS the Ocean. We are
the droplets and God the Ocean. I

know that image falls short too.

Think of a Tapestry; each colourful
thread is beautiful in itself but
woven into the tapestry it becomes
so much more. It is part of the
tapestry and yet is still a unique
thread. We are the threads of the
Grand Tapestry. Yet again it is
limited.

Consider a painting formed of
many colours. Each colour is
unique. Look out the window and
how many different shades of green
do you see. As the colours are
placed on the canvas and combined
or spread around they bring
something new and wonderful to
birth. They are still there but linked
to the colours around them and yet
are part of the whole. The painter
and the painting are God and we

are the colours. However it is much
more than this.

Science says that all matter is also
energy and that there is only one
basic type of energy. Therefore
each person though unique to our
eyes is but part of a continuous
flow of energy within the Universe
indistinguishable at the quantum
level. We are God and always have
been and always will be. We just
never fully accepted it. True but ...

All images are but shadows of the
truth. Words are but noise in the
wind.

Be still and know God in the
silence.

Kevin Ryan

On Meeting You

I greet the God in you
I see your divinity
the spirit shining behind your eyes
embodied now in Beauty

As your hand takes mine
I marvel at this outward sign
of the inner grace we share
by meeting heart to heart

And so in recognition,
in joy and celebration
I invoke the blessing of the dawn-red sky
I sprinkle the blessing of star dust upon you

May the wind that caresses you bless your
mind
the rain that reaches you water your soul

And as my gift to you
from my dance with the Rose
I offer you Love eternal unchanging
the blessing of Love
namaste, namaste.

Fionualla Smyth

The Eight Points

At SMX we have proposed that we are a community where what we do (orthopraxis) is more important than what we believe (orthodoxy). This helps us be a more inclusive community and ensures that we focus on living the sort of life we believe to be the best we can. We are followers of 'the way' of Jesus.

With this in mind it may be useful to consider the Eight Points which were first formulated by the Centre for Progressive Christianity in America and adapted for the UK by Progressive Christian Network, Britain, not as a creed or a statement of faith, but as an expression of how we live as Christians.

We are Christians who...

1. Have found an approach to God through the life and teachings of Jesus;
2. Recognise the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the gateway to God's realm, and acknowledge that their ways are true for them, as our ways are true for us;
3. Understand the sharing of bread and wine in Jesus' name to be a representation of an ancient vision of God's feast for all peoples;
4. Invite all people to participate in our community and worship life without insisting that they become like us in order to be acceptable (including but not limited to):
 - believers and agnostics
 - conventional Christians and questioning sceptics
 - women and men

- those of all sexual orientations and gender identities
- those of all races and cultures
- those of all classes and abilities
- those who hope for a better world and those who have lost hope;

5. Know that the way we behave toward one another and toward other people is the fullest expression of what we believe;

6. Find more grace in the search for understanding than we do in dogmatic certainty, more value in questioning than in absolutes;

7. Form ourselves into communities dedicated to equipping one another

for the work we feel called to do: striving for peace and justice among all people; protecting and restoring the integrity of all God's creation; and bringing hope to those Jesus called the least of his sisters and brothers;

8. Recognise that being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege.

Submitted by Ingerid Meagher from the PCN UK website.



This image which belongs to the Israel/Palestine Mission Network is a beautiful symbol of religious inclusiveness.

Women who Influenced their Times

and continue to be relevant today - Part 2

The Tarragindi Cluster met four times on the chosen topic: 'Women who influenced their times and who continue to be relevant today.'

Members chose to present each week a short biography of one woman from the three general periods: BCE to 13th century, 14th century to 18th century and 1900s to the present. Our fourth meeting drew our discussions together [and prepared a report for the magazine.] The varied and various selections surprised and delighted us.

We explored, discussed and reflected upon the contributions of these women in the advancement and awakening of spiritual and practical forces within their communities. It was never intended to be an exhaustive list and reflects the freedom of choice and democratic/demographic characteristics of our group.

In this edition of the magazine we include the second four of the women in the first era selections. Subsequent issues will continue this series and then move on to the next era.



BRIGID of Kildare
BRIGID of Kildare c 451-525- not to be confused with Bridget of Sweden. She is sometimes called

Mary of the Gael because of her great influence.

She founded several monastic institutions in Ireland, mainly for women. She is sometimes depicted in religious art as holding a bishop's crozier. In the Celtic liturgy an abbess was on the same level as a bishop with similar authority and power. The Synod of Whitby [mentioned later] changed that. A relic of her Irish shawl is kept in the cathedral at Bruges indicative of the far ranging influence. Some relics were removed to the tomb of St Patrick and Columba during the Viking invasions in the ninth century. Many miracles ascribed to Brigid over the centuries relate to the healing of women. She continues to be honoured throughout western Europe and is considered Ireland's patron saint beside Patrick and Columba.



HILDA of Whitby
HILDA of Whitby c 614-680
This extraordinary woman was born into an English royal household during troubled times when pagan invaders from Mercia were attacking the established Christians in Northumbria. Hilda loved the gentle and lovely Celtic liturgy being challenged by the assertive Roman practice. Her family fled south but she later returned when the Celtic bishop Aiden invited her to found a

religious house for women. She established more such foundations as time went on and eventually became the famous Abbess of Whitby, the spiritual leader of a large community of sisters, novices and women and men studying for the service of God. She employed many workers on the convent property: farmers, sheep and cattle raisers, woodcutters etc. She prepared some of her charges for positions of authority in the church and is famous for discovering and encouraging Caedmon, a herdsman, to become England's first recognised poet. Her wisdom and advice was sought by scholars and religious across Europe. She presided over the famous Council of Whitby where the prescriptive and inflexible Roman liturgy and Easter timing, unfortunately, prevailed over the gentler Celtic practice. She accepted the decision in obedience and humility although her heart always favoured the other. Her last recorded words were "Have evangelical peace among yourselves".



HILDEGARD of Bingen
Hildegard of Bingen 1098-1179
This self-taught German mystic has been called an ideal model for the liberated woman. She was a poet, a preacher and a prophet, a scientist, composer, artist and social critic.

That Hildegard was an abbess is a bonus. For her, all science was a gift from God; and because society became neurotic, she said, it had to invent psychology.

She truly was a renaissance woman, several centuries before the Renaissance. Her letters are ample evidence of her influence across all strata of society: monks, popes, emperors and queens, people both lay and religious; all listened to her and sought to tap into her visionary wisdom. But she never hesitated to say what she thought or to do what she believed needed to be done. Hildegard would rebuke pope and emperor alike.

She wrote books on biology and medicine and a commentary on the Gospels, but her major works are theological, much concerned with her visions. She combined science, art and religion using parables and metaphors to clarify her message. She wrote extensively about social justice, about freeing the downtrodden, believing that every human being should have the opportunity to realise their God-given potential. Like Gerard Manley Hopkins, she saw the world as "charged with the grandeur of God", entrusted to our care and not to be mangled or destroyed; a woman for all seasons no doubt who has enjoyed a surge of popularity in recent years with plays and a musical and documentaries being inspired by her.



JULIANA of Norwich
JULIANA OF NORWICH 1342-c
1416

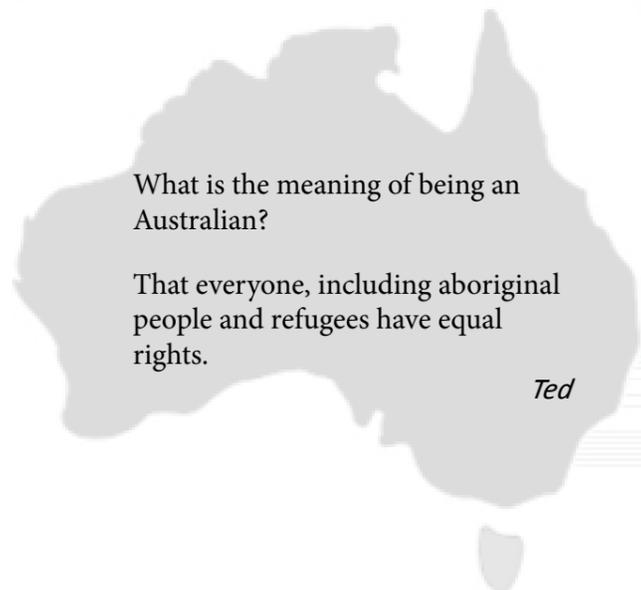
She is recognised as a great mystic in Anglican and Lutheran circles but never canonised or even beatified by the Catholic church, perhaps because she went against church teaching and preached God's love and compassion for sinners dying from the plague. Juliana may have been a Benedictine nun or an anchoress with her own cell in Norfolk.

She had intense visions in her thirties which she described in her book "Revelations of Divine Love". It is considered to be the earliest surviving book in the English language written by a woman.

She later wrote a theological exploration of her experience and became well known throughout England as a spiritual authority. She continues to be a celebrated mystic because of the clarity and depth of her divine visions.

She spoke of God's love in terms of joy and compassion, leaning towards universal salvation. She saw no wrath in God, despite this being the times of terrible plagues and peasant revolts. The lack of contemporary references to her controversial writings may indicate that the church authorities did not consider her worthy of refuting because she was a woman. Juliana saw God as both mother and father, and Jesus as brother.

Her most famous saying "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well" which she claimed to be spoken to her by God reflects her theology.



Recovering the Precious Gift

What thief broke in
and stole this precious gift?

Did I leave myself
unguarded, unprotected
in the dark of the night?
Or was I just careless
in small ways
and over time
it has been crowded out
stifled, almost choked to death?

What ever! It is out of reach!
And I must begin again
to tame the brain-driven noise
the over-thinking, impulsive reacting
and all those habits, addictions and ways of being
that stifle the spirit.

And so I begin again
the practice of stillness.

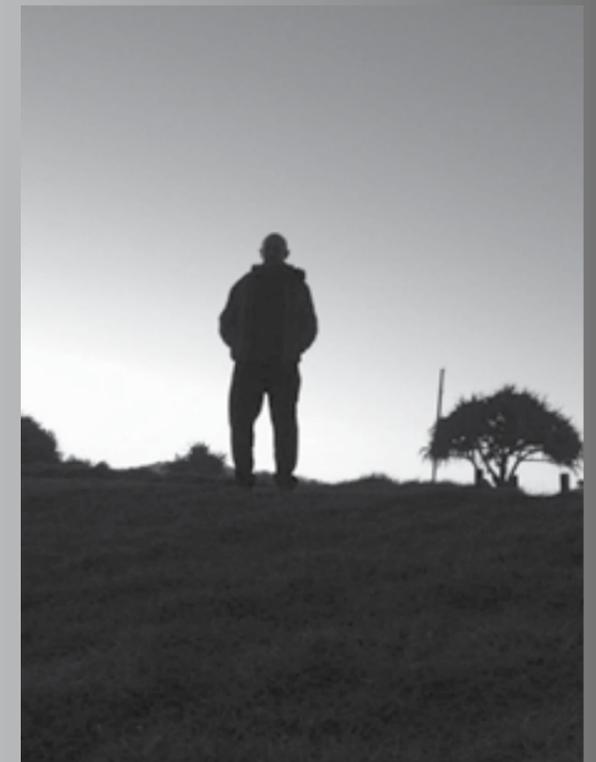
The wildness is loud and unyielding
and clings to power
demanding to remain in this learned pattern
flinging taunts of "too busy" and "too hard"

but in time
it will fade
and a quieter way of being
will resurface
and if I am waiting and willing
it will capture me

and I will recover
that precious gift
of silence,
that way of being beyond thought
of love welling up within
and over-flowing

and the pure taste of the moment
that is.

Margaret Clifford



A Reflection on Lent

Lent is a time of preparation for new light, new life. In Catholic churches everywhere Lent is initiated with the marking of foreheads with ashes. Our daily lives are no longer connected with ashes, as we no longer cook on woodstoves or have fireplaces. However our consumption of electricity does produce ash.



Although pollution controls can remove a lot of the toxic waste from smokestacks, it is through the burning of fossil fuels to generate electricity that coal ash is produced. Coal ash has toxins which are stored in waste ponds or landfills. This leads to the leaching of sulphur dioxide and heavy metals into surface and groundwater; arsenic, lead, mercury and other poisons including radioactive elements. So the process of creating ash in the production of electricity calls us to reconsider the use of ash as a symbol on Ash Wednesday.

Perhaps a better symbol for the beginning of Lent would be clay. In the Gospel of Thomas the young Jesus is recorded as having played with clay on the river bank. I have had a lifelong love of clay. I was captivated, entranced and in awe, when first I made a form from clay as a child. I considered clay to be magic dirt! If you pick up a handful of loam from your garden and try

to create a form, disappointment occurs; however, pick up a handful of clay and it contains infinite potential for new shapes! Clay is a plastic substance meaning that it can be changed or made into many forms. Clay as a substance whose processing brings about new form makes an excellent symbol for this important time within our liturgical year, with its emphasis on new beginnings

The use of clay has a long history. Pottery, an important human innovation, was more effective for holding and storing food than baskets or hide skin pouches and used for cooking in as an important development in food processing and preparation.



20,000-year-old fragments from China date to the time of the Last Glacial Maximum when scarcity of resources during that period forced people to develop better ways of collecting and processing food, suggesting that pottery predates the development of agriculture.

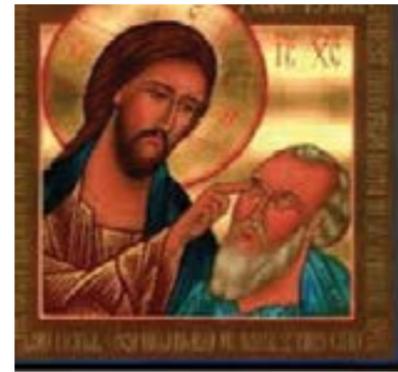
Clay was an important part of Jesus' life; the jars of water that were turned into wine at Cana were made of clay. And Jesus used clay to restore the sight of the blind man.

Clay is an integral part of our present lives; yes, we spit into it, sit on it, coat walls and floors with it, make walls out of it, eat and drink out of it, even ingest it. Some of you may recall having a tablespoon of white Kaomagma, which is Kaolin (clay) and Aluminium hydroxide and is an antacid. Even in space clay can be found as tiles on the underbelly on Space Shuttles, ensuring safety for astronauts on reentering the Earth's atmosphere.

Clay forms over long periods of time from the gradual chemical weathering of silicate-bearing rocks by diluted acidic solvents that migrate through the weathering rock and through hydrothermal activity. There are two types of clay deposits: primary and secondary. Primary clays form as residual deposits in soil and remain at the site of formation such as Kaolin. Secondary clays are clays that have been transported from their original location by water erosion and deposited as sediment, hence such places as Clayfield.

Should we go to the time that this continent was first peopled we would find clay being used in many forms. Foods were baked in ground ovens with hot clay, lumps of clay were smeared over the skin to inhibit sandflies and mosquitoes, ingested when sick to cure stomach ache, used by children in their play and used as ceremonial body markings and for painting on bark, wood and rock.

This is the stuff of our being, our essence, our belonging to this earth, our home. There is need to reconnect, and that is what this time of Lent is about, a time to reflect and reform and renew life. Jesus, who acted as a light



for the world by his actions, used clay and spit to create a balm which when placed over blind eyes enabled new sight and so we are encouraged to gain new sight, insights into our daily routines so as to acquire abilities and skills which will improve our lives and our relationships with those around us. Thus are we reformed.

Lent is a time of considering the possibilities of life, to re-engage, reform, renew. - a time to consider how we may live simply so that others may simply live.

I wish to finish with a poem by David Whyte, *Everything is Waiting for You*. I believe that if we allow Lent to be a time of reformation then we will come to a time when everything, everything that life has to bring awaits us with new life.

Everything is Waiting for You
 Your great mistake is to act the drama
 as if you were alone. As if life were a progressive and cunning crime
 with no witness to the tiny hidden transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
 the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
 even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
 the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
 out your solo voice You must note
 the way the soap dish enables you,
 or the window latch grants you freedom.
 Alertness is the hidden discipline of

familiarity.
 The stairs are your mentor of things
 to come, the doors have always been there
 to frighten you and invite you,
 and the tiny speaker in the phone is your dream-ladder to divinity.
 Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the conversation. The kettle is singing
 even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
 have left their arrogant aloofness and
 seen the good in you at last. All the birds
 and creatures of the world are unutterably themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

John Fitzwalter



Road Rage

Do you think road rage is increasing in Brisbane? I certainly do, although Maree suffers more from it, as a female in a small car, than I do in my big car rarely driven below the speed limit.

My suggestion is that anyone convicted of road rage type offences should be flown to Nairobi (this is itself a punishment), seated beside a man who has to lift up the armrest to be able to fit into his seat, or a woman with babe in arms. Then, they should be picked up at the Jomo Kenyatta Airport, and take the two hour taxi drive to the city centre. Then, they should change places with the driver, and drive back. Those too afraid could be left in Kenya. (The country has 1.1 million refugees, so one more would not matter.). Then, they board the plane and fly home.

The punishment would only cost about \$5000, take a couple of days, and would hopefully change their ideas for ever about what is annoying on the road, because they would have seen more annoying, outrageous and hair-raising incidents in four hours than you

would see in a lifetime in Brisbane. And the locals deal with them with barely a honk on the horn or a dent on the fender.

Another hazard of living in Brisbane, and Australia in general, is people telling you about their overseas holidays, but, whatever, now it is my turn to tell a little story.

My daughter, Clare, was sitting in the Land Rover, stuck in a traffic jam, when someone reached in through the window and took her purse, containing passport, credit cards, money, etc. The passport was the biggest problem, because we were in Tanzania, and Clare lives in Kenya. Also, her passport had a Somaliland work permit stamped in it, which are hard to get. (I was surprised that a government that is not recognised by any other countries was up to issuing work permits, but Africa is a surprising place.).

We reported it to the police, although solving crime and chasing criminals is not something that the Tanzanian police usually get

involved in.

We went on a safari, and a couple of days later, looking at zebras in the Ngorongoro Crater, the driver got a call that Clare's bag had been handed into lost property at the Arusha Central Police Station. (Tanzania's mobile coverage is noticeably better than ours). When we got the bag back, only the money and the iPod were missing. The precious passport, glasses etc were still in it. We speculated about who handed it in. Could we thank them? The driver said no, since it was probably the thief who had handed in.

Don't be put off by this story. I can recommend East Africa as a holiday destination, as long as one accepts that things work differently there. Zanzibar is extraordinary, but stay well clear of what used to be Somalia.

Peter Brown



Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre:

A Very Brief Introduction

Each week for several years now the mass sheets at St Mary's have included news and prayer requests from Sabeel. I think this began in 2004 after a small group of Aussies, including several from our community, attended an International Sabeel Conference in Jerusalem. As time has passed the memory of why these notices appear in our mass sheets has faded.

As the full name of Sabeel indicates, this is an ecumenical centre that has developed a local expression of liberation theology within the context of the Palestinian experience of dispossession, ethnic cleansing, and occupation. In a nutshell, Sabeel is a community of local Palestinian Christians seeking to make sense of their experiences in the light of the Christian mystery, and to draw on Scripture and Tradition to find resources to overcome the occupation of their land without recourse to violence.

Liberation theology engages with Christian faith from the perspective of a community in need of freedom. In this case there is the added challenge that the same

Scriptures are also invoked by Jewish settlers to justify their own actions. So what is a Palestinian Christian to do? Can the Bible that encourages the Zionist vision also provide hope to displaced and oppressed Palestinians?

Anglican Palestinian priest, Naim Ateek adapted the liberation theology that first developed in Latin America for his own situation in Palestine. He was not alone in this project as several articulate Palestinian women shared the same vision and engaged together in the task of framing a faith-based response to their own experiences of dispossession and occupation.

Drawing on the prophetic wisdom of the Jewish Scriptures that are also part of the Christian Bible, Sabeel encourages Christians to overcome the deep divisions between different church communities in the Holy Land, to engage with their Jewish and Muslim neighbours, and to work for peace and justice.

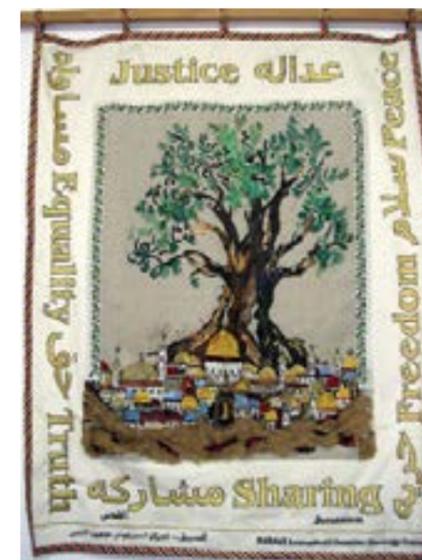
In Jerusalem, on the West Bank and in Nazareth, Sabeel is a catalyst

for grass roots action among the Christian population of Israel and Palestine. Sabeel is opposed to violence, and committed to a "two state solution" that accepts the existence of Israel on 80% of historic Palestine while seeking to establish a viable Palestinian state on the 20% (or less) that was only captured by Israel in 1967. Its core mission is to strengthen the life of the minority Christian community in Israel/Palestine, so that Christians can be active in interfaith dialogue and in achieving a just peace.

For an excellent summary of their work during the last year, see their 2014 narrative report that can be downloaded from: www.sabeel.org/events.php?eventid=392

Greg Jenks

Greg Jenks is an Anglican priest and a long time member of the SMX community. He is currently secretary for Friends of Sabeel Australia: www.sabeel.org.au



Tapestry in the Sabeel Centre

The Carpenter

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in 40 years of farming side-by-side, sharing machinery and trading labour and goods as needed without a hitch.

Then the long collaboration fell apart. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference and finally, it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning there was a knock on John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there I could help with? Could I help you?"

"Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my neighbour. In fact, it's my younger brother! Last week there was a meadow between us. He recently took his bulldozer to the river levee

and now there is a creek between us. Well, he may have done this to spite me, but I'll do him one better. See that pile of lumber by the barn? I want you to build me a fence an 8-foot fence -- so I won't need to see his place or his face anymore."

The carpenter said, "I think I understand the situation. Show me the nails and the post-hole digger and I'll be able to do a job that pleases you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he helped the carpenter get the materials ready and then he was off for the day. The carpenter worked hard all that day -- measuring, sawing and nailing. About sunset when the farmer returned, the carpenter had just finished his job.

The farmer's eyes opened wide, his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all.

It was a bridge .. A bridge that stretched from one side of the creek to the other! A fine piece of

work, handrails and all! And the neighbour, his younger brother, was coming toward them, his hand outstretched...

Anon



Reconciling faith with political power

Julian Burnside is puzzled by Scott Morrison's faith. Burnside examines Morrison's maiden speech to Parliament, in which he stated that his values come from his faith in Jesus, and concludes that Morrison is a hypocrite (Comment, 23/12). Others, including myself, are puzzled that the most Catholic Coalition Cabinet in Australia's history can be so cruel in slashing our aid program – the lowest in our history. Australia is the fourth richest nation but will slip to 19th position in the generosity stakes in the 2016/17 financial year.

Pope Francis has been clear calling the billion people who go to bed hungry each night a "global scandal" but the Australian government has cut funding that tackled hunger and poverty. Despite ignorant populism that aid is wasted, the opposite is true; it is a runaway success. It saves lives through immunisation and clean water and gives girls an education, a chance for a better life. And it is not trade alone that has lifted people out of poverty. The halving of infant death rates over the past 20 years – from 30,000 kids under five years old dying a day to 17,000 today – has been as great in landlocked sub-Saharan Africa nations without resources as in the powerhouses of India or China.

Burnside is right to be puzzled as Christian teaching is clear. Christians believe the resurrection of Jesus brings not only forgiveness of sins but also liberation for the down-trodden and God's promised justice for the poor and oppressed. Pope Francis has further attacked "savage capitalism" that allows inequality to grow; with profits flowing to the richest and the

poor are abandoned. Why are Catholics in office deaf to their Christian obligations when they smash government aid – one of the key levers to tackling hunger and poverty?

Is "hypocrite" the only conclusion to explain the puzzle of such a faith disconnect from those who assume power? I think not. History has recorded the inescapable transmogrifying of faith once it is married to political power. The typical solution of the devout politician is to privatise faith and truncate the Gospel so it only addresses the personal dimension of forgiveness of sins, with the social dimension contracted out to market technocrats. Worse, Christianity is diluted to some conservative moral principles that act as cultural glue to support the state sometimes in its worst nationalistic chauvinisms – for example, Christian nations that went to war for God, King and empire in 1914.

But Jesus didn't call people to be Christians but to be disciples that practised all he taught, including the impossible bits like love your enemies and turn the other cheek. He believed the image of God was in everyone, even the enemy, and that to see this clearly meant that he was not truly an enemy but able to be transformed by love.

The novel power of the first 300 years when Christianity peacefully conquered the Roman Empire was because they believed, preached and lived this. Christians ran the only schools and hospitals for the Roman poor and insisted that slave, female and disabled equally carried the image of God. This was novel and an explosive idea as the Graeco Roman world had no such universal ethic or services for the poor. It released the power of human dignity because all were image bearers. The conversion of Emperor Constantine was the first episode in history where Christians became the chaplains to power and



Author of this piece, World Vision Australia Chief Executive Tim Costello, with Maria Theresa and baby Ella at a relief distribution after typhoon damaged the Philippines.

strayed from bearing good news for the powerless to blessing imperial wars and the oppression of rulers.

regarding to whom we are responsible. Not God but our national boundaries.

To those who say religion has caused more war and violence I would protest more than what? Both before and post Constantine, all societies/governments were religious up until the 1789 French revolution. But what a record since; secular government fired by nationalism – yes, sometimes baptised by faith – has arguably caused far greater suffering. Nationalism fragments universal ethics and clouds our thinking

It is a primary loyalty to the nation and its political fears that explains Scott Morrison's action. For me the moral calculus changed when more than 1000 people drowned. As a disciple I cannot accept that the best we can do to stop people drowning is to lock up children and send people mad. Similarly with the budget, we asked "why is the burden shouldered by the poorest?" Christian politicians must be held accountable when their decisions

inevitably cost lives and destroy hope.

Tim Costello

Reverend Tim Costello is the chief executive of World Vision Australia.

Paying Attention - a form of Prayer

Peter Kennedy spoke to us in a homily about the Buddhist idea of impermanence, (everything is always changing), something that Western minds can relate to for we have the Physics notion of entropy, everything breaking down to eventually nothing. Then he discussed the Buddhist notion of "no self". I think this is also a Hindu idea? But is it a Western Idea? Surprisingly the answer is 'YES'!

The notion of self is a psychological one, and anything psychological can be changed. But why would you want to change it, not have a self, or at the very least why turn it down?

When we were born we were literally a bundle of cells and energy, we could breath, smell, wriggle and our bio-chemistry was just doing its job. These are all givens, they just happen. The technical term is Implicit Memory.

We have a name and a feeling attached to that name. The feeling comes from being warmly attached in our very early days to our mother. Then there are the ongoing experiences of our life, our personal history that, is attached to that name and feeling. All of this makes us who we are.

All of that stuff - name, feeling, personal history, all of it was installed, we were not born with it. We experienced it and have a representation of it in our mind and body; it was installed within us, and guess what, anything that has been installed can be changed - anything. The technical name is Explicit Memory.

But why would you want to change Explicit Memory, weaken it or even not have it? The reason is that by doing so we may be able to then answer the question, 'Why are we here'. One of the answers to that question could be, 'To get closer to the mystery that is present in the Universe'.

Unfortunately it is our minds, our representations of our personal history, our sense of me, our ego that gets in the way and blocks us from getting closer to the mystery. Paradoxically, it could well be that we need to have our Explicit Memory representations, our sense of self so that we can learn to let it go and move closer to the mystery.

The silence of meditation where there is no explicit memory representations or self-representations, helps us transform into who we are meant to be: a peaceful and harmonious being, acting out of love. We move from the surface to the depths of our being where Jesus is, where Christ dwells, our Christ nature.

The Act of Paying Attention is in itself a form of Prayer

Let me take that a little further. With the act of attention you are in the present moment, and present moment attention takes you out of the mind and closer to the mystery. This can be attention to anything; the trees, the flowers, the mountains, the caves, the ocean, the sky, other people, anything. As Eckhart Tolle said, *Enlightenment (awakening) means choosing to dwell in a state of Presence rather than in time. It means saying "yes" to what is.*

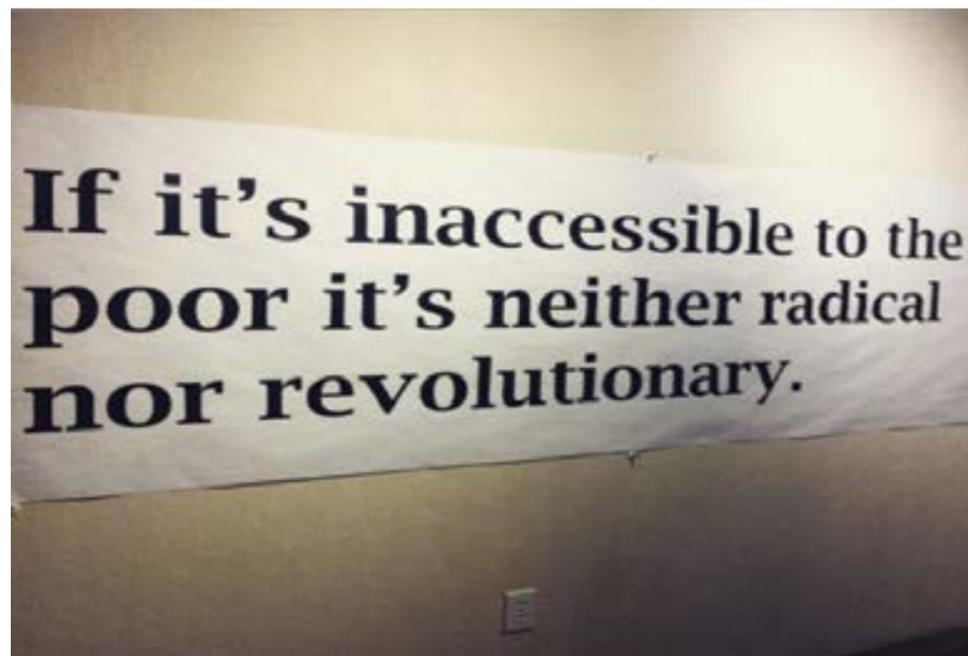


Presence is a reference to the mystery. Presence is a word that spiritual teachers use for attention. Attention leads to awareness. Attention and awareness move us closer to the mystery. Thus attention is a form of prayer.

For this to happen we need to place our focus on the present moment. Indeed it can be said, "there is no life outside the present moment", there are experiences in the mind of the past or future but they are not of the present moment. The present moment arises through paying attention to 'something'. So let us keep practising the following:

- Coming into Presence; coming into the present moment; paying attention.
- Understanding how we drag ourselves out of Presence; how we distract ourselves, how we gain mastery over our mind.
- Understanding meditation as the practice of coming into Presence.
- Discovering how to stay in the experience of Presence and yet on occasions in the world of time.

Brian O'Hanlon



Submitted by John Fitzwalter

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Articles, poems, letters, photos are always welcome. Send to ortizmargaret506@gmail.com
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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