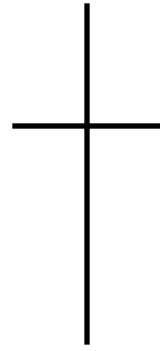


The Journal

Fall 2004



Following Jesus

Banner by Eileen Little, Cedar, BC

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The Journal
Fall 2004
Vol. 7, No. 4

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Arthur Menu
Jim Noonan (NCR Regional Editor)
Emil Kutarna (SK Regional Editor)

The Journal welcomes submissions from small faith communities and individuals that share its vision of the Christian Church as one in which all are equal, decisions are made by consensus, healthy relationships are nurtured, justice is done, and the Good News of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

All submissions to the Journal must be received by February 15, May 15, August 15, and November 15.

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See the inside back page for further details.

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George Pell, cardinal archbishop of Sydney, banned the Australian Reforming Catholics group from holding their annual conference at the Sisters of St. Joseph North Sydney headquarters. The sisters respected the cardinal's decision; however, the sisters believe that it is most important for Catholics to debate and discuss current issues in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. The sisters undertook to pay the additional costs for the hire of a new site.

Cardinal Pell ordered two priests, Gerald Gleeson, moral theologian, and Peter Maher, university chaplain, not to speak at the conference. He also asked Bishop Power not to say mass for the group in the Sydney Archdiocese.

FOCUS TOPIC *for the Winter 2005 Issue*

Our family album: With pictures and a brief biography of your family and ministry.

Note Articles for this issue are due by February 15.

Sophia



Title: *At Our Age: How to Make 50-90 Your Dynamite Years*

Publisher: authorHouse, Bloomington, Indiana

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“If you are 40 or more you are in the middle of your longest and most important growth stage. Let *At Our Age* show you how to bring dynamite living to every aspect of your life.

You need this book if you want to - - -

- Enjoy your life as never before
- Get the money you need
- Fall in love
- Create a vibrant future ... at any age
- Get worry out of your life
- Have fun again
- Make your sex life better than ever (seriously)



Following Jesus: Living the Alternative Community by Chris Diamond, Cobble Hill, BC

I have followed Jesus by trying to live the “Alternative Community”, the term used by Walter Brueggemann in “The Prophetic Imagination”. Almost everything I have learned about Jesus I have learned from the Church in all its manifestations- its people, its worship, its teachings, its practices, its scholars, Naomi and our children, our families, friends and communities, and the list goes on. I am grateful to them all for what they have led me to become. I love the Church. I love its people, its service to humanity, its liturgy, its hymns, and so on, even while I believe that some of these are already “in the hand basket”.

Jesus lived an alternative way. I try to follow him. I don't consider Buddha, Confucius, Moses, Muhammad, Ghandi, or anyone else that can be named, on the same level as Jesus. He would have treated them all with great respect and he would have been happy to hear from them their vision of God and what difference it made in their living. Jesus showed his friends and all

of us that there is another way to live other than the way of the dominant culture. He lived God's way, the way of justice and liberation from the thrall of the dominant culture.

Living the alternative community is very biblical. The Moses story tells us 1. that the king will rule- sometimes even in good faith!- over the helpless for the benefit of a select few, and 2. that people will groan and complain against anyone who tries to lead them out and into an alternative way. It seems to me that it is also part of our human leanings to want to build another empire even out of our religious experiences. We like to keep God nicely in a box, build a temple, and then control access to the sanctuary. As Pogo once put it, “We make the canary god because it fits the cage”. I don't think that's following Jesus.

“An alternative community knows it is about different

FOCUS: HOW AM I FOLLOWING JESUS?

things in different ways.” (Brueggemann) Jesus was aware of God’s presence (what we piously call ‘God’s glory’) in every place and in everything. Jesus lived in the moment: In Matthew’s gospel (6:34) he says “Don’t fret about tomorrow.” and in Mark (1:15) “This is the time. The Kingdom of God is here. Think again.” Jesus gathered his friends together, praised and thanked God for what they had, shared food and drink with them, and talked about God’s way. Jesus took his vision of God to the people caught in the grip of their culture, and he lived a different way. When he was threatened by the powerful, he did not back down.

In the prophetic covenants, God is seen as making it clear that God loves humanity with an unconditional love. This is seen as God’s ‘hesed’ and ‘emit’, as a mother’s love for her child, spontaneous, tender, vulnerable, faithful, reliable, and steadfast (again what we piously call ‘God’s mercy’). God loves humanity faithfully, no matter what we might do. This is a one-way covenant. God welcomes our love in return but God’s love for us does not depend on it. God’s love is universal. This is the view of God that Jesus accepted and lived.

The Deuteronomist, on the other hand, has a different spirituality, an ‘IF’ spirituality: If you obey God, you will prosper but if you don’t, you will be destroyed (Dt 7:9 - 8:1). This is a two-way covenant. Deuteronomic spirituality was in vogue in Jesus’ day and it is still with us today. It is as if we said to our children, “If you are good and do what I tell you, you are welcome in this house. But if you don’t, then you had better find some other place.”

Faith is not about doctrines. Faith is the acceptance of God’s unconditional love. It is very difficult for people to accept that God’s love is unconditional and universal. But Jesus accepted it. He left behind him the accumulated, culturally conditioned, Jewish religious requirements of his day, namely, the written Law and the oral traditions, but he accepted the ten commandments (Mt 15:3; 19:18), and the summary great commandments, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” and “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Dt 6:5; Lev 19:18).

Jesus went against the dominant culture in his attitude towards women. He was equally concerned about them as he was about men. He listened to their opinions and their ideas. He had them as disciples equally with

men and not simply to carry out domestic chores. They could talk with him and follow him in spite of the cultural male bias. Jesus treated women no differently than he treated men because he did not see them as human beings living on a different level. They were not simply objects of men’s world. When Jesus did show them special consideration, it was because they were oppressed.

Since his day, many rules have been made in Jesus’ name. People have been tortured: poor helpless women, the so-called ‘witches’, have been stripped and their bodies poked with long sharp needles, and the nails pulled out of their fingers and toes before they were dragged to burning or hanging. How’s that for cultural conditioning? Today, some parents agonize over their children not choosing to be married in church; some grandparents are still being ‘tortured’ with worry because their children are not baptizing their grandchildren and they were taught that you can’t get into heaven unless you have been baptized. That’s not Jesus’ vision of God’s way. That’s cultural conditioning. Not eating meat on Friday was religious cultural conditioning. It did not take people long to forget that one. Sending your kids to catholic school, frequent confession? Latin in the mass? Even “Missing mass on Sundays and holy days is a mortal sin.” was cultural conditioning.

How many other things in our christian beliefs and practices are not from Jesus but are the result of the same process? In his first recorded good news words, Jesus says “This is the time. The Kingdom of God is here. Think again. Trust the good news.” Follow Jesus.



The Coloured Glasses of Faith

by Hal Caton, Santa Cruz, CA

Sarah asked: “Have I seen God and still live after that vision?” Gen 16:13.

Faith seekers see God through the eyeglasses or thought patterns of their own era and society. They put on the sunglasses of faith to image or imagine what they cannot see directly. These sunglasses cut out the glare of God’s glory so that some of God’s nature may be seen. But the glasses are tinted by the culture of those who wear them.

Some have clearer lenses than others; but even they see only partial images of God. Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Mahavira, Nanak, Confucius, Laotzu, Zoroaster, and Muhammad all saw God through different coloured glasses. None of them had perfect 20-20 vision—though some of their followers make that claim and think that those

who disagree are totally blind.

The truth may be that all of us are and always will be partially blind to the total reality of God. God’s nature will always be partially incomprehensible to creatures; God’s brilliance is too bright for us no matter what coloured glasses we wear. Many now see God as a compassionate, loving being rather than a vengeful, violent king and judge. We have seen enough so that we can worship God each in our own unique way. Perhaps we can find the humility to try on each other’s glasses and appreciate the different tints of faith. We do not need to throw away our own coloured glasses; they are all we have, and they give meaning, purpose, and joy to what might otherwise be a colourless existence.

I choose to look at God through the insights of Jesus. I believe

that he gives me the best view, the most loving description of God. My beliefs are a big part of who I am, and they too are becoming less complicated, more simple. I inherited my faith mostly from my mother, but it has been personally authenticated by my own spiritual experiences, and it is in the process of reformulation. My faith is now more of the heart as I discard some of the intellectual baggage I accumulated in the seminary and carried along during twelve years of ministry in the institutional church. I am fully convinced of the 'miracle' of the human Jesus of Nazareth. I no longer need the miracles which the early church needed to explain him. For me, Jesus shows as much of the 'divine' as is humanly possible, as much as has ever been shown in human history. The core of his 'divine-humanity' is the love with which he lived his life and faced his death. His death was the validation of his teaching and his resurrection was the validation of his lifestyle. Love is indeed eternal!

Jesus showed no interest in metaphysical explanations- and now neither do I. Paul needed to explain Jesus to the Hellenistic world; the writer of John's gospel needed to explain Jesus in terms of the Greek Logos; the Church needed Councils to sanctify its explanations of Jesus; Protestants have needed Manifestos to expound their theories. But while all of these may be intellectually titillating, they have also been divisive and destructive of our vital love for each other. Now I reject the metaphysical explanations, but I embrace the Pauline and Johannine emphasis on the centrality of love in defining the essence of life and of God. Doctrines and creeds may leave me cold; God's love warms my heart and guides my life when I allow it to do so. That love is so well exemplified in Jesus that it makes me a follower of him and a worshipper of his God and mine.

My faith tells me that our purpose here is to experience God's love and to bounce it along to others. I don't think it is either possible or necessary to understand much else about God or Jesus. Love experienced and expressed is all we need. Some might say that this is a too simplistic approach to the christian faith, but I am convinced that what the institutional church has been most successful at throughout the ages is in complicating what was and is a very simple faith. Jesus stood within the Jewish prophetic tradition and challenged the complications of the Jewish faith. I don't think he wanted his followers to complicate his own simple vision, the message of God's love. He wanted a new life-style in which love dominated. He did not conceive a new institutional church. Perhaps it was inevitable. Theologies and 'holy beliefs' are human constructs and are not always true to their purpose. They can overshadow honour and worship and the simple light of God's love.



CONVERSATIONS WITH JESUS: FOLLOWERS OF JESUS?

by François Brassard, Ladysmith, BC

Misha and I were taking a stroll at one of our favourite spots, the municipal ball diamond and par 3 golf course. She hunts for the occasional discarded fast food and I look for lost golf balls in the woods off the 6th green.

"It's not fair," she pouts. "You pick up all the KFC and Mac goodies and put them in my trash bag, but you get to keep all the golf balls, and you don't even play golf."

"Oh, well, Misha, life's not fair. Actually, I'm protecting you against your worse self. Remember what you looked like when you weighed 25 pounds. And now look at you, a slim and trim 15 pounds. You're beautiful."

"You sure know how to compliment a lady."

Just as we were approaching the 6th green, Misha noticed a man walking along the lower path of the Holland Creek trail. Not on her leash, she bolted down the path and noisily greeted the man with her 'bichon' circle dance. I followed her down to check things out, and as I approached, I could see why she was excited. It was Jesus.

"Hi there! How about taking a walk with me along the trail?"

"I'd love to. And I know Misha would."

"My oh my, Misha, you look so pretty with those two pink ribbons on your ears. Have you been to the groomer's?"

"Yes she has. She's perfectly white and fluffy. How long it will last remains to be seen."

"So, Fran, how have you been doing since I saw you last?"

"To tell you the truth, not so well. I guess it's the shorter days and the typical rainy weather."

"Maybe... Tell me, what do you feel about the results of the recent U.S. elections?"

"Oh, you would bring that up! Frankly, I was devastated. I had prayed so hard that the pain and suffering caused by the present administration might come to an end."

"I know. I heard you loud and clear."

"Do you realise that the present U.S. administration has killed more Iraqis than Saddam Hussein ever did during his entire rule, and that's not counting Afghans. And the money used to do this has impoverished millions of U.S. citizens. George Bush has become a lightning rod for so much hate and anger throughout the world."

"I'm painfully aware of that, but..."

"And for me, the most galling, devastating thing of all is the fact that the people who made the difference in the reelection of the president claim to be your loyal, devoted followers. They claim to be pro-life which, translated, means they're only anti-abortion. Who are they to judge why a person chooses not to have a child? Besides, when did you ever talk about abortion? They pride themselves about being pro-life, but they support the

Focus Continued...

death penalty and they support pre-emptive wars that kill thousands of people, most of them innocent civilians. It's utterly depressing!"

"Fran, slow down! I know how you feel. I felt the same way."

"What do you mean?"

"When I was praying to my Father in the garden of Gethsemane, I felt the agony of despair. And it wasn't so much because I knew the horrible death that awaited me if I continued to challenge the religious authorities of my time who were colluding with the Romans. I knew what happened to prophets in the past and I saw what happened to rebels and patriots in my day. I saw the rotting corpses on those crosses. And that's still happening today. Think of Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years in prison for speaking out against the injustice of apartheid. Think of Martin Luther King Jr. who knew he would be cut down if he continued to speak against racial discrimination in the U.S. Think of Mahatma Gandhi who devoted his life to the same message of non-violent resistance to injustice as I did, and he was killed by an assassin's bullet. No, it was not the kind of death that I would face that pained me so much. What weighed heavy on me was more the incredible suffering inflicted on decent, hard working people by rich absentee landlords who were in cahoots with the religious authorities. I truly felt their pain. Under great duress I had preached for three years against these horrible abuses, and in that garden I felt that it was all coming to nothing. Mind you, I could understand the fear that the rich had of me, because I was challenging their greed and power. I was pleading with them and with all to be just as compassionate toward those worse off than themselves as their Father in heaven is toward them. And the healings I did in my Father's name were a sign of that great compassionate love. Oh, I could understand how difficult it was for them to let go and do what was right. I hoped and prayed that they would, even though at the end it seemed like all was lost.

Yet, that was not the worst of the pain and desolation I felt that night in the garden. The worst was the realization that after three hard years of preaching and teaching, my own disciples still didn't understand what I meant by the 'kingdom of God.' They couldn't understand that it was a spiritual power that was already present among them, and that, if they had faith as small as a mustard seed, they could make anything good happen. Despite the signs I gave them in my Father's name, they really didn't believe that by invoking the Spirit with heartfelt confidence, they could transform all life, all creation into my Father's image. No, they had a vision of a material kingdom, a political kingdom in the image of their own pride. Poor Judas Iscariot was convinced that if he could just get me an audience with the religious leaders, I could by some spiritual power force them to accept the new kingdom, free from Roman dominion. Frankly, he misused the invitation I extended to him to be an integral part of God's Realm of Peace, Justice and Love. Peter was no better. I once caught him arguing with James and John over who would have the highest position in the coming kingdom. Can you believe it? Right there in the garden Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. He really didn't understand the message. The worst of the agony in that garden was that I knew they would all run away when the going got tough. I felt totally alone, totally disheartened by the realization that the mission I had undertaken at my Father's request was apparently in shambles.

Now, Fran, get this clearly. The great temptation that I faced in that moment was despair. Would I give in to it? Oh how I prayed for

strength and courage, both for myself and for all my followers, especially those who might stray from the path from time to time. Three times I asked my disciples to be strong and to pray with me. But the Passover wine got to them and in the heat of the night they fell asleep.

Of course, my prayers were answered. I kept faith in God's loving power to raise up followers of the message I had lived and preached, and that out of the ashes of terrible suffering a new Realm of God would arise in every generation till the end of time.

Though the times seem bleak to you right now, there are already new leaders arising in many countries who are laying the foundations for global peace and justice. Look at what Nelson Mandela accomplished in South Africa after rotting for so many years in jail. That's an outstanding example. But there are thousands, millions of other, very humble examples happening today. And as it was in the days after my resurrection, it is more often the women who are making a difference, who are truly following in my footsteps, leading the way in building God's Realm. For instance, think of those women in Afghanistan who are risking their lives by opening schools for girls. Open your eyes. See with the eyes of faith and do whatever the Spirit calls you to do."

And then he was gone. I looked about, but he was gone. I looked at Misha, called to her, and she came. I held her in my arms. The clouds of despair were gone. I felt peace and joy.



THE SUN STOPPED/NO STEPPING INTO THE SAME RIVER

by Tom McMahon. San Jose. CA



In the Torah there is the story of a Jewish warrior winning a military victory because he got Yahweh to stop the sun in mid sky; without questioning I read the account as a seminarian in 1950, but in 2004 I know that this absurdity has been the root of much mayhem in church and science; it cost Galileo his freedom and branded Roman Church officials as arrogant and ill informed about creation. On the other hand, Heraclitus gave a wonderful view of evolutionary life as he offered: "One can not step twice into the same river,

for the water into which you have stepped has flowed on."

Since Vatican Two a confluence of information has rushed at me, combinations of "the sun standing still" and informational "rivers" flowing swiftly past. At 76 I have become a discerning individual. With the issue of lack of priests and eucharist, the Roman hierarchy waxes

eloquently about the proper color if glass chalices are to be used in communion services. The Roman sun has stopped by papal command! Where are the flowing living waters of the Christ? Has the Roman Church stepped into the modern world as a Gospel resource or is it stuck in stagnant medieval water?

People save me. As a follower of Jesus, in whose way I hope to find salvation in the here and now. When I was in seminary listening to the professor drone on about church law, I would day dream of the time I might imitate Jesus as he sat at the well talking to the distressed woman. Does Roman Catholicism qualify today as a religion centered in Jesus? Have the living waters of mercy and understanding of the man from Nazareth dried up?

I grew up in a church that was described as the bark of Peter, the man who is said to have hung upside down for following Jesus; I served thousands in six parishes, grateful for the Christian clarifications brought about by Vatican Two. Now 76 and quite mature religiously and spiritually, I question the Roman institution in its handling of sin, crisis, love, justice, hope, respect for person, grace, and what is moral. I am aware that Jesus the Christ is flowing living water, not stagnant impotence. In the litany of saints we cry out "Lord, come and save your people." How will this happen when there is no leadership. Catholics need to grow up, become informed, and demand justice. What river are we standing in?

Letters From Our Readers

Editor:

I am not sure how I come to be receiving your well produced online Journal, but it is certainly welcome. I qualify - being now married as a priest 33 years! A member of Epiphany (Australia). Of particular interest to me was the Newsletter from Aitor Orube, plus your notice of the 6th Congress of the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests in Germany next September. As a theologian who has written widely on ministry/diakonia, I find the theme of "A Renewed Ministry for Today" pretty attractive. Hmm. As I am in the planning stages of a visit to Ottawa in late July 05 for the 2nd International Meeting of Ordination of Catholic Women, I wonder if I can get to Germany as well in September? Tough call. We'll see.

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Thanks so much, Sheldon. You're a man of many talents!! (although I should have guessed you'd be a *left* winger!) and it should be the source of unremitting embarrassment for the Roman Catholic Church that a man of such talent and profound faith can no longer practice his vocation.

Thanks too, for introducing me to Corpus Canada. I read some of the other articles in this issue and was impressed, enlightened, and saddened that the Roman Catholic Church cannot acknowledge the riches in its community. Father Rolheiser seemed to me to be well-meaning, but, in my opinion, was writing about the mote in the Church's eye while completely missing the log. That men like you -- and women, too, for that matter -- who try to embody Jesus' teachings, whose faith and compassion are so obvious and wide-ranging, are restricted in how they can serve their communities, is utterly incomprehensible to those of us who do neither understand nor accept the Church's position.

(I have never received any religious instruction, either Christian or Jewish, or otherwise it would have dawned on me before, but I've only just realized after writing "embody" that the "Word made Flesh", is that Jesus was the incarnation of God's teachings, a human exemplar of a transcendent God. Is that what celebrating the Eucharist calls people to do? To repeat this incarnation, and as far as possible, ourselves become the Word made Flesh? Or have I just written an unspeakable blasphemy? My deepest apologies if I have.)

Anyway, as much as I'd like to contemplate matters of faith all day, there's other work to do and I'd better get to it.

Angela Parkes
Calgary, AB

Theological Soapbox

by Arthur Menu, Sidney, BC

MAINLINE CHRISTIAN SEXUAL MORALITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY (PART I)



In this series of articles I present my view of how sexual morality will develop among mainline Christians in the 21st century.

Before addressing sexual morality later in the series, I will explain how morality in general fits within the Christian world view.

When Christians make judgements about

whether a particular action is moral or immoral they consider three questions: Does the action benefit or harm me? Does the action benefit or harm others (the common good)? Is the action specifically commanded or forbidden by one of God's revealed laws?

The Christian will answer these questions by considering reasons and evidence. The reasons and evidence pertinent to each question will be different for each question.

Christians believe that God is a God of love. This implies that God did not create the world to be a place of unnecessary suffering. God created a world in which actions that truly benefit me never harm others or go against God's laws, and actions that truly harm me do not benefit others or obey God's laws. Otherwise God would have created a world in which there is greater suffering and conflict than there needs to be.

At first glance this view of a harmonious world appears contrary to the way the world actually operates. For example, a man pushes a child out of the way of a speeding train, is himself hit by the train, and is crippled for life. Here it would appear that the action that benefits the child harms the man. Christians resolve apparent conflicts of interest of this sort through their belief in spiritual benefits and harms. The spiritual benefit the man experiences by helping the child outweighs the physical harm he suffers. From the Christian point of view, the man's action has brought him into a closer relationship with God that is infinitely more valuable than the physical mobility he lost. In addition, if the man remains in communion with God, he will enter God's kingdom after he dies, entirely healed in body and soul, and forever will reflect joyfully on how his action benefited the child. On the whole the man's action will have benefited him.

Similarly a businessman who cheats a customer appears to benefit from harm done to the customer. But in doing so the businessman experiences spiritual harm. He moves farther away from God. This harm infinitely outweighs the monetary benefit of cheating. If the businessman does not repent, he will be excluded from the kingdom of God after he dies. He will suffer eternal harm.

Consider a third example. A hiker gets lost in the forest. After wandering for days without food, he comes upon a cabin. No one is home. He breaks a window, enters, and finds food to eat and to take with him as he leaves the cabin behind and seeks his way out of the

forest. He benefits from his action. The owner of the cabin appears to suffer harm in that his cabin has been damaged and his food taken. Later when the owner of the cabin comes home and finds himself a victim of what is apparently theft or vandalism, he feels anger and a loss of a sense of security. However, if the owner finds it in his heart to forgive whoever broke in, he will experience a spiritual benefit greater than his loss. Even if he is not freed from the anger and hurt in this life, when he enters the afterlife and finds out the reason his cabin was broken into, he will rejoice that his cabin provided the hiker with food. The benefit of this knowledge and joy will last for eternity and infinitely outweigh the temporary harm he suffered.

When spiritual benefits and harms, and consequences in the afterlife, are taken into account, the Christian can say that there is no contradiction between what is good for me, good for others, and God's laws.

In judging the morality of an action Christians ask the three questions mentioned above, whether the action benefits or harms themselves, benefits or harms others, and obeys or disobeys God's laws. However, if a Christian knows the answer to any one of those three questions, he knows the answer to the other two, because there can never be a true conflict between what is good or harmful for the Christian, what is good or harmful for others, and what is commanded by God's laws.

Of the three questions, which one are we most likely to know the answer to? The answer is obvious. In particular situations we are more likely to have certainty, or probable reason to think, that an action benefits or harms ourselves than we are to have certainty, or probable reason to think, that the action benefits or harms others or the common good.

Why? We know ourselves, our needs, our hopes, and our aspirations better than we know others and their needs, hopes and aspirations. We know our own capacity to be hurt better than we know the capacity of others to be hurt. So if I have reason and evidence to believe that some action will benefit me, and no reason or evidence to believe that it will harm someone else (even if it might harm someone else), then I am justified in assuming that the action will not harm someone else. It will be moral for me to perform the action.

There will be some actions that obviously benefit or harm others. Giving water to someone running a marathon obviously benefits the runner (except in rare circumstances) and hitting someone over the head with a baseball bat obviously harms the person (except in rare circumstances, e.g., if it prevents the person from committing murder). But in many cases it will not be clear. Will telling someone a white lie to spare his or her feelings really benefit them? Sometimes we just don't know about another person, even if we know whether we would or would not benefit from being told the lie.

Some readers may think that of the three questions a Christian must ask when deliberating on the morality of a particular action, the question of whether the action is commanded or forbidden by God's revealed law would be the easiest to answer. After all, we can open the Bible and look it up. Things are not that simple. In Part II of this series I will show why.

A CHRISTMAS MEDITATION... OF A MARRIED PRIEST

by Emil Kutarna, Regina, SK



From The Journal Archives: Christmas '93

Christmas is a time full of emotions and memories. What thoughts and feelings go through the mind and heart of a married priest spending Christmas in the pews and not at the altar? Christmas for a married priest is a most unique experience filled with conflicting emotions – joy being with the one you love,

and deep hurt at being barred from the altar on this day a priest most enjoys. And what is going through the mind of his wife, caught up in this whirlwind of the birth of the new church? The following meditation will, no doubt, bring back many memories and, hopefully, some healing and joy as well.

Sitting in the pews

Well Jesus, here I am again, sitting in the pews at midnight Mass. I should be at the altar, but I feel I'm being punished because I fell in love and married. Just doesn't make sense. It's OK to fall in love, but don't get married. Getting married, that's the big mistake, that's why I'm being punished by the Church. For doing the honourable thing. Not a very happy thought at Christmas time. Sorry for complaining, Jesus.

Really, after all these years I thought I had worked it all out and rid myself of the baggage of guilt and bitterness. Not that easy, I guess.

The manger scene

So maybe I'm a little sentimental, Jesus, but I always liked the manger scene. I remember my first appointment as pastor. My first Christmas at my new parish we built a large stable for the crib scene, put in lights and straw and the statues. The people loved it. It was a small country parish, the church wasn't finished – wood floor and unpainted walls. But we decorated it with fragrant pine boughs and big red ribbons on every post. I thought I was in heaven already. I even felt a little guilty for having it so good while at Christmas so many in the world were suffering hunger and cold. Never forget that first Christmas as a young pastor. I was twenty-six years old.

Marginalized

Many years have passed since that wonderful time, Jesus. As I look at your manger scene now, different thoughts come to mind. I see your mother and Joseph in dire straights. I see them marginalized, among the outcasts of their society. I think I can relate to that now. I feel marginalized. Like the doors closed to them in Bethlehem, the doors to ministry are closed to me, Bethlehem, 'the house of bread' – they shut out their God. Forgive the Bethlehemites, they did not know what they had done. Likewise Rome shuts the door to the Eucharist for millions of the faithful who hunger for the 'Bread of Heaven' this Christmas day. And here I sit helpless to do anything about it. It is as if Rome is saying "Let them eat celibacy". Am I getting bitter again, Jesus? Should Rome be forgiven? Do they know what they have done?

Marginalized by choice

But, Jesus, you could have had it differently. It looks like you chose to be marginalized. Why? Are you trying to tell me something here? Good God! (excuse me) you're not trying to suggest to me that I should accept my marginalization from the Church? What possible advantage could that be for me? Isn't marginalization always bad?

Why marginalization

Why in the world would anyone willingly join the marginalized? So, Jesus, did it do you any good? It gave you injustice and poverty; you were exploited, put into the underprivileged class. But OK, I see what you're getting at, Jesus. You're suggesting that the marginalized, the outsiders, see the world differently, particularly in terms of justice and power.

Tidings of clerical comfort and joy

I have experienced the power of clerical life. I liked it, Jesus. Hey, after all, I was your representative, I was the all important, absolutely necessary "mediator dei", between heaven and earth, between Our Father in Heaven – and them down there. Without me there was no Eucharist. So there! I sat in judgement in the confessional, and could shut the door to God's mercy if I chose! So there again! Boy, did I have power!

The Word made flesh

So Jesus, you came into the world as a little baby. Quite the opposite of power. How come I couldn't understand that as a cleric? I was a good priest. I said Mass reverently, said my breviary, worked hard to make good sermons. Still I didn't see the message. Now I see it. Now that I am "reduced to the lay state". Reduced all right. Reduced to poverty at one time. Out of a job, dependent on my wife for a living while I went back to university to qualify for something (the work world didn't have a place for seminary education). Reduced all right. Canon Law of my Holy Mother Church says I am less than a layperson. Looks for all the world like vindictiveness to me.

Wisdom of the outcast

Sorry, Jesus. There I go again. It's Christmas and I have to forgive and forget. I get it. I have a sneaking suspicion that you had something to do with getting me "laicised", didn't you? You want me to see what it's like being an outcast, don't you? Are you trying to tell me that it's better to be an outcast to understand the religiously marginalized?

Marginalized Catholics

Well, I never looked at it that way, Jesus. So what does happen to those Catholics who are excommunicated, in irregular marriages, admitted homosexuals and lesbians, married priests without dispensation? Need I count the ways they are put down? Job and livelihood are jeopardised if it becomes public, no matter how many children you have to feed. The pope once called us Judases. Does God in heaven cast us out too? Lord, to whom shall we go?

New sight to the blind

Sorry Jesus, I did it again. Can you blame me for complaining? But then I remember that you deliberately associated with outsiders: tax collectors, prostitutes, children, women, the blind, lame, sick (their sickness was considered god's punishment – gosh I remember my hair stood on end when a married priest told me that his first child was deformed, and he believed it was God's punishment for

Meditation Continued...

“leaving the priesthood”! Brrrr).

Are you trying to tell me something, Jesus? Are you trying to tell me that we need the marginal for salvation? Are you trying to tell me the personal crisis of my leaving the clerical cocoon was what I needed to open my eyes? This is scary stuff, Lord. Take it easy on me.

Liberty to the captives

Jesus, this visit with you at the manger has been good for me. I see the world in a whole new way. My declericalization has been a blessing in disguise. I have been a captive of my anger. This Christmas you have set me free. You came to minister to the marginalized in your society. Our Church has many marginalized. I am one of them. I now choose to be one of them – as you did when you came that first Christmas. My ministry is to the marginalized. It is not my place among the clergy at the altar as it once was. My altar now is the kitchen table of the rejected of the Church – my brother priests who married, the homosexual, the lesbian, the divorced, the disillusioned Catholic, the excommunicated. That is now my parish. And I’m not alone. I have this wonderful woman at my side. Thank you, Jesus.

NOTE: It is 43 years since my first Christmas in the pews. I wrote this meditation in the Dec. 1993 Corpus Canada Journal.

On The Lighter Side!

A 6-year-old and a 4-year-old are upstairs in their bedroom. "You know what?" says the 6-year-old. "I think it's about time we started cussing."
The 4-year-old nods his head in approval. The 6-year-old continues:
"When we go downstairs for breakfast I'm going to say "hell" and you say "ass."
"OK!" says the 4-year-old with enthusiasm.
Downstairs, their mother walks into the kitchen and asks the 6-year-old what he wants for breakfast.
"Aw hell, Mom, I guess I'll have some Cheerios."
WHACK! He flies out of his chair, tumbles across the kitchen floor, gets up, and runs upstairs crying his eyes out, with his mother in hot pursuit, slapping his rear every step.
Mom locks him in his room and shouts, "You can just stay there until I let you out!"
Then she goes back downstairs, looks at the 4-year-old, and asks with a stern voice, "And what do YOU want for breakfast, young man?"
"I don't know," he blubbers, "But you can bet your fat ass it won't be Cheerios."

Michael Morwood: A Christian Spirituality for the 21st Century Notes by Emil Kutarna

Everything and everyone is held in a relationship we call God.

For two millennia the belief was held that we exist on this earth and it is separate from some place “up there” called “Heaven”. This comes from the Old Testament view of creation, and the fall of Adam and Eve. That view had three tiers: ‘heaven’ up there where God dwells, ‘earth’ here below where we dwell, and ‘hell’ down there where the devil dwells. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were expelled and the gates of heaven were closed for them and all who came after them. So in our prayers we called ourselves “poor banished children of Eve”.

We must let go of the concept of God of the last 2000 years.

Abraham and Sarah lived about 2000 BC. They probably believed in many gods just as the people of that time did. Around 1200 BC Moses brings in the concept of One God “I am Who am”. Then appears the notion of a Chosen People who are led out of Egypt during the Exodus. After around 800 BC, the “Axial Age”, saw the emergence of great religious leaders like Buddha, Isaiah, Zoroaster. Different concepts of God were evident when the Hebrew people split into the Northern Kingdom (God is Eloim) and the Southern Kingdom (God is Yahweh). After the Babylonian exile (587 BC) history shows two versions of God in: the priestly writer (P following the tradition of Moses) and the Deuteronomist (D following the tradition of the covenant and the commandments).

So we note that the concept of God never was static, but evolved as time and circumstances changed. The question is: do we still believe that God is a legislator, a jealous Judge, who takes notes about our conduct and demands worship, as the early Hebrews did?

Christianity is undergoing the greatest transformation

in its history, one that makes the Reformation look tame!

The Reformation dealt with minor issues like indulgences, justification, celibacy and other Church practices. The basic concept of God remained the same. God was up there, we needed to be saved by the death of Jesus or we couldn’t get into heaven. With great respect we recognize that the story of Jesus had to be told within the context of the prevailing world view.

Today we have ways of understanding God that were not accessible to those who lived centuries before us. Instead of the three-tiered universe of the past, our universe is populated with billions and billions of galaxies. Each galaxy has billions and billions of stars. Just one of those stars is our sun with its solar system. And here we are on one of those planets called earth.

This has significant theological implications. Nothing can exist without God’s presence sustaining it in existence. The thought is mind-boggling! So where is God? Up in heaven? Where is heaven? **Jesus gave the crowd images to understand who and what God is.**

The message of Jesus was to convert and believe. ‘Convert’ meaning to change their image of God from “out there” to God as “Father”, Abba, right here. Jesus does not have a dualistic view. The Kingdom of Heaven is not “up there” and we are “down here”. The Kingdom is here within you. Of course, because God is everywhere. We always gave lip service to that statement, but we didn’t practice it.

So if we believe that we live in God now, at death we will be living in God. What this means is a mystery still, but we can rule out images of a soul floating up into the sky and greeted by

Someone who decides whether we can be admitted into a place called “heaven”. Life is a journey IN God, not a journey TO God.

What is “salvation” about?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells the story of original sin in numbers 415-419. By the sin of Adam the gates of heaven were closed, and Jesus saved us by opening them again by his death.

The image of the “Father” Jesus gave contradicts any image of a God-Judge who keeps notes and who locks people out of “heaven” because our parents sinned. Salvation means being set free. Jesus sets me free by his life and teaching, not by satisfying Divine Justice by paying for our sins on the cross, redeeming, buying our way back into heaven.

Jesus on the cross: “I will not believe in a cruel God out there, no matter what happens to me”.

When Jesus learned of the death of John the Baptist, imagine the dilemma he was in. He was committed to the Baptist’s teaching when he accepted John’s baptism. But now he could see clearly that this was a dangerous thing to do. He could be thinking “I’ve had enough! I’m out of here!” But his conviction was so strong, that he decided to carry on. And after the meagre response to his message of the “Good News” when he was sentenced to die on the cross, do we imagine he thought: “Well, after all I am God, and this will be over in three days, and mankind will be saved”? Or more likely, if we honestly believe that he was fully human, he might have thought “God, why are you doing this to me?” Or did his faith remain strong enough to say, “I will not believe in a cruel God, no matter what happens to me”. This is the faith and conviction we need in our times of crisis. And we have the most powerful example and model in Jesus on the cross. This is the only belief that can set us free.

This is my body. This is my blood

At the Last Supper, was Jesus thinking of founding the Catholic Church? Is this why he “ordained” the apostles?

Or, did Jesus have a strong premonition that this may be the last time he would be with those whom he so deeply loved and cared for? When he took up the bread and held it out before them, he tore it apart with his two hands, saying: “This is my Body”. Did those present get the message? Was not the message that he is broken, being torn apart, by what has happened and fearing what is going to happen? “This is my blood”- will the coming hours be bloody? They were all aware of the charged atmosphere in Jerusalem. They must have known or heard rumours of what the religious authorities were plotting against him. It was more of a sentence of death, than an ordination.

The Body of Christ. Amen

The new rite for communion is really not new, but a return to an older tradition. We go back to St. Augustine when he explains to the newly baptized Christians at the Easter liturgy that they are to receive communion for the first time. He explains to them that by their baptism they are now “incorporated” into the Body of Christ. As members they have committed themselves, just as the Roman soldier does when he pledges loyalty to his general. Augustine says that when the host is presented to the communicant, it signifies the whole body of Christ present in the community and throughout the world. He explains that ‘you are saying Amen to that which you are’, namely the Body of Christ. There was no suggestion of “transubstantiation” as we were taught.

Priesthood

The dualistic notion of God “up there” and us “down here” brings with it the idea of the middle man, the priest, who does the magic of bringing God down to our level. Instead, with our updated understanding of God’s already being present, the priest or minister’s role is to affirm the presence of God, to articulate more clearly and meaningfully the reality of God’s Spirit at work in our lives. We need to be affirmed again and again in the belief that our God is intimately a part of the ups and downs of our everyday lives.

Going to Sunday Mass

How do you cope with the usual church service that seems like a step back in time and in faith? You want some affirmation in your faith development but you encounter religious services locked onto outdated images and language that Church authority decrees is timeless and will never change. Do you just quit going? Many do.

You need to clearly articulate for yourself why you go to Sunday Mass. Is it to nourish my faith in the old story of God up there and me down here? Is it to receive the transubstantiated Body of Christ? Or can we be present to and find affirmation that We are the Body of Christ. We can try to live our new understanding of God’s Spirit living in and through each one of us by how we show compassion to those around us. At communion, our “Amen” can be our reminder that we say “Amen” to what we are: the “Body” of Christ, and try to live out this commitment.

Is Jesus God?

Before we start gathering wood for burning heretics, I must say that unless I missed something of Michael’s talks, I don’t recall that he once said outright that Jesus is not God. His main message was that we are today faced with a new understanding of the universe that is vastly different from the understanding of those who wrote the Gospels. The Gospel message was built on a dualistic story that God was in heaven and we were separated because of Adam’s sin. Only a God-man Jesus could “redeem us”.

The new story built on our present understanding of the immensity of the universe leads us to believe that God is a lot more awesome than our ancestors imagined. And God must be a lot closer to us, because nothing can exist without God. So we live in God. That’s inescapable.

We do not need to rely on the Genesis story to explain our presence on this earth. We “trace the journey of atoms in our bodies back to their presence in stars exploding billions of years ago”. Within the framework of this story we can continue to make Jesus of Nazareth central to our lives and to give meaning to our lives. This story sets us free from images and practices that tie us to fear, guilt and a sense of distance from God, a sense of our unworthiness, and religious dependence on others to bring the sacred to us. Yes, we will joyfully call Jesus “divine” and our rejoicing will reflect our belief that the very same Spirit of Divine Love that moved him moves in all of us.

Mary, the mother of Jesus

Does any of this relegate Mary to a lower position than what we

were always taught? It should do just the opposite. Being more like us brings her closer to us. We can identify with her task of trying to handle a precocious child that Jesus must have been. We can agonize with her when Jesus leaves home and gets into trouble. Why does he have to go out on a limb like this?

From the perspective of our new story, there is no need to propose an original fall of Adam. So Augustine's idea that original sin is transmitted by way of human sexuality doesn't make sense. We are free to accept sexuality as a gift from a loving God, and so it is something precious and good, not evil at all. What is wrong with Jesus being conceived and born human like the rest of us? Why then shouldn't Joseph and Mary have other children? This view certainly brings Mary and Joseph much closer to us than the "purity" notion that must be constructed, seemingly so artificially, just to avoid sexuality.

Home Celebrations

Michael encouraged celebrations at home with bread and wine. But not using the Mass ritual, which, he said, was a rite that belongs to the hierarchy. He gives an example of a home celebration in his book *Praying – A New Story*.

Concluding thoughts

In a few pages, it is impossible to cover adequately the presentation given by Michael Morwood. The overheads he used in his presentation helped me very much to follow his reasoning and explanation of some very difficult concepts of faith.

Michael has published several books which more fully explain his views:

Tomorrow's Catholic – Understanding God and Jesus in a New Millennium. Twenty-Third Publications, Box 180 Mystic, CT 06355, 146 pages. 1999.

God Is Near – Trusting Our Faith. The Crossroad Publishing Company, 481 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10001, 126 pages. 2002. First published 1992 in Australia.

Is Jesus God? – Finding Our Faith. The Crossroad Publishing Company. 144 pages. 2001.

Praying – A New Story. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545-0308. 144 pages. 2004.

Reflections on my Summer Readings

by Leonard Schmidt, Alpha & Omega Christian Community, Winnipeg, MB

The Da Vinci Code by Brown & *Conversations with God* by Walsch

Brown chooses a fictitious conflict between Opus Dei and a secret organization, founded by Leonardo Da Vinci, intent on venerating the goddess, Mary Magdalene, and protecting the line of offspring emanating from the union of Mary and Jesus. This theme may find its origin in, among other sources, a book entitled "The Holy Grail" which attributes the popularity of this myth to the Knights Templar. After their papal suppression, these dispossessed knights reacted by embracing the occult and using their residual, hidden wealth to promote this legend. It is alleged in "The Holy Grail" that the original treasures had been confiscated by papal and royal interests.

The challenge in Brown's book lies in cracking the code, of course, which includes in part a sequence of numbers: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13 etc.

I enjoyed all of this book, especially the tongue-in-cheek (?) substitution of Mary Magdalene for the beloved disciple in Da Vinci's "alleged" first authentic version of "The Last Supper". Will the Holy See ban this book as she banned some other books, for example, Boccaccio's "Decameron"? No! And even if it did, this piece of humorous fiction will not prevent us from entering heaven, nor will ignoring the unlifted ban on the Free Masons stop us. Fortunately, our Church has begun to respect the nature, responsible judgements, and consciences of 21st century highly evolved committed Roman Catholics.

Walsch claims that "Conversations with God" is a nonfiction attempt to tell us who God really is (the Ultimate Reality) by incorporating all the recent theological, spiritual, philosophical, psychological, ecological, apocalyptic, and cosmological insights of our contemporary great New Age. According to Walsch, we are motivated to become an "H.E.B.", a highly evolved being. We are all "gods" because we are made of the same stuff, i.e. spirit, as God in a

process described as "individuation" of this infinite spirit.

What intrigued me was the "hit" or "potshot" which the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church incurs in this book too.

The substitution of patriarchy for matriarchy was effected, historically it is claimed, by men inventing the devil to instill fear in the hearts of women. Similarly, the Church also wrested control of its members, it is claimed, by inflicting fear of "invented" hell and purgatory; and it enriched itself by the sale of indulgences and the promotion of novenas and vigil lights, etcetera. It also created sin by decreeing Sunday Mass attendance compulsory under pain of mortal sin. Of course, some of our New Age young people today ignore this injunction.

Walsch's god prefers reincarnation, instead of reward or punishment. Then, on Friday, September 10, I attended the Anglican funeral service in Melfort, Sask., of my wife's sister-in-law, Mae Kvemshagen, 84, who had suffered from painful debilitating arthritis for 57 years. I asked myself "Was this reincarnation of Mae an effective means of achieving a highly evolved state of being?" Walsch also claims that Jesus was reincarnated as Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, a.k.a Mormons! On another occasion, I met a Sorbonne Ph.D. Irish graduate who claimed he could "remember" his earlier reincarnations, as well as encountering his divorced wife in a previous life.

Walsch's book provides an enthralling, fresh vision of evolving life in our vast universe challenging us to achieve "Nirvana", a more intimate personal union with God, heightened sexual pleasure, and the "remembering" experiences of our past lives whenever our souls/spirits leave our bodies during sleep!

Circular Letter No. 8

by Aitor Orube, Madrid, Spain

October 4, 2004

Since my last Circular Letter, we in the northern hemisphere have had the summer vacations and we have just started a new school year. The rest period allowed us to step back from our daily tasks and to review our priorities so as to deal with our responsibilities with a renewed spirit.

To kick-start this new 'year,' the "Office" of the E.C. met at the end of September and continued to work on the preparation of the 6th Congress which, as you already know, will take place at Wiesbaden-Naurod, near Frankfurt, Germany, from September 16 - 19, 2005, that is in one year!

In my previous Letter, I started to formulate several questions that seemed to me necessary and needed to be discussed in the member-groups of the Federation. Once again, I am asking you to express all possible alternatives: your advice and opinions will help the Executive Committee at its annual meeting at the end of January, 2005, to establish a list of topics to be submitted to a vote during the next General Assembly.

Remember that the E.C. received an explicit and pressing mandate at the General Assembly of Leganés (2002) to prepare the way and take the necessary steps to bring about the formation of the European Federation in order to establish a Confederation of Federations, in view of the already approved existence of the Latin American Federation at the General Assembly of Atlanta (1999).

With this in mind we announce to you the good news of the establishment of the European Federation of Married Catholic Priests. It

includes at present the following group-members: ADVENT (Great Britain), HLM (Belgium) MOCEOP (Spain), P.E.F. (France) and VOCATIO (Italy). The doors are open for other group-members to join. This Federation has set up a very simple structure to service its functioning.

I remind everyone to reflect well on the up-coming passage or period of transition from the present International Federation to the Confederation of Federations. I urge you to please send your suggestions to the Secretariat (Michèle and Claude Bertin) before November 30, 2004 so that they may be taken into account at the next meeting of the E.C. in Brussels on January 27-30, 2005.

Also, in order that the next Congress might profit from sufficient time to share our experiences and practices of various ministries, it is strongly suggested for the sake of precision that we put these in writing. We could thus group together your contributions and publish them in advance.

As well, you will remember that the group of women is awaiting responses to the little questionnaire published by our wives. These written contributions are necessary to permit the facilitating group to formulate the eventual topics for discussion. These submissions should arrive at the Secretariat no later than November 30, 2004.

At any rate, there will always be room for spontaneity, since, as already noted, the Spirit blows when and where It will.

Priestly Ministry Today

by François Brassard, Ladysmith, BC

The next Congress of the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests which takes place in Wiesbaden-Naurod, Germany, September 16-19, 2005 has as its theme: A Renewed Priestly Ministry For Today's World. Aitor Orube of Spain, the president of the Federation, has written several Circular Letters that have recently been published in The Journal. He has asked member-groups to discuss among themselves and report back to the International Secretariat issues relating to the theme of priesthood and priestly ministry. He also raised many specific questions related to the structure of the organization. I would like to respond to his requests and thus initiate a dialogue among members of Corpus Canada.

In the Summer issue of The Journal (pp. 14-15), Jack Shea of Corpus NCR wrote an excellent article on Models Of Priesthood. He distinguished very clearly two models of priesthood that exist today: the cultic priesthood that dates from the Council of Trent and the pastoral servant/leader priesthood of the Vatican II Council. He linked these models to the ideas of two great modern European theologians: Karl Rahner and Hans Urs Von Balthasar. In my opinion the catholic world needs to preserve these two models and the ideas that support them. However, I believe the cultic model needs to be subordinated to the servant/leader model within the structures of an inclusive priesthood open to men and women, married or single. The world needs servant/leader priests who respond to the very real needs of the world

according to the call of the Spirit and in a manner faithful to the teachings of Jesus. The servant/leader priest's chief function is pastoral: to teach, inspire and encourage the faithful to live the Gospel message of Jesus in their daily lives. He/she can, if necessary, delegate cultic functions to other ministers.

There is nothing new in this concept. Others have already expressed it in some detail. Also, there are already many good priests who live out more or less this concept of priesthood, whether they be Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran or any other sister church. But to put this more in practice in a more focussed fashion within the Roman Catholic Church, a Third Vatican Council is necessary. Indeed, many married priests, and I believe Jack Shea to be one of them, would like the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests and other Catholic renewal organizations to urge most forcefully the Pope and the Vatican Curia to call such a Council for such a purpose. This is a good and legitimate objective. However, in my opinion, there are some individual European members of the Federation who do not want the organization to express ideas or actions they deem radical, lest it offend the Vatican hierarchy and, thus, negate the organization's influence in Rome for the calling of a Council. In my view, this is the expression of an unrealistic strategy which will not achieve its goal. In fact, the Vatican hierarchy is almost solidly Balthasarian and thus concentrated on the consequences of

Priestly Ministry Continued...

negativity (sin and evil). They see the modern world as evil and they feel they must protect the Church against it at all costs by stubbornly maintaining past traditions.

In my view, the vast majority of members of Corpus Canada believe that it is a waste of precious human energy to continue trying to dialogue with a hierarchy uninterested in real dialogue. We feel it is more important to live out actively the servant/leader pastoral model of priesthood in a manner, preferably, not against the bishops, but without them, if necessary.

Since 1995 Corpus Canada as an organization has strongly encouraged the formation of Small Faith Communities whose members act in the world according to the call of the Spirit and the teaching of Jesus.

That's why some of us have organized the Kristus Community Society, specifically dedicated to that purpose. There are many other married priests, in Corpus Canada or not, who have worked steadfastly in one way or another to meet the real needs of people in society.

In my view, these are the real priests according to the Spirit of Jesus.

I come now to the questions of structure raised by Aitor Orube with respect to the International Federation. Personally, the most telling point he expressed came at the end of his Circular Letter # 7 (Summer issue, p. 22) where he reminded us that the International Federation could very well disappear in the near future because of the advanced average age of its members and the fact that younger married priests in Europe and North America have no need or interest in getting involved

in our member/group organizations. They no longer need our support, as we older ones did, to make a life for themselves in the world.

Consequently, in my view, the principal objective of any married Catholic priest organization is the support of its existing members with respect to their lives and, particularly, their pastoral ministry. This is true also for the international organization. Its most important objective is to inspire and encourage its members through the publication of the pastoral work of its members in different parts of the world, whether as groups or as individuals. This can be done in French, Spanish and English on a web site created by the International Federation.

If, on the other hand, some individual members wish to devote themselves to the ministry of conversion of the hierarchy through dialogue, let us encourage them as well and let us publish their efforts.

I have no specific suggestions regarding questions of structure except to say that we need to keep things very simple, sufficient to accomplish an effective ministry of inspiration and encouragement.

That's all for now except to say that I would very much appreciate your comments on this topic.

Report on Congress of North Atlantic Federation

by D'Arcy Coulson, Luskville, QC, Corpus-NCR

Report on the North Atlantic Federation for a Renewed Catholic Priesthood (NAFRCP) Congress in Wiesbaden, Germany, August 26-29, 2004

Three people from the National Capital Region (Canada) attended The International Congress of the NAFMCP. In 2003, the NAFMCP elected one of the three, Jack Shea, as President. He participated at the congress with his wife Jean, and D'Arcy Coulson. The organizations are members of a worldwide group of national and international organizations emerging as a network of married priests and their wives committed to change to the current mandatory celibacy requirements of the Roman Catholic Church.

In Canada, the number of priests is half of what it was in the late 1960's, or roughly 8,600, as opposed to 16,000 plus. The emerging crisis faced by the Church hierarchy and the people they serve is due in the view of most to failure to implement the 1960s Vatican II Council's recommendations, current policy on mandatory celibacy for Roman rite priests and a changing sense of religion and spirituality. The crisis has reached epidemic proportions globally and will worsen as the present Church leadership reduces services and closes parish churches, faced with a critical shortage of priests due to fewer candidates for ordination, retirements and tens of thousands of resignations globally. There are thousands of married priests, it is estimated, who would return to active ministry should current policy on mandatory celibacy change. The Church hierarchy under Pope John Paul II has refused to change the present policy on mandatory celibacy for Catholic

priests, with the exception of Anglican clergy converts who are married and active as priests and some eastern rite priests in the Roman Catholic family of churches who are married.

The Congress theme was Power and Sex in a Renewed Church and Priesthood. It brought together an extraordinary group of over 30 men and women from 11 countries. The Congress explored often shocking views on human sexuality and the ideological and historical roots and personalities over the centuries who influenced current policy. Mentioned were St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Jerome, John Knox, Manicheans, Gnostics, Jean Calvin, and others, all apparently uncomfortable with the body, pleasure and human sexuality. The Congress challenged the current policy and pondered the hierarchy's apparent wish to maintain a discredited Church regulation and policy in the face of massive support for a move to married clergy globally with an end to mandatory celibacy in favor of optional celibacy for candidates for the priesthood.

Even more important was the extraordinary warmth and mutual respect offered by the participants to each other. One had the very strong sense that the Spirit was present to us and our work there. The bonding of the small group was almost tangible. One could not but be touched by the often difficult journey taken by most of the participants in doing what they loved to do, working as priests or nuns, and loving the Church and its people but forced to withdraw from ministry when marriage became part of their life. The failure by the institutional church and its leadership to always do the right thing for its priests and nuns in transition as

Report Continued...

a humane and good employer was particularly troubling.

One could not be but impressed by the intelligence and great human decency and maturity of the individuals who gathered together there. It was our sense that if the small gathering of men and women was typical of the same kind of gatherings worldwide, then the hope for timely change was well-founded, and there is good reason for optimism. This gathering of good people of faith and commitment was an epiphany in so many ways. The introduction of a worldwide website in the course of the Congress will no doubt bring together in a positive and powerful way global development.

Summary conclusions from the Congress:

1. There has been in the history of the Church the same confusion and faulty thinking on sexual matters that has been experienced by other religions and other societies. We should acknowledge this and deal with it as an evolving historical reality, and look for a more healthy and spiritually sound vision and practice with respect to sexuality, family life and marriage, as led by the laity.
2. The present leadership of the Church should with respect and humility hear the voice of the people not only on matters of sexual ideology and morality, but on broader issues of concern, notably the recommendations of Vatican II, the empowerment of Ordinaries and decentralization of authority, issues of social justice and a humane response to the AIDS epidemic.
3. The laity and married clergy in the Church should be encouraged to

go where their faith leads them in terms of belief and practices, with particular reference to the Eucharist, without fear or threat of sanction.

4. If the Church is a community gathered around the Mass and the Eucharist, all means must be taken to ensure that canonical priests, married priests, and married men and women and the divorced are invited to a more inclusive ministry and priesthood. Included might be discussion of temporary engagements to ministry, part-time ministry and other alternative modes of ministry.

5. Faced with the perception of the silencing of bishops to deal with or to speak about the crisis of inadequate numbers of clergy, and change of regulations, Church authorities should enter into dialogue with the Church community and jointly seek out solutions to the crisis with transparency and honesty.

6. The voice and contribution of women have been limited by their lack of access to positions of authority and influence in the Church, leaving them with the status of a minority group within their own Church despite their numbers. The Church has been male-dominated for centuries, with inadequate representation of women with their particular values, gifts and priorities. If change is to occur, as it must, women must be given at least equal power and influence in planning for change and the implementation of change.



Photograph of the Executive, below, from left to right: Russ Ditzel (USA), Lambert van Gelder (Netherlands), Magda Peeters (Belgium), Simon Bryden-Brook (England), Jack Shea, President (Canada), Anthony Padovano (USA), Wim van derVelden (Netherlands), Heinz Vogels (Germany)

Final Declaration: Power & Sex in a Renewed Church

Final Declaration of the Congress of the North Atlantic Federation for a Renewed Catholic Priesthood held in Wiesbaden, Germany, August 26-29, 2004.

We, the North Atlantic Federation for a Renewed Catholic Priesthood, explored the theme Power and Sex in a Renewed Church and Priesthood during our Congress in Wiesbaden, Germany.

Sexual love is the most creative gift God gave us. It draws the whole human family into love and gives it life. Life and love are signs of God's presence. We make love and life happen through our sexual commitments.

We regret, therefore, the negative Church teaching of earlier centuries. The New Testament is a better guide. St. Paul notes that the sexual experience of husband and wife is valuable in its own right even without reference to conception and that it is a sign of Christ's love for the Church. Christ focuses on the corruption of power as far more evil than sexual misdeeds.

The condemnation of power may be the best way to sound sexual teaching since it prevents institutions from mandating celibacy and controlling marital life.

The teaching of Vatican II on authority and sexuality, on collegiality and marriage, is far more liberating and evangelical than much of the teaching which precedes and follows it.

There is sexual dysfunctionality in the ministry and in the world at large. A more enlightened sexual teaching in the Church will enrich the ministry and heal the world. The nobility of sexual love and marriage, the status of women and the future of ministry belong to the same reality.

The Church is truly itself when it follows Jesus. It must, therefore, dismantle its structural abuse of power and sexual repression. It can do this through a new Ecumenical Council. The gifts of all God's people, married and celibate, man and woman, clerical and lay, assembled in Council, will bring the Church of Christ the new Pentecost it seeks.

Editor's note

Corpus Canada and Corpus-National Capital Region (Canada) are separate and distinct organizations. Corpus-NCR (Canada) has become a member organization of the North Atlantic Federation of Married Priests (NAF). Along with other North Atlantic member organizations, Corpus Canada has decided not to become a member organization of the NAF.

Corpus Canada has been and continues to be a member organization of the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests (IFMCP).

Beginning with its Winter '03 issue, The Journal has reported the news of CC, IFMCP and NAF.

The Journal can be read online at the Corpus Canada website: www.corpuscanada.org

One of the first questions we should ask the next Pope is: Do you have the authority to ordain women? If the answer is No (as it very well might be), the second question should be, what other authority to bind and loose do you NOT have? Denial of the Church's authority to ordain women does seem to have more than a hint of heresy about it, if we take Christ at His word. There is no longer any serious question among thinking Christians about the qualifications of women to be ordained (no matter what Cardinal Ratzinger says). Whether or not a given Catholic community has grown enough to understand this and accept a woman priest is another question. Some are and some are not. Even if we do have a given right, it is not always charitable to exercise it, but unused rights have a tendency to be ignored. Women do not have the right to be ordained, but every Christian community has a right to celebrate the Eucharist, as well as the right that no member be excluded from ordination unjustly.

Thank you for supporting ARCC and please encourage your friends to learn more about the ASSOCIATION FOR THE RIGHTS OF CATHOLICS IN THE CHURCH AT <http://arcc-catholic-rights.net> Your comments are welcomed and considered helpful.

“When Religion Becomes Evil” by Charles Kimball, Harper Collins Paperback 2003

A substantial number of Christians embrace some form of exclusivism that says, “My understanding and experience of Jesus is the only way to God. Any other form of human religious understanding or behavior is nothing more than a vain attempt by sinful people on a fast track to hell.”

However convincing this may sound to some Christians, it doesn’t square with reality. The lived experience of Christianity throughout history just is not appreciably different from what one finds in other major religions.

It is all too human to compare the ideal version of one’s own religion with the visibly flawed lived reality of other religions- a tendency found in all traditions.

Church history also exposes repeatedly the gap between the ideal as exemplified in the teachings of Jesus and the way Christians have lived and actually behaved.

Mahatma Gandhi encountered Christianity when he lived under British colonial rule in India, as a “coloured” person in the apartheid system in South Africa, and as a student in England. Gandhi loved the Gospel stories, particularly the teachings of Jesus. He found Jesus’ words to be compelling and true. Although he was befriended and supported by some open-minded Christian clergy, he found the larger picture in India and South Africa rather bleak. While Gandhi considered himself a follower of Jesus, he believed many Christians and “Christian civilization” contradicted Jesus’ teachings. For Gandhi, actions spoke louder than words. Gandhi sought to live out the ideal of Jesus’ teachings, which he found consistent with the heart of his own Hindu tradition. (pp 27,28)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Mk 12:30-1

At the heart of all authentic, healthy, life-sustaining religions, one

always finds this clear requirement. Whatever religious people may say about their love of God or the mandates of their religion, when their behavior towards others is violent and destructive, when it causes suffering among their neighbors, you can be sure the religion has been corrupted and reform is desperately needed.

(Kimball p 39)

Kimball cites Wesley Ariarajah, a United Methodist minister from Sri Lanka (who) argues that it is possible to embrace and affirm religious truth without defining truth for others. He (Ariarajah) suggests we can find our way forward by untangling the notion of absolute truth from confessional statements uttered in the language of faith and love. He illustrates the distinction in a way all parents can readily understand:

When my daughter tells me I’m the best daddy in the world, and there can be no other father like me, she is speaking the truth, for this comes out of her experience. She is honest about it; she knows no other person in the role of her father. But of course it is not true in another sense. For one thing, I myself know friends who, I think, are better fathers than I am. Even more importantly, one should be aware that in the next house there is another little girl who also thinks her daddy is the best father in the world. And she too is right. In fact at the level of the way the two children relate to their two fathers, no one can compare the truth content of the statements of the two girls. For here we are dealing with the language of faith and love....The language of the Bible is also the language of faith....The problem begins when we take these confessions in the language of faith and love and turn them into truths on the basis of which we begin to measure the truth or otherwise of other faith claims. My daughter cannot say to her little friend in the next house that there is no way she can have the best father, for the best one is right there in her house. If she does, we’ll have to dismiss it as child-talk. (69, 70)

From the Corpus Archives

From the BC Corpus Connector Newsletter, May/June 1995
How do I know whether my communion with God is increasing or decreasing? This is like asking how I know I love someone more or less than before....The experience is so clear that the one having it cannot doubt that it is happening. Jesus said it best: by their fruits you shall know them. If I grow in communion with God, I become a better person. If I am less in communion with God, I become a worse person. The standard by which we judge whether we are better or worse people is Jesus himself....It is not difficult to know what Jesus is like and how he acts.

Arthur Menu, Sidney, BC

“For we know only in part, and we interpret only in part... For now, we see in a mirror dimly.”
1Cor 13: 9,12

Richard Sipe's Celibacy In Crisis

reviewed by Tom McMahon, San Jose, CA

I was a genuine celibate for twelve years of seminary and twenty years of institutional priesthood. I learned vastly from this reading and I recommend the book as a study guide for those who want to practice celibacy and understand its mystery, as well as those who would support those who seek this ideal for the sake of the Kingdom. Richard Sipe is a believer that a celibate life is possible and valuable.

In our dismal days of a dying clericalism I found the whole to be uplifting. When I offered encouragement to read this excellent work to a veteran priest friend, ordained a half century ago, he did what most clerical friends of mine continue to do; knowing what Sipe offers before they open the first page, they do not read the book. "Celibacy in Crisis" is a diamond amidst the pablum of literature on celibacy. Sipe shows genius in compiling a vast amount of knowledge that I had never heard or thought of. The book deserves ongoing dialogue and healthy communication; sexual theories hitherto unknown are developed in the open clerical marketplace. Positiveness and hope pervade the entire book. I made notes on virtually every page of Sipe's ideas that followed my life from grade school boy to priest to married father of children. I grew; I learned; I renewed interest at age 75.

The glory of the work is that Sipe, in true Benedictine style, draws his information from within the clerical circle; a reader can hear the priests as they trust him with the innermost details of their struggle to remain true to their vow. Mercy and understanding of human nature cushion the process and there is no black-and-white one-time sin involved that dooms a person to failure in this sacred process.

The author claims that 2% of the American clergy have achieved success in living a celibate life, while some 40% put up a good fight, yet lack church support which is so vital to success: "The crucial problem is that the church exacts high standards in theory without actually having enough effective means of supporting those who would subscribe to them." (p 318) Authority plays a role in underachievement.

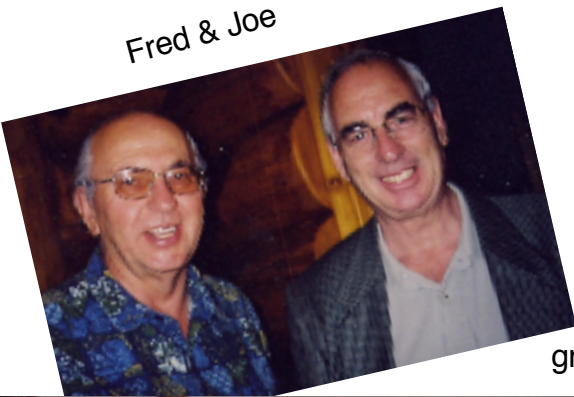
There is a gulf between bishop and priest.

In fashioning a plan that brings into focus healthy sexual psychology, missing from the Roman system, Sipe ventures into waters uncharted for cradle Catholics; he examines the role of what he terms the "MASTURBATIONS": He masterfully guides one through relations with women, heterosexual relationships and behaviors, as well as priests who become fathers. In chapter seven he takes up the "HOMOSEXUALITIES" and the monoculture of the Roman institution. Chapter eight deals with "SEXUAL COMPROMISES"; he brings to light areas needing deep dialogue. I saw my life pass before my eyes as if the author knew my story and its secrets from the day I entered seminary at age 13, ordination at age 25, and the reality of being "dumped" into the parish world an innocent boy and my struggle to grow up and remain celibate. In my opinion the only weakness in the book is the still kept secret of the inner life of the secular priest as compared to a religious order man. The secular priest does not know himself and remains a field of opportunity for growth and maturity. Celibacy for aging seculars is a major problem.

"Celibacy in Crisis" enters the modern world with a careful study of the current pedophilia crisis, abuses, and "can clerical abuse scandals be prevented." Part four, "PROCESS AND ATTAINMENT" is the best of Richard Sipe's offering; contrasting St. Paul's admonition as to who should be a bishop to Chaucer's "evil and cunning-shitty Shepherd". The author offers ten essential elements for the achievement of celibacy. I can use them for spiritual wholeness in my daily life as a married man. "Celibacy in Crisis" is an unusual book, a gem, a pearl of great price.

Our Family Album

Fred & Joe



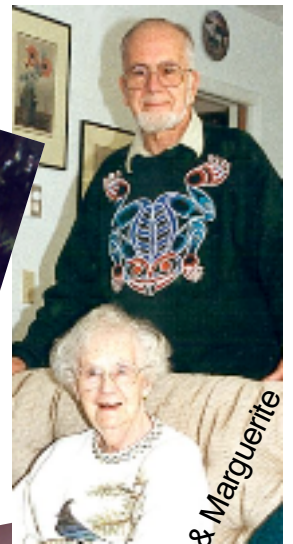
group in Regina



Mary Ann



Dick & Marguerite



Louis & Imelda





Corpus Canada

Who Are We?

We are a faith community of men and women empowered by our baptism in Jesus' Spirit to reach out to others in their need as Jesus did. We also provide support for married Roman Catholic priests, their family and friends.

Where Are We Going?

This faith community is dedicated to

- Renewal of ministries in the Church, including an ordained ministry open to men and women, married and unmarried;
- A vision of Church that includes all people who profess faith in Jesus Christ;
- Development of leadership among all the baptised in the Church;
- Promotion of a wholesome view of sexuality;
- Justice for all based on Gospel values.

Our message is a healing one and is directed to everyone, including the marginalized in the Church. It is our hope to reach people through many ministries, and in a special way through the creation of small faith communities.

How Do We Get There?

Through a collegial approach based on consensus reached through communal discernment in the Spirit, we share our gifts that all creation might be transformed according to God's loving plan.

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Thank you for your support of this Christian ministry.

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