



# The Journal



Spring 2006

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## Corpus Canada Mission Statement

The mission statement of Corpus Canada appears on the back cover of every issue of The Journal. I'd like to comment on it in light of the present historical situation of Catholicism in North America.

### **1. The mission statement is very inclusive.**

It is not directed particularly to the hierarchy of the institutional church. And that's good, because, for many reasons, it has become irrelevant in North American society. That makes me very sad, because the clergy could be a source of prophetic leadership that could provide inspiration and encouragement to many followers of Jesus to do a lot of good in our society. Instead, the mission statement is directed to "all people who profess faith in Jesus Christ." Since Jesus directed his ministry to all the People of God and especially among them, to the marginalized, the mission statement of Corpus Canada is really directed to all the People of God.

### **2. The mission statement promotes a different vision of ordained ministry.**

First, it is open to anyone who senses the call of the Spirit and who submits that call to the acknowledgement of the community. Second, the ordained minister (deacon, priest, bishop) is not a member of a caste system, such as the clergy. Rather, the ordained minister is part of the People of God like everyone else, with a particular function within the faith community. Third, it sees ordained ministry primarily as an exercise of prophetic leadership, which may or may not include presiding over the sacraments. Prophetic leadership requires an explanation.

North American society is largely secular, individualistic and consumerist. These are not Jesus values. Jesus chose leaders, men and women, who would promote Gospel values; those who could see and respect God's Spirit in all of creation and who could promote sharing the goods of the earth with everyone in a manner that is fair and responsible.

The mission statement presumes that prophetic leaders will have their head screwed on right. That means that they are well immersed in Gospel values, that they have a balanced view of God's reality, particularly in the area of sexuality, and that they know how to communicate the Jesus message in a way that energizes people to live it in day to day life for the benefit of all.

Also, the prophetic leader, who may not necessarily be an ordained minister, realizes profoundly that, like Jesus, the 'medium is the message.' That means that there is no room for anger, violence or self-righteousness in the behaviour of the messenger. Only in this way will the messenger proclaim a message that is effective.

It may seem to some people that the Corpus Canada mission statement as commented on here, is pie in the sky. I don't think so. I am greatly encouraged by all kinds of people, especially younger people who don't even know about Corpus Canada, who live lives that model its mission statement.

One example: two weeks ago Connie and I met a young woman in her twenties who was on her way to Tanzania to devote two years of her life assisting women there on health issues. The Spirit blows where it will and that gives me great hope.

François Brassard

The Journal  
Spring 2006  
Vol. 9, No. 2

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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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Canadian Publications Mail Sales Product  
Agreement No. 40025971

Xristos Community Society, a non-denominational society incorporated in British Columbia, serves the Gospel of Jesus Christ through worship and the promotion and development of Christian small faith communities across Canada. Xristos Community Society is a registered charity in Canada. The Journal is distributed free of charge. Xristos Community Society needs and welcomes donations in support of its ministry.  
See the back page for further details.

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Corpus Canada Mission Statement  
*François Brassard*
- 3-4 Theological Soapbox: Analogies For The Computer Age  
*Arthur Menu*
- 4-7 Meeting With Voice Of The Faithful - Saanich, BC  
*Phil Little*
- 7 A Survey of Members of Voice of the Faithful
- 8 Book Review  
*Jim Noonan*
- 9 Hearing & Seeing  
*Hank Mattimore*
- 10 Jesus Reinterpreted by the Qu'ran  
*Tarif Khalidi*
- 11-12 A Perspective On Enhancing Muslim-Christian Understanding  
*Jennifer Waterman*
- 12-13 Sophia  
*Dianne Peck*
- 13 A Personal Confession of Faith  
*Hal Caton*
- 14 Women in Islam  
*Frank Sarton*
- 14 Accepting God's Spirit  
*Chris Diamond*
- 15 New Catholic Community  
*Fr. Ed Cachia*

## FOCUS TOPIC

*for the Summer 2006 Issue*

Two Prophetic Voices: Michele Birch-Conery and Ed Cachia  
Readers are invited to write about these two Catholic voices.

**Note: Articles for this issue are due by August 15.**

Reader's may send in items of interest to the Corpus Canada Forum at  
[www.corpuscanada.org](http://www.corpuscanada.org)

# Theological Soapbox: Analogies for the Computer Age

by Arthur Menu, Sidney, BC



In my Theological Soapbox in the previous issue of The Journal I suggested that the technology of computers provides an analogy for understanding the divine Word through whom God created everything. I suggested that we could understand the Word to be self-aware code, infinitely rich

in information, and us to be pieces of self-aware code, generated by the Word, having the freedom to choose to be (or not to be) subprograms of the Word. We can choose to sacrifice our autonomous freedom in order to participate in the freedom of the Word, without loss of our individual identity. I also suggested that in creating us the Word programmed us in such a way that we ourselves generate the universe as we perceive it based on the code contained within the Word.

This notion may seem paradoxical because we tend to think that code requires a medium in which it is encoded. For example, what you are now reading is code (English) encoded in paper and ink, if you are reading the paper edition of The Journal, or in the pixels of your computer screen, if you are reading the online edition of The Journal. My analogy would have code (us) generating the objects in the universe as we perceive it. But must not the objects exist before the code exists if the objects are to provide the media in which the code is to be encoded?

I would here suggest that the code of which I am speaking, the code which is constitutive of persons, is like light. At the end of the nineteenth century scientists thought that light was a wave phenomenon, and as such needed a medium in which to be propagated. They called that hypothetical medium 'ether'. Since then science has determined that light, while it does display wavelike characteristics (and particle-like characteristics) under certain conditions, does not require a medium in which to travel. Light is its own medium. In the same way, we can think of the code constitutive of persons to be its own medium.

I believe that analogies for the doctrines of faith based on computer and communication technology will be especially illuminating for the generations following ours. Even today we see children and youth immersing themselves in this technology. The best analogies are based on the lived experience of those to whom we are seeking to explain spiritual realities. Biblical texts tend to use analogies based on nature, agriculture, crafts, and the social structure of their societies. When Jesus wanted to explain to his disciples how they were to be related to him, he told them that he was the vine and they were the branches. This would have made sense to the disciples, who would have been very familiar with the farming of grapes. Today in our cities there are many young people whose only experience of grapes comes from seeing clusters of picked grapes in the grocery

store.

One analogy for our relationship with God that I would like to propose as apt for the computer age is based on computer networking. Many of those reading this use computers, and all of those readers I would expect have seen computers in operation. An individual computer's usefulness depends on three things: its processing power, its storage capacity, and the way in which it obtains data. These three factors limit what programs will run on the computer and how much data can be handled by the computer. The first computer I owned had a 20 megabyte hard drive, a processing chip that was very slow by today's standards, and able to receive and send data only by input from the keyboard, a floppy diskette, or a telephone line. On my current computer I have programs so large that my first computer's hard drive would not have been big enough to hold them, and even if I could have installed them, there would not have been sufficient processing power to use them.

But even today's immensely more powerful desktop computers are limited in comparison to the mainframe computers that are used by governments and large corporations. These mainframe computers run programs and handle amounts of data that no desktop PC (personal computer) can cope with. Fortunately there is a way that a person with a desktop computer can access the power of a mainframe computer. If the desktop computer has a network card and networking software installed, and a high speed cable connection to the mainframe computer, then it is possible for the person with the PC to send computing tasks to the mainframe, have the mainframe run programs and process data far beyond the capacity of any PC, and then have the results sent back to the PC.

Another way to multiply the power of a PC is to have a large number of PCs connected in a network operating with software that enables tasks to be shared by all the PCs in the network, so that a task that no one PC could accomplish can be accomplished by a large number of PCs, each of which works on one small part of the task.

This leads me to suggest an analogy between PCs connected to a mainframe and our relationship with God. Each of us is limited in what we can know and do, but if we are 'networked' with God, then we can enjoy the benefits of what God can do. In fact we can imagine that while God possesses the power to do everything by himself, He chooses to share His creative work with all the people networked with Him. Each of us has some small part in the tremendous creative work of God. We do not have the capacity to envision the entirety of the task we are involved in, but each part is essential, what each of us does is essential. God, as the coordinating 'mainframe', alone has the capacity to run the program that parcels out the individual tasks to us, the networked 'PCs', and combine the results into the desired whole.

In order for us to be part of this great network, we must choose to give up our autonomy. Once we are in the network, the operating system of our individual 'PC' is integrated into the operating system of the 'mainframe'. The PC retains its individuality: all the documents, spreadsheets, graphics, etc., that were created on it before it became networked are still stored on the PC; no history is lost. And all the tasks performed by the PC after it became

## Soapbox Continued...

networked are credited to the PC no less than the tasks it performed before it joined the network. There is no sacrifice of individuality. Whereas before being networked, the individual exercised a freedom exclusively its own, it now exercises a freedom shared with the mainframe and all the other networked PCs.

I feel this contemporary analogy may better explain to young people, who love their freedom, that discipleship does not mean the loss of freedom, but entering into a shared freedom that is greater, and more full of possibility, than they could ever experience as individuals outside the network God invites them to join.

*Thanks to readers of The Journal for your calls, cards and caring. All that energy has lifted me to better health. Bouquets, books and blessings are treasured.*

*François' home care was excellent; he deserves my very special thanks.*

*Connie Kurtenbach*

## Meeting With Voice of the Faithful - Saanich, BC

*by Phil Little, Cedar, BC*



Let us begin with a few verses from the Gospel of John. Peter says to Jesus “ Lord why can I not follow you right now? I will lay down my life for you.” (13:37) And of course we know the response by Jesus “a cock

shall now crow until you deny me three times.” (13:38) And then later, after the arrest of Jesus, we find Peter being questioned: “Are you not also one of his disciples?” (18:25) And later, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” (v.26) And Peter denied it over and over again.

We gather as disciples of Jesus remembering his promise that when two or more are gathered in his name, he is present among them. It is not that Jesus will be present only when we are faithful and good, but whenever we gather together as a body that seeks to discern his Way and to move with his Spirit. We are a pilgrim people, on a journey, and we seek this blessing that tonight our minds and our hearts will be open to his Grace.

A few months ago you hosted an evening with Michele Birch-Conery. That was rather bold on your part and it is a tough act to follow. I am impressed at how Michele has so reluctantly accepted ordination, and I think for the right reasons, while at the same time she does not know how her priestly ministry will evolve. But she won't be a priest like all the rest. It is exciting to be so close to what really is a trans-formative moment in our history as a church people.

I am also mindful that for many years you had Jack Sproule as your pastor and spiritual guide until his retirement two years ago. I know Jack from Nanaimo when he was pastor of St. Peter's Parish which has to be one of the strangest parishes anywhere. Jack was a breath of fresh air, but his stay was too short. Jack offered to the parish what VOTF seeks today, and the result was a parish community vibrant with activists who ran the parish. Most of those people were crushed and alienated by a string of unfortunate clergy appointments, even during

the time of Remi DeRoo. What Jack didn't do was to prepare the people for an experience of exile in their own land. They had come to experience themselves as church only to be told over and over again that the church didn't need them. Good friends tell the truth and I eagerly await Jack's analysis of my efforts tonight.

And so you are, most of you, the Voice of the Faithful from Sidney. VOTF comes out of a bitter experience of church, from faithful card-carrying Catholics of the “pay, pray and obey” paradigm who were literally scandalized by the behaviour of their church in the sexual abuse scandal that continues to unfold throughout the USA and in other countries, such as Ireland. We are a people who do not know our history and who deny it when it shakes our faith. Scandal is our history; and perhaps the question is ‘Why get upset now?’ Or perhaps better ‘What has changed so that now we get upset?’

James Carroll, an American author who has a weekly article in the Boston Globe and who is also a priest who left the active ministry, began a study of anti-Semitism in Church history because he was upset at what he thought were unfounded criticisms of the church. The further he got into his investigation, the more shocked he became. He wrote a book of his investigation entitled “Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews”. His conclusion was that anti-Semitism was part of our nature; it was the Catholic thing to do; it was a part of our culture.

The more we get into it, looking at all that is wrong with the Church and all the ways that it denies Jesus day after day in its structures and in its treatment of the people, we begin to see that it is part of our culture. Little boys have been abused by clergy for centuries. Little girls have been abused by clergy for centuries. Women have been victimized by a misogynist culture that denied them an equal identity and status even though St. Paul affirmed so early in the life of the church that such distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, and neither male nor female should no longer be tolerated “for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28)

The rot in the church is so very deep; it goes back before Constantine, and it is certainly entrenched with this paradigm swing to church as an official institution of the empire. It is not difficult to outline all the examples of how the rot is manifested, but if Jesus is in any way connected to the early church, it is

difficult to imagine that Jesus could identify with the institution after Constantine.

The great living theologian from Peru, Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, sometimes called the father of the Theology of Liberation, often speaks about the moments of grace that have appeared throughout our history like artesian wells which bubble up from the interior of the earth offering fresh and nourishing drink to a people desperate and thirsty. To the Samaritan woman, the first missionary in the Christian story, Jesus says “the water that I shall give shall become a well of water springing up to eternal life.” (Jn 4:14) But the institution has been successful in putting a cap on these wells whenever they burst open, but not until some of the people have had a taste of this eternal water. Gustavo asserts that these gushers of living water are breaking out more frequently, and the empire and its church are finding it more difficult to keep them capped.

Such was the experience of St. Francis of Assisi, once called the last great revolutionary in the Church. Even in his lifetime, his charisma had been subverted and subdued. In our time, the original inspiration that produced Mother Theresa was subdued and contained within her lifetime which is why she will probably be canonized in a speedy process by a system that needs to glorify itself and its ideological views on the place of women, especially religious women.

I want to share with you some of my personal story, for this is not meant to be a sermon or lecture. I want to focus on two particular moments of my life which I will call pivotal in my own ongoing awareness of myself and my growth as a disciple of the man from Nazareth.

### Background

To frame these moments I need to be quite honest with you so that you understand from where I come. I was born in 1947 to devout and faithful Catholic parents. Church was a major part of our lives. We went to Church twice on Sundays – in the morning for mass and in the evening for Benediction and Rosary. I became a Knight of the Altar and sometimes served at two or three Sunday masses. If I served at a wedding mass, I would even share in the priest's stipend, sometimes as much as \$2 which around 1960 was a lot of money for a kid. I was told that as an altar boy I was second in closeness to God after the priest, ahead of the choir, any other church volunteers – even ahead of my parents and family.

I met the Oblate Fathers in my first years of high school, and then in 1964, I went to a Franciscan college for my grade 12. There I was taught by wonderful and kind men. Among these Oblates and Franciscans, who were my role models, there has never been any hint of scandal or abuse – what VOTF calls today “priests of integrity”. I wanted to be one of them. I was already part of the clerical culture; at the age of 18 I entered the Oblate novitiate in Ontario. That was 1965, just months after the close of Vatican II. In 1969, I went to Mexico with an international student movement, and through this group I was exposed to the analysis of Ivan Illich and, in 1970, to Paulo Freire. I think I was the first Oblate seminarian to read his “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”. Ah yes! And that summer in Mexico, I met a lovely young woman from Toronto who today is sitting over there and is my wife of

25 years. But that is another story.

In 1972, the Oblates were not sure what to do with me because I was not fitting into the mold in Ottawa. So, much to my pleasure, I was sent to Peru in 1972 for my pastoral year of study, and I began working with one priest in a parish of 80,000 in the slums north of Lima. There on Christmas day 1972, I was ordained a deacon by Msgr. Luis Bambaren, one of the few bishops who has consistently sided with the poor and has even been jailed. I returned to Canada and was ordained a priest in May 1974, and then I returned to Peru.

I became a member of a priest movement (ONIS) which identified with the poor and used the theology of liberation as a tool for analysis and reflection. Many Oblates by this time had adopted the American charismatic movement as their vehicle of missionary work. In 1980, I learned that the Oblates had decided to send me to a remote village in the mountains of La Rioja, Argentina, an otherwise beautiful valley but, at that time during the dirty war, it was known for disappearances and military brutality. The handwriting was on the wall and I decided to leave the active ministry and the

Oblates. I returned to Canada. The following year I was married and eventually fathered three children, one of whom is now married and the other two are in university. I began teaching in the public school board, and in 1985 along with many non-catholic teachers, I was transferred to the Separate School Board by the government.

So now I want to share these two special (kairos) moments in my pilgrimage and to connect them as questions in a way that I hope will be useful to you as VOTF in your journey.

### Moment 1

I mentioned that I became involved with a group of priests in Peru. In this group I had the opportunity to listen and learn from Peruvian clergy who walked the talk. Among these was one priest by the name of Jorge Alvarez Calderon. He was related to three of the 15 or so ruling families who owned the country. Jorge and his brother became diocesan priests in Lima, and it was a matter of speculation which one would become a future Archbishop and automatically Cardinal. They had intellect, vocation, and more importantly, connections. Both priests in the 1960's went to work with the poor, as part of their official career path to more important positions. Jorge however was transformed by the poor, and he began to understand how he (and his family) was part of the problem, not the solution. Jorge became the national chaplain of the Catholic Worker's Movement, and he became a pariah and outcast to his family.

I had Jorge come to work with a parish team of young adults. Of course, I was there to share in the reflections. Jorge explained how the church was part of the mechanism of oppression by the state. He used his own situation to illustrate the mechanisms the state used to perpetuate its power and control. He explained the role of the judiciary and the military. He showed how educators were part of the system. And of course, this analysis included the

*We gather as disciples of Jesus, remembering his promise that when two or more are gathered in his name, he is present among them.*

church and its functionaries and including foreign missionaries. Wait a minute! Jorge was talking about me. Why were foreign missionaries in the country? Penny Lernoux wrote a book called "Cry of the People" which in part explains why missionaries were sent to Latin America after the late 1950's and why up to 80 % of them worked not with the poor but with the rich, and most of the money sent through them went to strengthening the position of the wealthy and the elite.

Jorge used the expression "tuerco util" - tuerco means bolt or nut in a machine; util means useful. We were by definition, by virtue of ordination and social status "useful cogs" in the machinery of oppression and humiliation of the masses. In the church, even in the official documents of Medellin, the Church talked about a "preferential option" as an option for the poor. Jorge refined that notion of option - it was a choice to be useful to the machine or to be useful to the poor. The story of Jesus begins to take on a different perspective when read through this new analysis. Why was Jesus so dangerous to the Romans that he was put to death in the worst way by the Roman Empire? And then seeking to accommodate itself to the empire, the Church blamed the Jews.

Q. If my role is to be a useful cog, my option to be a disciple of Jesus requires me to choose for whom I wish to be useful. Does the gospel of Matthew help to make this option any easier? When the Son of Man comes, will he not say "inherit my kingdom"? It all hinges on the poor: the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned, the marginalized, and the oppressed. (Matthew 25)

### Moment 2

When teaching with the public system for three years and later with the separate system for 21 years, I became involved in the teacher associations which acted like unions or bargaining units. With the Ontario English Catholic Teacher's Association (OECTA) I served on numerous committees at both the Provincial and the local levels. I held positions of responsibility in the schools, with the local bargaining unit, and on Provincial council. All of this work was volunteer without any financial compensation.

Back in 1994, I was a grievance officer of OECTA assigned to a group of schools in the inner city of Toronto. I had a reputation as a grievance officer; every grievance I supported was won by the union, in part because I knew the contract, and I did my homework thoroughly.

I received a phone call one day from the Vice-President of the local asking me to assist a Jewish teacher who was experiencing difficulty. This Jewish teacher had been transferred against his wishes from the public to the separate school board by an act of provincial legislation. He was a man in his early 50's and he was the grandson of Holocaust victims from east Europe. His teaching subject was history and he was assigned to teach modern European history, including WW2.

This teacher came to school one day to find the outside of the school spray painted with a swastika and the words "Jew get out". The police began an investigation. Nothing happened but there were other incidents which caused the teacher to feel he was being targeted, and he was getting no support from the Board. He complained because of a lack of support for which he received a formal reprimand for "his lack of sensitivity to Catholic culture".

I assisted this teacher in filing two grievances against the Board and also a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Through Freedom of Information, we tracked a systemic campaign

against this teacher because of his Jewishness that began with complaints from some parents who did not want their son to be taught by a Jew "because the Jews killed Christ". We uncovered that this campaign included not only school board officials but also an important official of the diocese.

While I tried to support this teacher as a union officer, at the request of the union, I witnessed anti-Semitic comments by union leaders who were upset with my diligent support of this teacher. The union was particularly upset that I had accompanied the teacher to the Human Rights Commission.

This Jewish teacher took the matter somewhat philosophically; it was what he expected from Catholics, and it confirmed his experience and that of his family as victims of Christian anti-Semitism. He expressed his doubts as to the support he would get from the union and said one day "Phil, when push comes to shove, the Christians will circle their wagons and make sure that the Jew is on the outside."

I somewhat naively told him that this would not happen because I had been appointed by the union to assist him through the process. Eventually the union leadership scuttled the two grievances on technical errors which simply don't happen by mistake. In the meanwhile, I received a disciplinary transfer to one of the worst schools in the Board, if not in the province. That was the beginning of 10 years of harassment, intimidation, and reprisals against me orchestrated by officials of the school board.

I was invited by my Jewish colleague to come over for a beer when he learned of my sad fate in part because of my diligent and personal support of this Jewish teacher. Of course, there were other factors, related to my work as union officer in other cases. The union accepted my disciplinary transfer and provided lukewarm support through five arbitrations over the next 10 years, all of which were decided in my favour.

Over a cool beer that June afternoon in 1995, my Jewish friend asked me "How does it feel to stand outside the circle with the Jew?"

My work with the union on behalf of my colleagues had become my ministry. It was something that I put my heart and soul into. It really did not feel comfortable to stand outside the circle with the Jew. Just as it doesn't feel safe to sit at the back of the bus with the blacks. Or to join in a gay pride parade with gay clergy friends. Or, as Fr. Ed Cachia of Peterborough knows, to show support for women's ordination.

In Peru, I had worked with the poor and oriented my ministry in the struggle for justice, but in truth, I wasn't really there. I was an outsider, privileged and protected.

As a teacher, working for the union, I no longer had the privilege that went with ordination and, in fact, that was a factor against me. Some saw me as a traitor who should have shown more loyalty to the Catholic system and its culture of anti-Semitism.

To stand outside with the Jew is where I should have been. It is not what I had anticipated. And it did not make life any easier for me or my family. It came with a social, emotional and professional cost. I chose, out of naivety perhaps, anticipating

support from my Catholic colleagues, but in the end, standing outside of the circle was a shocking experience. It is where I should have been many years before.

Q. Is VOTF a choice to stand outside the circle with the Jew?

The goals of VOTF as listed on its website are

1. to support victim/survivors of clergy sexual abuse,
2. to support priests of integrity, and
3. to shape structural change within the Catholic Church.

VOTF began as a choice to stand outside the circle with the victims of sexual abuse by clergy and the systemic complicity of the hierarchy in these criminal actions. It began as a choice to support “priests of integrity”, who are in some ways also victims by the backlash by society. One priest friend told me that he is embarrassed to wear his clerical collar in public, but in part that has a lot to do with the loss of prestige and power that went with the collar. And VOTF begins with a commitment to participate in seeking change in the church. But seek not to change the bishop or the clergy; for the most part, they are nice people, but because of the system which rewards them, they remain severely underdeveloped and addicted to the toxicity that is big C – Church. What is the change that is happening to you?

VOTF began something like the Coalition of Concerned Canadian

Catholics who were angered about the official church involvement and mismanagement of the clergy sexual abuse cases coming out of Mount Cashel and other places across the country. The CCCC came out of anger and remained angry for a few years, and then the group just faded out, some remaining committed to change and others just moving on and out of the church. It is not enough to be angry. VOTF will need to look at its goals and redefine them in the context of the local church. We should be angry at much of what the church does, but the artesian well of new life is a different energy with vision and hope for a different reality of church.

I know that I am not the same type of Christian-Catholic that I was as a devout altar boy nor as a recently ordained Oblate priest. I am not the same type of Christian-Catholic that I was when I was a Catholic school teacher teaching religion lessons to reluctant students. The experience of standing outside the circle with the Jew has been a liberating experience, and in some way, a profound religious experience for me. It was a grace offered later in life, but it has given me freedom to encounter Jesus in a totally new way.

Is that what VOTF will do for you? I hope so!

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## A Survey of Members of Voice of the Faithful

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A recent survey of members of Voice of the Faithful suggests that participants in the grass-roots reform group have a high level of commitment to the Catholic church. “Our members come from the heart of the Catholic church,” said James E. Post, the group’s outgoing president. “The study convincingly shows that we are who we claim to be -- Catholic women and men who share a deep commitment to their church.”

The 2004 national membership survey of Voice of the Faithful, an organization that sprung up in the Boston archdiocese at the height of the clergy sex abuse scandal in 2002, measured a variety of variables including Mass attendance, formal Catholic education, behavioral attitudes to church policy, participation in church life and religious practices.

Voice of the Faithful claims 30,000 members as defined by affirming support of the organization’s main goals stated on its Web site: supporting survivors of clergy sex abuse and priests of integrity, while shaping structural changes in the church in “full accord and harmony with church teachings.”

The study originated from a 2003 Louisville Institute grant awarded to D’Anotnio and Pogorelc of the Life Cycle Institute of The Catholic University of America. In undertaking a two-year study of Voice of the Faithful, the aim was not only to document the emergence of the group as a social movement, but also to learn what, if any, were the shared socioreligious characteristics among members. The study also aimed to discover a common vision for the group.

Key findings include:

- Ninety-three percent of the members identify as “cradle” Catholics, born and raised in the church.
- Two out of three attend Mass at least once a week, compared to 34 percent nationwide.
- Sixty-two percent consider the church to be the most important part of their lives, or among the most important parts, compared to 44 percent of Catholics nationwide.
- Eight of 10 respondents said they pray at least once daily.
- Participation in church life is high, with half of respondents saying they serve on parish councils, while 45 percent are on liturgy committees, more than 40 percent serve as lectors and eucharistic ministers, and more than 50 percent teach religious education.

Survey results found little variation across the generations with respect to political, economic and sociocultural outlook. One in 10 Voice of the Faithful members said they are conservative, a third are moderates, and 44 percent identify as liberals.

One of the most distinctive characteristics among members is their high level of education, with 87 percent holding college degrees and six out of 10 also earning a master’s or professional degree. Almost a quarter of Voice members hold degrees in theology, canon law or scriptural studies, and almost as many said they participated in diocesan- or parish-sponsored courses in theology.

Altogether, the survey reports, “members have an extraordinary amount of knowledge about the Catholic church, its teachings and liturgy.” Members expressed some strong criticisms of church policy. Four out of five respondents, for example, said they “strongly agreed” the hierarchy was out of touch with the lives and experiences of the laity.

# Book Review

by Jim Noonan, Ottawa, ON

*The Catholic Challenge: A Question of Conscience* by Thomas W. Rezanka.  
Palm Harbor, Florida: Better World Together Publishing, 2004. Paper, xvii, 206 pp.



There are many things to recommend in this book. Among them are the insistence on involvement of the laity in the governance and stewardship of the Church at all levels; the reform of the priesthood and of the

hierarchy; the importance of developing a deep spirituality on the part of all Catholics and the contribution that ongoing adult education can contribute to this; and the necessity of change within the Catholic Church before it can expect to be united with other Christian Churches.

On the question of priestly celibacy Rezanka is adamant that there should be a change in the present discipline so that it is made optional. He states bluntly and logically, "Priests who would be better priests if married should be allowed to marry, rather than be forced out of the priesthood. Those who have been forced out because of marriage should be welcomed back." (p. 66) And he makes the further sensible proposal that those who have been forced out of the active priesthood because of marriage should be invited back now as a solution to the shortage of priests. "This," he says, "could be not only a short-term, but perhaps a longer term solution to the vocations problem, while the Church then dedicates its efforts to reviewing all recruiting, admissions, and training practices within its seminaries." (p. 169) However the likelihood of this happening soon was reduced at the recent Synod of the Eucharist in Rome which rejected even the idea of "viri probati" - respected married men - being ordained as a solution to the lack of vocations.

Rezanka, a married lawyer living in the Tampa Bay area of Florida, makes these points in prose that is virulent and even aggressive. His virulence comes from active involvement in parishes at many levels, including being president of a parish council, a post from which he and other council members were rudely dismissed by their pastor with no reason given for their dismissal.

With Rezanka's background it is not surprising to read strong words like this in reference to the Catholic clergy: "Would the current crisis within the Church, where the crimes of priests against their parishioners and the children of those parishioners, have been covered up, sometimes for decades, or even occurred if the laity were exercising a supervisory role within their diocese? I think not." (p. 2)

Yet in spite of Rezanka's harsh denunciation of incompetent and uncaring clergy, the book, in the last of its four prefaces, is dedicated "to the many wonderful priests within the Church who have truly responded to their calling in life." (p. xvi)

However, this book is unevenly written and badly structured. The four

prefaces are one example of its odd structure. Another are the sections of the book, consisting of several pages, that repeat word for word what has already appeared there, supposedly "for the convenience of the reader". (p. 180). This repetition suggests the author and his editor should have worked carefully at more tightly organizing the structure of the book.

Another example of the uneven structure of the book is the unbalanced length of the chapters. The longest of its twelve chapters, on "Catholic Social Conscience", is forty-seven pages long (out of 206 pages for the whole book), while the last two are five pages and one page long respectively. The second last, entitled "The Lord of the Dance (Music for all Seasons)" consists mostly of 58 hymns which "are favorites of mine and of my wife", (p. 186); the last is a brief invitation to other Christian Churches to unite with the Catholic Church once it gets its house in order. And there is no Conclusion to the book.

That long chapter on "Catholic Social Conscience" is largely a denunciation of the Bush administration leading up to the election of 2004. Most of what Rezanka says here I would agree with. But this chapter is only tangentially related to the main theme of the book - "The Catholic Challenge" - and was admittedly written while the author was "not thinking of himself as a Catholic American, but as an American." (p. 160) It sounds more like the denunciations by a fervent Democrat of the sins of the Bush administration than the analysis of a concerned Catholic. It also has by far the largest number of endnotes (39 out of a total of 48) in the whole book, which indicates the care with which this chapter was written in spite of its questionable relevance to the book.

A more serious lapse in judgment occurs in the chapter entitled "What Catholics Believe", where Rezanka condemns the hatred of one group for another in the world today as being against Christ's law of universal love. In giving examples of ethnic groups who are hostile to one another he says, "it is wrong...for the Irish, in certain parts of this country, to hate anyone who isn't Irish" (p. 34). Without any evidence to support it, this comment is merely racist, and belies the point Rezanka is making here.

In spite of the shortcomings of *The Catholic Challenge*, it is a book which should be read by Catholic laity and clergy alike, including and perhaps especially the hierarchy. Many of the clergy will not like the harsh judgments Rezanka makes about them and the Catholic Church. But he writes from a genuine love of Christ and of the Church, and they will ignore his insights at great cost to the Church itself, which they all profess to love. Rezanka represents the type of informed Catholic who can help right the bark of Peter at this time of its peril on the sea.

*The Catholic Challenge* may be ordered from Better World Together Publishing, Inc.; Post Office Box 2015; Palm Harbor, Florida; USA 34682-2015. It may also be ordered online at: [www.thecatholicchallenge.com](http://www.thecatholicchallenge.com). The cost is \$24.95 USD plus shipping.

# Hearing & Seeing

by Hank Mattimore, San Jose, CA

## Hearing the Music

The story goes about a man born deaf who could never comprehend that on certain occasions men and women would rise to their feet, grab hold of one another and do these bodily gyrations for a few minutes. Then, they returned to their chairs, only to go through the same gyrations a few minutes later. It was only after surgery had given him his capacity to hear sounds that he caught on. It all made sense, once he heard the music. Most of us do experience epiphanies in our journey through life, moments which are so personally powerful that they can change the way we think. They happen every day. They are the moments of truth. We, who have been totally wrapped up in ourselves, respond. Paul of Tarsus needed to get knocked off his horse to learn that he was on the wrong track.

I'm convinced that there are moments in all our lives when our music is played. Whether it is our conscience, or mother earth, or God in heaven, someone plays the music that is meant for our ears alone. The melody appeals to what is most noble in us. We recognize it immediately. Yes, this is the song we are meant to sing. This is who we are. Or, sadly, we can shut our ears to the melody and pretend we are deaf. Then, we miss our chance to become the person we were meant to be.

Ah, but if we do open our ears to hear the music, a path opens up; we understand what seemed so puzzling before. Call it inspiration or enlightenment or grace, we hear the music. When those magic moments happen to us, hey, it's time to put on our dancing shoes and boogie. Our lives may depend upon it.

## Seeing

"Instead of trying to look better; Start trying to see better" Those are powerful words, don't you think? Most of us are all about looking good aren't we? If we were not, the cosmetics market would not be the multi billion market it is today. Everything about us, from the clothes we wear to the model car we drive, from hair styling to pedicures, we take our appearance pretty seriously.

The marketing teams for our political figures have all this down to a science. We can laugh at the politicians but we, too, spend a good part of our lives at fitness centers or beauty salons or catching the latest sale, all in the interest of looking good. Nothing wrong with that, right? Of course, we want to look good, to project an image of success, of having it together.

The problem with concentrating all our energies into looking good is that we can lose track of who we are on the inside. Intent on how we will appear to others, we no longer have the capacity to go outside ourselves and really see the beauty around us.

By changing our focus to "seeing," we become outer directed. The center of our attention is no longer how we look to others but the people and the things that we see around us. Did you ever have the experience of passing by a store or a sign or a tree a thousand times over the years and one day, for the first time, you SEE it. You ask yourself, "How come I never noticed it before?" This can happen in our personal relationships, too. You have been married for twenty-five years to your spouse and one day it dawns on you that she has strikingly beautiful brown eyes. Could it be that we pay so much

attention to how we look that our eyes are closed to even the person we love?

Sometimes, it seems we almost go out of our way NOT to see. Ask a homeless person how many people who pass by him every day really see him? How many senior citizens really see the teenagers hanging out in the mall, not as a threat, but just kids having a good time? Seeing is not just a biological phenomenon. We see with our minds and our understanding, too. We see goodness where we want to see it.

In William Stafford's poem "When I Met My Muse," his muse says to him "I am your own way of looking at things. When you allow me to live with you, every glance at the world around you will be a sort of salvation." Ay, there's the rub isn't it? Allowing the God within you to see the beauty that is everywhere. God has put the stamp of the divine on our world, in people, in the flowers of spring, the stars in the heavens and even in little puppy dogs. It's all there for us to see and appreciate.

What a waste it would be if we were to go through our whole lives so intent on trying to look better that we missed seeing life.



# Jesus Reinterpreted by the Qu'ran

by *Tarif Khalidi, Beirut*

*Excerpts from "Jesus reinterpreted by the Qur'an" by Tarif Khalidi, Professor American University of Beirut and internationally renowned scholar of Islamic Studies*



**I** think it can safely be shown that Islamic culture presents us with what in quantity and quality are the richest images of Jesus in any non-Christian culture. No

other world religion known to me has devoted so much loving attention to both the Jesus of history and to the Christ of eternity. This tradition is one that we need to highlight in these dangerous, narrow-minded days. The moral of the story seems quite clear: that one religion will often act as the hinterland of another, will lean upon another to complement its own witness. There can be no more salient example of this interdependence than the case of Islam and Jesus Christ. And for the Christian in particular, a love of Jesus may also mean, I think, an interest in how and why he was loved and cherished by another religion. Jesus is singled out, again and again as a prophet of very special significance.

The Qur'an is the axial text of Islamic civilization, and it is there, of course, where we must begin to look for Islam's earliest images of Jesus. Approximately one third of the Quranic text is made up of narratives of earlier prophets, most of them Biblical. Among these prophetic figures, Jesus stands out as the most puzzling. The Qur'an rewrites the story of Jesus more radically than that of any other prophet, and in doing so it reinvents him. The intention is clearly to distance him from the opinions about him current among Christians. The result is surprising to a Christian reader or listener. The Jesus of the Qur'an, more than any equivalent prophetic figure, is placed inside a theological argument rather than inside a narrative. He is very unlike his Gospel image. There is no Incarnation, no Ministry and no Passion. His divinity is strenuously denied either by him or by God directly. Equally denied is his crucifixion. A Christian may well ask, what can possibly be left of his significance if all these essential attributes of his image are gone?

Uniquely among prophets he is described as a miracle of God, an aya; he is the word and spirit of God; he is the prophet of peace par excellence; and, finally it is he who predicts the coming of Muhammad and thus, one might say, he is the

harbinger of Islam.

How did these earliest images of Jesus grow and develop inside Islamic culture? The Hadith or Prophetic Tradition of Muhammad, depicts him (Jesus) as a figure who will come at the end of days to help bring the world to its end. He can now be said to bracket the era of Islam, standing right at its beginning and right at its end. It is the rapidly growing literary tradition of Islam which began to embrace the various images of Jesus current in the lands that Islam had conquered. There came together a corpus of sayings and stories attributed to Jesus which in their totality one could call the Muslim Gospel.

Let me quote a few of these sayings and stories: "Jesus said, Blessed is he who sees with his heart but whose heart is not in what he sees". Here's another: " Jesus said, The world is a bridge; cross this bridge but do not build upon it." And here's a short exchange: " Jesus met a man and asked him, What are you doing? "I am devoting myself to God," the man replied. Jesus asked, " Who is caring for you?" "My brother," said the man. Jesus said, "Your brother is more devoted to God than you are".

And so it goes on, some three hundred such sayings and stories, which Muslim culture was to ascribe to Jesus across a millennium of continuous fascination with his images and manifestations. At times he is a fierce ascetic, at other times he is the gentle teacher of manners, at yet others the patron of Muslim mystics, the prophet of the secrets of creation, the healer of the wounds of nature and of man.

As we approach our own days, we observe that many of his (Jesus') earlier manifestations continue to dominate the spiritual horizons of contemporary Islam. Let me speak of only two major images: Jesus the healer of nature and man, and Jesus the Crucified.

To encounter Jesus the healer, I invite my listeners to take a trip to to the Monastery of Sidnaya north of Damascus or to the Iranian city of Shiraz . The Monastery of Sidnaya was founded by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the 6th century AD. It sits on an outcrop of rock high above a valley. To this Monastery travels an endless stream of men and women seeking the blessings and healing of Our Lady and her infant son. The vast majority of visitors are Muslim, who come to this Christian shrine as did their ancestors for a thousand years.

A visit to Shiraz might come next. Here, the celebrated city, a treasure house of Muslim art and architecture and a garden-city of poets and mystics, is home also to a living Muslim medical tradition of healing, the tradition of the Masiha-Dam, the healing breath of Christ. This theme is already reflected in the poetry of the great Persian poet Hafiz, some seven hundred years ago. Thus, in both the literary as well as medical tradition of contemporary Iran, there runs a continuous preoccupation with the healing Christ figure.

# A Perspective on Enhancing Muslim-Christian Understanding

by Jennifer Waterman, Ottawa, ON

My response to Jim Noonan's request for this brief perspective comes from being a participant for four years in ongoing Christian-Muslim dialogue in Ottawa; it includes Muslim and Christian insights from this shared experience. I also draw upon my personal experience with Muslims as neighbours, friends, workmates, and refugee claimants.

One thing those I spoke with or e-mailed agreed upon was that, above all else, we are each of us fellow human beings on this one earth and that we are also, in this instance, all Canadians. Thus, here we share fundamental commonalities. Furthermore, both Christianity and Islam are Abrahamic faiths with scriptures that share a common heritage in Judaic monotheism. (Indeed, one respondent felt it would be very useful if groups of all three faiths could meet in ongoing dialogue.) Such common ground offers much from whence to begin developing greater understanding. Before getting into specific ways that nurture this, I want to bring into focus the ordinary, everyday ways in which positive relations may be fostered.

The nature of Canada today means Christians and Muslims meet in a multitude of places - at work, as neighbours, as community activists, as day-care Mums, as patients with doctors, or as students and teachers. Simply treating one another with mutual respect, positive regard, and open-heartedness - just seeing the other as a person before all else - establishes the ground for good relationships. It helps to look past a label or an appearance, while yet not denying the uniqueness of the other, and see the common task, whether it be growing a shared front garden patch together, consulting over a project, or sharing in foods, feasts, and family occasions. Risking asking questions in order to learn more fosters growth of understanding and may well create real friendships. So, too, can partaking in situations that answer human needs, for example, with refugees and food banks, particularly when Christians and Muslims are in service organisations together as many are. It is easier to connect when we recognise and value the human goodness in one another.

Coming together as Christian and Muslim specifically to address our desire to know one another better can certainly enhance the relationship, whether it be by attending informative workshops and conferences or other organised opportunities. What follows comes from the shared ideas of individual participants in Ottawa Christian-Muslim dialogue groups whose essential objective is to advance mutual understanding of each other's faith - and having that as a clear foundation is key. It provides for a spirit of friendliness and respect that allows dialogue, rather than debate, to happen. A dialogue entails attentive listening with suspension of the critical judgement; so often there is debate where the point is to convince the other that one's own perspective is the right one. In dialogue there is a recognised mutuality and a willingness to be present to the speaker.

Such a dialogue group will go through a life-cycle as all groups do. In its formative period, it helps to rest at the level of sharing key facts about each religion, acknowledging that each faith has its own sectarian divisions and historic antecedents. This phase may last some considerable time while members reach a comfort level with one another and work out how meetings best proceed. It definitely helps to have a settled format, including a topic schedule and facilitator.

In the two groups I am familiar with there is a specific topic for the

monthly meeting, a two-hour time frame, and a speaker either from each faith on the night's topic, or a speaker from one faith on the topic one month followed the subsequent month with a speaker from the other faith on the same topic. There are two "Chairs", one Muslim and one Christian, and the meetings always start with key prayers from each faith, the Arabic being translated. Topics covered have included what each faith understands by concepts such as Prayer, Pilgrimage, Martyrdom, Marriage, Prophet-hood, and the nature and meaning of the major festivals. Thus, in the initial phase at least, staying close to scripture, doctrine and ritual practice is a means of both faiths learning essentials about one another's traditions.

As trust builds, it may become possible to deepen the levels of research, discussion, and exploration. This is very important yet a tricky navigation and transition. In my experience, Christians who join such dialogue groups are likely to be liberal in inclination or "outside the box" of traditional Christian faith perspectives. Which is not to say Muslims in the groups are not open-hearted and open-minded; of course, that's why they are there. But Christian participants may well take as pretty ordinary the stance of critiquing traditional doctrine, scripture and practice. The degree of disagreement Christians may have with such basics of their own faith may distress Muslim members for whom greater reverence for the scriptures and the Prophet (PBUH) is deeply significant. I recall, for instance, one evening when the fact that the Immaculate Conception was regarded as myth or legend by Christian members offended Muslims for whom it remains a literal truth.

This is an area that tests dialogue and respectful listening for both parties. Each faith group can experience "culture bumps" here. Yet if this difference is not truly met, frustration can set in for both and lead to members leaving the group. In my experience also, I sense that for a Muslim member to disagree with other Muslims in the group is not happily experienced. But this I have not risked checking out. What it makes me realize is how tender the shoot of such faith sharing is.

A helpful factor is keeping such groups small to allow for audible meetings in relatively small rooms, mainly people's homes, and the formation of smaller groupings if need be. In fact, most meetings I've experienced average about 20 participants. Socializing before and after meetings is a wonderful way to establish connections and friendships. Certainly the food is a great shared pleasure!

Participation in such groups leads to networking outside the meetings, including e-mailing back and forth regarding useful workshops or articles. Moreover, it allows for deeper exploration of a topic or issue, and increases the possibility of expressing different points of view. Such exchange deepens contact and increases knowledge.

To conclude, then - What are the benefits of such dialoguing? Firstly, one learns a great deal about one another's faith, and not just at the intellectual level. One learns what the faith means to the believer, how it feels to be within the given tradition, what the lived experience is. That makes so much difference! One comes to see how similar we are - and where differences lie. Secondly, it opens the way to friendship. Thirdly, it encourages the possibility

## Muslim-Christian Understanding Continued...

that Christians will speak with greater love and respect to their fellow Christians about Islam - and vice versa. Usefully, it may encourage participants to inspire others to enter into such dialogue, and to work together to move the education system towards inculcating dialogue amongst young people of different faiths in the schools for the benefit of all our futures.

*Go deep enough and there is a bedrock of truth.*

May Sarton

*Sophia*

by Dianne Peck, Sydney, NS



I would like to share some thoughts and theories about the focus topic for this issue of the Journal, which is, "How do we build a positive relationship between Islam and the Christian West?"

First let's listen to some strong words from two equally strong voices.

The first is Clarissa Estes. She writes in an article called, "View On The Times In Which We Live",

"Do not lose heart. We were made for these times...do not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times. For years we have been in training for this exact place of engagement... I cannot tell you often enough that we are the leaders we have been waiting for, and that we have been raised since childhood for this time precisely... In the language of aviators and sailors, ours is to sail forward now, all balls out...It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good".

The second is Mark Morford, columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle.

"Stop thinking this is all there is. Realize that for every ongoing war and religious outrage and environmental devastation there are a thousand counter balancing acts of staggering generosity and humanity and art and beauty happening all over the world right now on a breathtaking scale...

Resist the temptation to drown in fatalism, to shake your head and sigh and throw in the karmic towel. Realize that this is the perfect moment to change the energy of the world, to step right up and crank up your personal volume; right when it all seems dark and bitter and offensive and acrimonious and bilious. There's your opening.

Remember magic. And finally, believe you are part of a groundswell, a resistance, a seemingly small but actually very, very large impending karmic overhaul, a great shift, the beginning of something ...potent and unstoppable".

As I see it, these authors are saying, -1- break away from the collective mindset that believes only in doom, foreboding and impossibilities ("that drowns itself in fatalism"). -2- take charge of your inherent power to create a new world ("sail forward now, all balls out").

-3- become a part of the change that is already happening ("a very large impending karmic overhaul")

In the twentieth century our understanding of quantum physics changed our world.

We understand now that "Mind is the creator of everything...If you cling to a certain thought...it finally assumes a tangible outward form." Paramahansa Yogananda

We understand now that there is only energy. All reality, visible and invisible, is energy.

"Later in history this will be judged to have been the primary discovery of the 20th century, that the human organism is sensitive to electro-magnetic fields, that electrical currents flow through the organism, and that in all of this we are part of the living process of the entire cosmos." Tom Harpur quoting Dr. Robert Becker.

"Nature is made up of patterns of energy interrelating, not of isolated building blocks.

We are all interwoven and create each others' universes." Natalie Goldberg in "Writing Down the Bones".

We have the power to create each other's universe, and our own. This is an extremely significant statement. What is this power? Where is it? How do we use it?

We are using it all the time. The power is in our thoughts. And we are creating thoughts all day long.

Thoughts are things. Thoughts are energy. And by the Laws of Attraction, they draw like to themselves. A thought that is repeated often enough becomes a belief, a mindset, and brings into reality what it thinks about. The way in which we create a universe, or anything else, is by thinking it and feeling it. Feelings originate out of thoughts. And feelings play a very powerful role in the creation process.

The good news is it is the essence of quantum reality that thoughts of unity and love create unity and love. We can alter the universe we live in. We can create the universe our hearts call us to create. But we must begin with our minds. Everything begins as

an idea. Nothing is created that wasn't first a thought.

"What is essential is invisible to the eye" said the Little Prince.

"If we could realize how to live through our minds". Tom Harpur quoting Godfrey Mowatt.

We have an instrument of unspeakable power. There is a tipping point, when the collective mindset shifts. All is a dancing swirling ocean of energy where every individual movement of thought and emotion affects the whole ocean.

Thomas Berry says "Every atom is in relationship and immediately present to every other atom, no matter how many light-years they are away from each other, without passing through the intervening space."

A bit technical, but he is simply explaining how my belief and yours instantly affects the farthest corner of the universe. There is no time/space/distance in the quantum world.

The effect of our mindset is instantly and immediately present throughout the entire universe.

Another thing about Quantum reality, it is invisible, not insignificant. "Life is more real than we can imagine and most of it is invisible." We truly and scientifically are one with all.

So how do we build a positive relationship between Islam and the Christian West?

We begin with our minds. We observe our thoughts. We become aware of the mindsets under which we are operating. What are they? All-embracing? Hopeful? Envisioning? Imagining? Creative?

Or are they reticent? Fearful? Prejudiced? Suspicious? Doubting? The other day I was driving with friends past a building called the Shambala

Center and, being new to the city, asked what exactly it was. The tone of the voice that answered immediately shifted to low and constricted and said, "Oh that's the Muslims". Are we aware of our mindset? What are we currently creating?

What do we want the relationship with Islam to be? We begin by making it vivid and real in our minds. We feel the feelings we want the relationship to have. We think the thoughts we want the relationship to be built on. We speak words that describe only what we want to see. We get very specific at the thought and feeling and speaking level about what we want the relationship to be.

Then the outward action steps begin to reveal themselves. Then we get ideas for the right next step. Then the steps we take are coming from "inspiro". They are guided and success is inherent in them.

There is a tipping point. The collective subconscious mind responds to the nature of the collective mindset.

"It is not given to us to know which acts...will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good". Estes. But we do know it will tip. And I am with those who believe the time is very close. Everything begins with a thought. The deciding factor in a healing relationship between Islam and the Christian West lies in how we are thinking and picturing in our mind.

Today's Sophia wisdom is from Mark 11: 23 "what you believe (think) will come to pass"

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## A Personal Confession of Faith

*by Hal Caton, Santa Cruz, CA*

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Sociologists say that old age is a time for the simplification of life. At 75, I am becoming more simple in lifestyle, in thinking, and in my faith. I would like to think that this is the result of wisdom and not senility. Maybe it is a little of both. Whatever the reason, my conscious goal for these latter years of my life is to become more childlike, even at the risk of becoming more childish. Doctrines and creeds leave me cold but God's love warms my heart and guides my life when I allow it to do so.

My faith tells me that our purpose here on earth is to experience God's love, bounce it back to God, and then to

bounce it along to all other persons and things in God's creation. I don't need to understand God's nature; love experienced and expressed is

all that I need. This may be a very simplistic approach to life and to faith. From my experience, I am also convinced that institutionalized religion has been very successful at complicating what is a very simple faith. After a lifetime of reading the sacred scriptures, I don't believe Jesus ever wanted to establish a new institution.

Standing in the prophetic tradition, Jesus challenged the complicators of his Jewish religion. I don't think he expected his disciples to complicate his message of God's love for us. He expressed and taught a new lifestyle of love for one another. It doesn't take complicated theologies to explain that. Theologies often overshadow the simple yet all-powerful light of love.

With this understanding, I have come to appreciate other faiths, to accept, to respect, and to love those who have chosen a path different from my own. In my weakness, sometimes I feel a little bit of holy jealousy when I discover that another faith has found an aspect of Truth which my own faith tradition seems to have missed or dismissed.

God's creation is a beautiful garden wherein the most fragrant faiths flower and bloom side by side. Each is watered by the same stream of life and warmed by the same sun. The soils differ, but each is rich and fertile. The inner reality of each faith is unique but each also has much in common with the others.

# Women in Islam

by Frank Sarton, Duncan, BC

Islam is a religious as well as a political force that pervades the whole of every Muslim's life. These two are inseparable. Politically, Islam seems to want to bolster its position in relation to the West as if to proclaim that it is in control of its own destiny. Women are used to emphasize this political patriarchal position.

Islam began as a religion of reason and responsibility. The Prophet, born in 570 AD, received a series of messages from 610 until his death in 632. He recited these to his people and these became the Qu'ran. It was not to be translated but to be recited. However, al-Bukhari, born in 810, compiled the sayings and doings of the Prophet, filling four volumes of sayings between the Prophet and his family and companions. This compilation is known as the Hadith. One has to be well versed in the Hadith in order to be able to sort out the genuine from the culturally and politically false or dubious.

The problem for women struggling with their faith does not lie in the Qu'ran but with the Hadith even though the Qu'ran says that men are in charge of women and have the right to beat them but only after admonitions and recourse to her family have failed. Muslim women may question the Hadith because it came into existence long after the Prophet's death.

The Hadith is open to patterns of prejudice. For example, the Shariah law that vilifies Jews and women is a human construct and not God's choice. Muslim women claim the tradition of independent reasoning which allows every Muslim to update religious practices in

the light of contemporary circumstances. The saying of the Prophet that those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity has caused a long tradition of prejudice against women. However, this saying is open to question since it was remembered only long after the Prophet's death. To gain the truth, one must study the source and the context of a saying in the Hadith.

The veil is a key concept in Islam. Literally it means a curtain to isolate, to hide, or to protect. The Prophet did not see its use for women, but to separate himself from other men. The veil establishes a threshold or marks a border. It pertains to space. For some, it indicates the inability to see the divine light in one's soul. The veiled person is trapped in earthly reality and unable to reach elevated states of consciousness and thus the veil blocks the soul from seeking God. For others, the veil hides the female body. But to see the veil only as a piece of cloth imposed on women is to impoverish its meaning. In the Qu'ran, Allah does not speak to any mortal except through revelation or from behind a veil.

One wonders how an egalitarian message can be lost. The answer, of course, lies in pre-Islam cultural practices that go back thousands of years, as far as Zoroastrianism (2000 BC). Today some Muslims legitimize their patriarchal position without stopping to consider the difficulty of finding the divine will. Such Muslims affirm male supremacy without ambiguity and there has been no shortage of followers, then as now.

## Accepting God's Spirit

by Chris Diamond, Cobble Hill, BC



The Hebrew scriptures tell us that the work of God's Spirit cannot be predicted nor can any human will control the will of God. The Bible stories tell how in Genesis it moved over the chaos and created the whole universe; how it blasted the waters to let Moses and the Hebrews pass; how it inspired prophetic men and women; how its presence is everywhere. The christian scriptures too tell how the Spirit rested on Jesus and led him as he healed and taught; how the Spirit continued to guide the christian community as it struggled to understand and express the relationship between Jesus and God. The resulting christian creeds came about through great battles over words and ideas in the effort to get it right and to correct perceived 'errors' in the way God is understood. The creeds are the result of prodigious human effort forged in the clash of cultural contexts. They are part of the christian story.

The Hebrew scriptures tell us that the work of God's Spirit cannot be predicted nor can any human will control the will of God. The Bible stories tell how in

Christian faith accepts that God exists. Christian faith accepts that God loves us. Christian faith accepts that God gives us life here and for ever. Christian faith accepts that what God has revealed is true.

Jesus accepted God as free and beyond understanding; he committed himself to God and to God's Kingdom; he quoted the scriptures; he went to the synagogue and to the Temple. Jesus' Jewish faith was close to the earth—happiness here and now in family, tribe, flocks, harvest, health, long life, and peace. It did not distinguish the sacred from the secular. It accepted that God directs the seeker, comforts the afflicted, encourages the weak, forgives the struggling, and threatens the sinner. God's power supports the genuine and brings good out of evil. But it does not excuse us from making the effort to do our part. Jesus accepted these things; he accepted that suffering is the price of being human and committed to God. His friends commented on his relationship to God and on his prayer life. They came to see Jesus' relationship to God as unique. They accepted God's revelation in Jesus as unique. a gift to anyone who would accept it. They proclaimed it to anyone who would listen. They knew that it was something not held by others.

In their zeal, some christians mistakenly have tried in the past to force others to accept the christian kingdom. It is not contrary to christian faith to hold that there are things to be learned from other faiths and other spiritualities. Faith is not natural wisdom. It is a gift from God. Christians proclaim their faith while listening and learning from others. The parables of God's Kingdom are everywhere.

# New Catholic Community

by Fr. Ed Cachia, Peterborough, ON



Christ the Servant Catholic Church is one community now serving two Churches. The name of this community was inspired by Jesus' message at the Last Supper. "When he had washed their feet

and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you". (John 13:14).

## Mission Statement

We are men and women, baptized in Christ. We are a Christ centered Catholic Church reaching beyond the institutional church to be inclusive of all. Jesus Christ is the head of our Church. We join together to answer the call of the Holy Spirit and to offer a refuge in Christ for those who are suffering. At the Last Supper, Jesus gave us the Eucharist, and He taught us to humbly wash each other's feet. We are ordinary people joyously celebrating the opportunity to follow Jesus' radical message of unconditional love and to live the beatitudes. We profess our faith in Christ in the living Catholic tradition handed to us from the Apostles through many generations. We stand open to a dialogue with those of other religious faith traditions.

## Our Values: What we stand for

- Christ the servant is our pastor.
- We celebrate all Sacraments. For us the Eucharist is our highest form of worship. Everyone is welcome to join us at the table. "Come to me, all of you who labour and are over burdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes my yoke is easy and my burden light." (Matthew 11:28).
- Human life is sacred from conception to natural death.
- We believe in the sanctity of marriage and family values.
- God created men and women as equals, each called to celebrate their uniqueness.
- We support ordination of women and men.
- Priests may, of their own free will enter into marriage.
- Unconditional love requires that we treat all persons with dignity and respect.

## Our personal mission is to attempt to live the Beatitudes (Matthew 5)

Our mission is to strive to live the radical message that Jesus presents to us in the Beatitudes.

- Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!
- Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!
- Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised!

- Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully!
- Happy are those who are merciful to others; God will be merciful to them!
- Happy are the pure in heart; they will see God!
- Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children!
- Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!
- Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted.

## What we must do?

If we are to begin to live the Gospel without compromise we must:

- Surrender totally to God's will for us and develop a personal relationship with Jesus.
- Strive to develop the gifts of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues.
- Once we have submitted to the Holy Spirit God can then bless our ministries to our families and our communities with the fruits of the Holy Spirit which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, justice, holiness and truth.
- The experience of coming together and celebrating the Eucharist as a community that loves one another must be a life-changing event. Your participation in this community will make a difference in your family in your neighborhood and in your work place.

## Directions to Mark Street United Church

90 Hunter Street East - East City Peterborough

From the south: Hwy 115 to Ashburnham exit. North on Ashburnham to Hunter Street turn left (under lift locks) and continue to corner of Hunter and Mark St.

From the north: South on George Street to Hunter turn left, drive over bridge, and continue on to the corner of Hunter and Mark St.

## All are welcome

Please come and join us. Feel free to share this invitation and bring a friend. Those who feel alienated; come. Those who feel they don't count; come. Those who have been rejected; come. Those who feel that no one cares; come. Jesus wants to reach out to you and touch your suffering. If you cannot join us in person please join us in prayer as we constantly ask for God to bless all we do and direct us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Our gratitude goes out to Pastor Bob Root and Mark Street United Church Community for opening their doors to us and embracing us with open arms.

God Bless you and your loved ones always. Hope to see you soon.

# 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, especially 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.

**Corpus Canada**  
[www.corpuscanada.org](http://www.corpuscanada.org)  
**Corpus-NCR (Canada)**  
[www.ca.renewedpriesthood.org](http://www.ca.renewedpriesthood.org)  
**Corpus USA**  
[www.corpus.org](http://www.corpus.org)

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## How Can I Join Or Show Support?

If you wish to join or renew your membership in Corpus Canada for the year 2005 (membership is open to all regardless of denominational affiliation), write to: Corpus Canada Treasurer, 35 - 10070 Fifth Street Sidney, BC V8L 2X9. Enclose a cheque for \$50 (individual membership) or \$75 (family membership) payable to "Corpus Canada." Corpus Canada will donate \$25 of your membership fee to Xristos Community Society in your name, and Xristos will send you an official tax receipt. At the request of Corpus Canada, Xristos Community Society distributes The Journal free of charge to the membership of Corpus Canada.

## HOW TO GET THE JOURNAL

If you are not now receiving The Journal and would like to, please fill out this form and mail it to the Treasurer, Xristos Community Society, 35 - 10070 Fifth Street Sidney, BC V8L 2X9.

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*Thank you for your support of this Christian ministry.*

**Corpus Canada Treasurer**  
**Alanna Menu**

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