

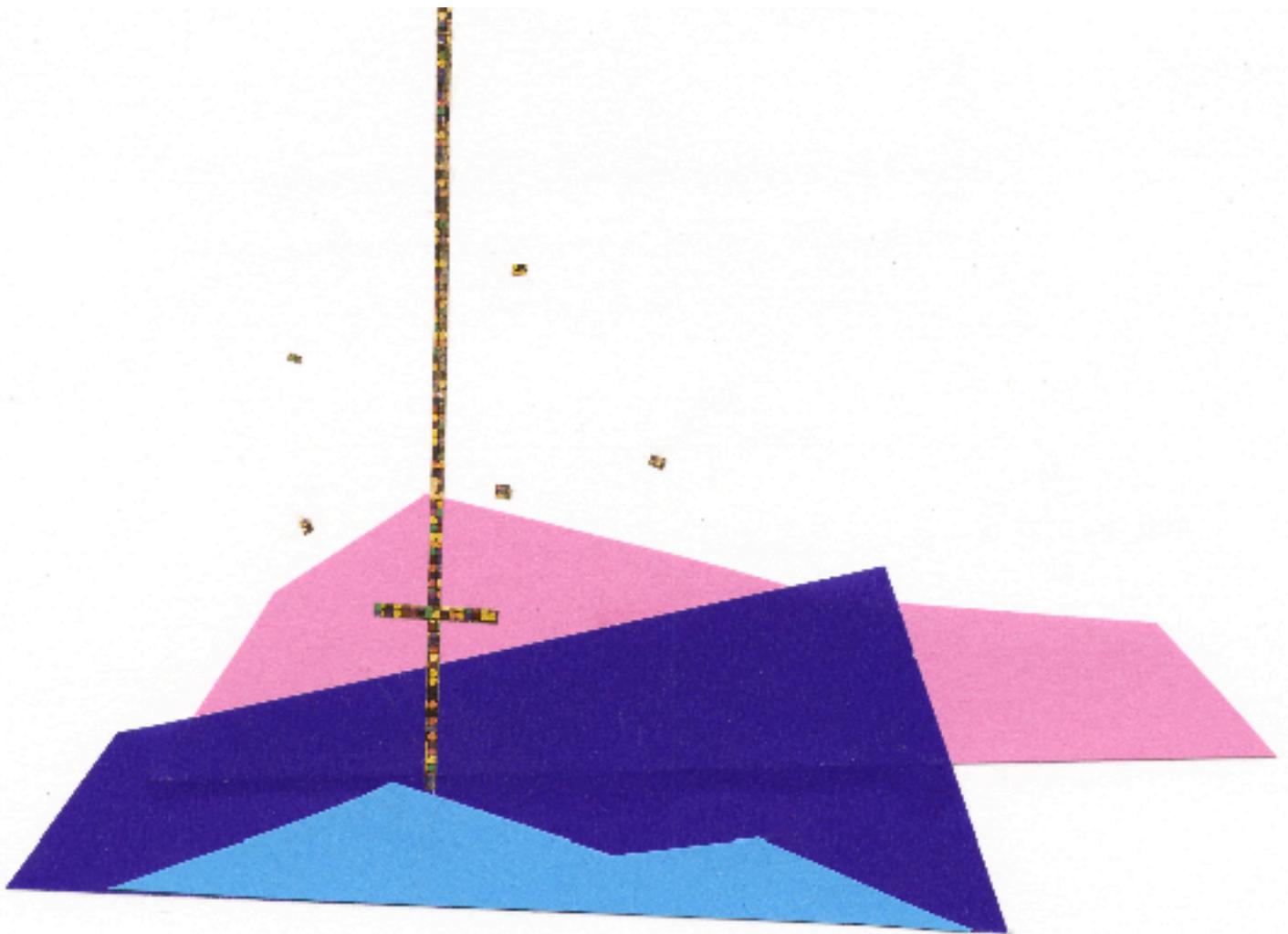


# The Journal



October - December 2008

Look to the Lord and you will renew your strength and soar like eagles.  
(Isaiah)



Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All

Art by Ralph Thompson

The Journal  
October - December 2008  
Vol. 11, No. 4

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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

Kristos 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. Kristos Community Society is a registered charity in Canada. The Journal is distributed free of charge. Kristos Community Society needs and welcomes donations in support of its ministry.  
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## FOCUS TOPIC

*for the January - March 2009 Issue*

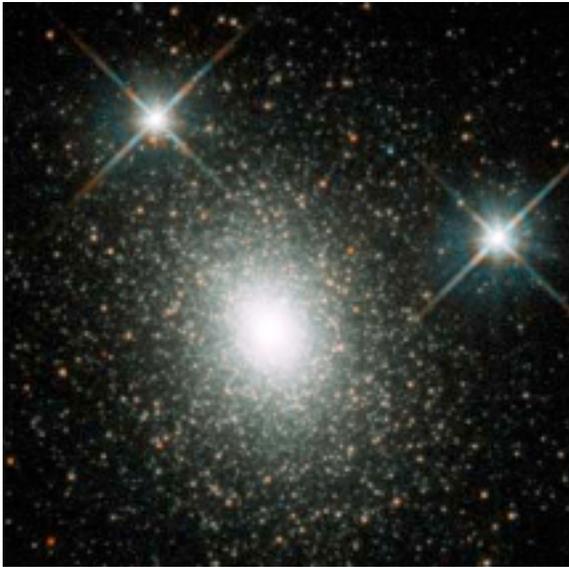
There is no focus topic for this issue

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

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

# The Star Of Bethlehem: A Christmas Meditation

by Emil Kutarna, Regina, SK



*“Stars are the primary sites for transformations of energy and matter in the universe. In each star, as the elements are forged, gravitational and nuclear energy are converted into light and radiation and sent into the universe”.*  
O’Murchu (2002).

*“Light is the ultimate source of life. Without light coming from the sun, there would be no life here on earth. Light is not only our medium of contact with the world; in a very real sense it is the basis of our existence”.* Smolin (1997).

In the Gospel story, the Star of Bethlehem led the Magi from the East to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. For Matthew and his contemporaries who believed in astrology, this was a huge sign. Today we know that Matthew was using a metaphor to emphasize the importance of the person whose story he was writing about. And today with our knowledge of astronomy we can go beyond metaphor to peer into the deeper mysteries of life.

Lucian Kimble, a Franciscan at the Lumsden Retreat had a powerful telescope to study the stars. At one of his retreats he told us that 13.7 billion years after the Big Bang, we humans appeared, consisting of atoms of carbon and oxygen which had been incubated by the first generation of stars. On Ash Wednesday when we are reminded that we are dust, he said, **“Remember that you are stardust!”**

There is no denying the romantic beauty and wonder of the Christmas story celebrated in carols and Christmas cards. I remember preaching the great wonder of the Son of God, Jesus being born to the Virgin Mary in the poverty of the stable - the mystery of the Incarnation, when God came to earth as a man. But here we can also remember *what a wonderful story is my incarnation and yours and all the humans on this planet earth.*

We are living on a very small planet at the edge of one of the perhaps 100 billion galaxies, each of which as a rule contains more than 10 billion stars. Just to try comprehending the magnitude of these numbers. I need to ponder them over and over. Then I must ask, “Does it mean anything?” “What does it all mean?” I remain speechless, drowned in awe.

Let us get back to earth. The sun is our nearest star. Its light is our life. The sun emits more energy in one second than humankind has consumed in the whole of its history. The plants on earth transform the sun’s light into energy. We take the plants into our bodies and transform that energy into the light of life. Incarnation did not just

happen at one point in history. It is happening every moment within you and me. This is what O’Murchu writes:

“For every single atom of ordinary matter in the universe there are one billion light particles; matter is nothing but gravitationally trapped light.”

God is light. We are light. We are star dust!

How easily we forget what we are. From time to time we need to get back to basics like this. How appropriate at the season of Christmas, the Feast of Lights, the time of year when the darkness begins to fade and the days of light get longer?

By this meditation, little by little we appreciate the immensity of God’s work. Little by little we might escape the arrogance that entraps us. At one time in history we believed that our earth was the centre of the universe. Gallileo proved otherwise. Now we know that we are not even at the centre of our galaxy. Other galaxies exist that are ten billion light years away and still moving outward!

What is a light year? Light travels at the rate of 300,000 Km/sec. That would go around the earth seven and a half times a second. Multiply that by how many seconds in 365 days and we have the distance of a light year. Einstein said that the speed of light is the absolute and unchangeable constant of nature. Doesn’t this sound like a description of God?

Bethlehem is a paradox in many ways: God becomes man, born of a virgin, in an obscure village, yet sought out by the lowly and the great, by shepherds and kings.

You and I are a paradox. We live on an insignificant speck of a planet at the edge of an unimaginably enormous universe. Yet we are part of that universe of light. You could say that each of us is a mirror of that universe. Each of the trillions of cells in our bodies is made up of billions of light particles. Energy pulsates into consciousness; we become persons; we know that we are all related intimately by genetic makeup, even with Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

*In one sense how insignificant we are, in another sense, how glorious!*

*Stardust! Merry Christmas!*



# Response To Emil's Questions

by Chris Diamond, Cobble Hill, BC



Emil Kutarna is a great person and a great priest, one you would like to have near you if you needed help or a little bucking-up if things were not going right. In his faith journey, he has not been afraid to ask difficult questions when explanations have not made sense nor has he backed away from challenging church positions that have not seemed sound no matter how dearly they may be held. He has studied the grave questions and has openly shared his thoughts with others often laying himself “on the line” without regard for his own comfort. All the while he has maintained his good humour and his equilibrium.

In his last article in the July - September 2008 issue of *The Journal*, “If You Can’t, You Can’t. But If You Can, You Must”, he reflects on *With or Without God* by Greta Vosper, a United Church minister. About restructuring Christianity, Vosper writes there is a need to redefine and re-mythologize starting with the Bible. She says “When we allow the progressive scholarship of the past centuries to challenge us to reconsider the foundations of our faith, we find ourselves left with an enormous task... When we consider the concept of god and work, our way toward exploring it differently than we have in the past, the whole idea of Jesus being the Son of God no longer makes any sense.” She asks “Is it worth the effort to change the church?” She thinks it is.

Emil too thinks it is worth the effort. Even though “Catholics are not encouraged to think independently”, some do “move on to the stage of critical thinking”. Once again in his last article mentioned above, he asks some hard questions:

Why should it frighten us to think that the Church may have a human origin?

Could the death of Jesus have a different meaning than the ‘redemption from sin’?

What then does ‘salvation’ mean?

He also notes the following:

The Bible is not the last word about who God is, or whether God is; We can no longer believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God for all time;

Our salvation does not depend upon the Bible any longer;

Emil admits to feeling bitter and angry at the way he was treated by the Roman Curia. He adds, however, “But one can and must move

on.” He opines “Eucharistic communion can be the most beautiful and powerful symbol drawing us into community... Change will come; gradually the myth is changing. We must continue to work toward the renewal.”

Vosper is right about recent scholarship’s enormous challenge to church leaders to provide new ways of presenting the foundations of christian faith. Emil is right in that more catholic leaders have to lead the move towards critical thinking.

Critical thinking begins with religious language. Some catholics understand religious language but they are a very small minority. More people need to hear explanations from church leaders. What lies behind our christian language and faith? For example, what lies behind the word ‘church’? A Germanic word with Greek roots, kuriakos/church means belonging to the lord. Vatican II in its “Constitution on the Church” (art. 9) states “Israel according to the flesh, which wandered as an exile in the desert, was already called the Church of God.” Hundreds of years before christianity when Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria talked about this biblical Church of God, they called it God’s ekklesia. It was not a building but a gathering of God’s people.

Throughout the years, the secular meaning of ‘ekklesia’ did not remain static; it passed from meaning either a gathering of citizens in a city or a gathering of members in a household to a voluntary lay people’s association (koinonia) for company or for purpose. Paul uses it in his letters to designate a religious gathering of lay people dedicated to Jesus’ way of doing what is right in God’s eyes. These lay gatherings met in homes and were not usually very large. They had a liturgical prayer function, an open meal function, and a teaching function. They followed a pattern that was common in their day and one that Jesus had used wherever he went. Jesus did not likely use the word ‘ekklesia’ but his own language equivalent for a gathering of God’s people. Christians began to use ‘ekklesia’ for their gatherings instead of ‘synagogue’ which meant the same thing to Greek speaking Jews. How or when in the Germanic cultures the word ‘kirche/church’ replaced ‘ekklesia’ is not known. But we know what it meant.

Salvation is also a shifting biblical term. Its meaning shifts from ‘God righting the wrongs done to or by God’s chosen nation or individual to the belief that all wrongs will be righted at the end time when the reign of God will be established’. The Bible does not use the words ‘eternal’ with salvation; rather it speaks about salvation in the “age of ages” or “at the end time”. The expressions “for ever and ever” and “eternal damnation” came into christian language much later. The Jews had faith that God worked through history to take care of God’s chosen people. The story of the rescue of the Hebrews from Egypt ends with their possession of the promised land. It did not matter what were the historic facts of how they got there: the Jews saw in them the work of God. Centuries later, the fact that the wicked prospered and the good did not called for other attempts at an explanation. Each answer is the subject of Job, Sirach, the Book of Wisdom until about the time that Jesus was born, the end-time apocalyptic salvation belief is arrived at. After Jesus’ crucifixion, his friends/disciples had to absorb his terrible death. They searched their sacred Jewish written and oral accounts and found consolation in texts from versions of the Torah,

## Response Continued...

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the Prophets, the Writings, and the rabbinic teachings. They used these sources in their proclamation of what God had done in Jesus.

The disciples of Jesus lived in a culture where all Jews did not necessarily see the traditional stories as historic accounts but as explanatory helps to fathom God's way of leading creation to its fulfillment - i.e. salvation. The members of the Jesus movement, like Jews in general, certainly differed among themselves as to how this was going to come about. Their faith experience led them to proclaim salvation in what God had done in Jesus anointed by God and who would come again. In this proclamation, they used the familiar biblical forms of narrative, metaphor, parable, allegory, discourse, argument... and so on. In their explanation of Jesus, they used the stories of the great heroes of the past: Abraham, Moses, David. They could not have done differently.

They gave Jesus titles from their Jewish tradition to explain their faith: God had rescued Jesus the prophet from the realm of death and 'anointed' him; Jesus the prophet is the Anointed - Greek Christ, Hebrew Messiah; Jesus is the 'Son of Man' from Daniel; Jesus is the 'suffering servant' from Isaiah. The disciples reinterpreted baptism to mean dying (to sin) with Jesus and rising again anointed with him. The ekklesia (church) is the fellowship/community (koinonia) of those baptized who bond together in this freedom from sin and freedom to do good. Paul equates salvation with this freedom. It is not 'redemption' from sin that Jesus' first disciples spoke of but freedom/rescue from the realm of sin: "We have been freely made right by God's gift through the freedom which is in Jesus anointed." Rom 3:24; and "You are in the anointed Jesus who for us by God was made wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and freedom." 1Cor 1:30. Doctrines about Original Sin and Marks on the soul at baptism, confirmation, or ordination are images that do not come along for a long time.

Exegetes, historians, and theologians have laid out these findings for us: The works of Yves Congar, Raymond Brown, John L. McKenzie, John P. Meier, Walter Brueggemann, Brendan Byrne, PHEME Perkins, Luke Timothy Johnson, John Dominic Crossan, Joseph Fitzmeyer, Thomas Sheehan and dozens of others that I have not listed because it is a long list. For example:

*Biblical studies have implications not only for the general position and direction of the Church but also for the way individuals understand Christianity. While it is difficult to reach all Christians, large numbers are engaged in one way or another in teaching religion. An application of modern biblical insight to two of the most frequently taught doctrines (creation, humanity/divinity of Jesus), taken by way of examples, results in profound implications for the way Christians think.*

*(The Critical Meaning of the Bible, Raymond E. Brown Paulist Press 1981, p. 82)*

A study of this little book alone would help pastoral teachers. At times it has been bemoaned that today young people don't know their religion, but we should not go so far since many life-long, holy, pious, devout, committed christians don't know their religion. It is not their fault. The explanations of the Old Testament and the New Testament that have been developed by experts have not been passed on to the majority of God's people. Why? One can only guess. I have no survey data to assess church pastors, but less than ten years ago I did ask a Jesuit pastor about it and he said "My people are not ready for it." Perhaps that is indicative of the reason that pastoral teachers have not been forward in explaining religion to people who are hungry for it and need it. It indicates a lack of trust in the Holy Spirit. Other reasons may be inadequate catechisms or pastoral teachers who through culpable ignorance do not know the works of exegetes and theologians.

Like the rest of us, when Jesus came into this world, there was only one way out of it. The Greeks were used to the idea of heavenly beings who could flit between heaven and earth. Jesus was not a visitor from the heavens but a truly human being who had to die. The manner of his death was due to the wickedness of those who had little respect for anything but their own position in life. So christians rightly say that "Jesus died on account of sin."

Thanks to Emil for asking the questions and for his service of pointing out some glaring deficiencies today in the proclamation of God's good news in Jesus. There are stalwarts who conscientiously lead the way forward. I hope that they continue, in spite of the obstacles put in the way, to set out the faith which nourishes the People of God.



**O Oriens, splendour of  
eternal light. and sun of  
justice.  
come and enlighten us.**

# Reconstructive Christianity

by François Brassard, Ladysmith, BC



In the last issue of The Journal, Emil Kutarna, commenting on Greta Vosper's book, "With or Without God," raised the very timely theme of "reconstructive Christianity." At the end of his article he encouraged Corpus people to enter into a dialogue on this critically important topic. With this article I would like to begin a response to his invitation.

Several months ago I gave a two-hour seminar (available on DVD from me) to several candidates for ordination in the RCWP movement. The purpose of the seminar was to provide an overview of the topic of "reconstructive Christianity/Catholicism." Following are highlights of what I presented. Obviously, much of this material would need to be fleshed out. I will deliver this in two parts. This article deals with Part 1.

## Part 1: BACKGROUND: Why reconstruct Christianity?

Christianity needs to be reconstructed, because, as Bishop Spong, Greta Vosper, Marcus Borg and others have pointed out, the God described by most institutional Christianities no longer makes sense conceptually, nor rings true to the intuitive experience of many knowing people today. Bishop Spong clearly and rightly rejects the 'theistic' concept of God, one who is above, beyond and separate from all that is created.<sup>1</sup> Others have pointed out in great detail the inadequacies and poverty of a distant, patriarchal concept of God.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the classic concept of God does not ring true with what the best of research tells us that Jesus experienced and revealed both by his public preaching and his healing deeds.<sup>3</sup>

Also, Christianity needs to be reconstructed because the so-called 'orthodox' presentations are based on faulty, biased or outdated information embedded in various fields of knowledge such as: cosmology, philosophy, theology, physical science and social, cultural and political history. More concretely, does God exist above our earth clouds according to a first century three-tiered cosmology? Did God create the earth/universe in six earth days according to the book of Genesis? Did God *destroy* the enemies of Israel in order to protect 'his' (sic) chosen People? Put another way, what is the difference between a literal understanding and a metaphorical understanding of sacred texts?

Continuing this line of questioning in the New Testament, we might ask the following. Was Jesus born in Nazareth or in Bethlehem? Did he have brothers and sisters? Was he known historically as a wonder-worker? Was Jesus' public ministry in the same tradition as first century Greco-Roman Cynic philosophers, as some would have it? Or was he just a marginal Jew from Galilee preaching a message of imminent/already happening salvation to Palestinian Jews, as did his mentor, John the Baptist, but in a manner more imitative of the prophet Elijah?

The first Christian communities were convinced that Jesus had a special

relationship with God's Spirit, that, after his death by crucifixion, he was 'resurrected' from the dead. What was their understanding of these beliefs and what theological significance did they give to them? How has this significance evolved through the centuries? More specifically, was Jesus not only human, but also divine in some manner? How has the concept of Jesus' 'divinity' evolved through the centuries? Can this understanding truly evolve? How is this possible?

All the above questions and many more would never have been raised several centuries ago. What changed to make it legitimately possible to ask the questions and, more importantly, to propose new, reasonable, insightful and spiritually enriching answers?

It all started with the Renaissance. Da Vinci, Galileo, Copernicus, Columbus, Magellan and many others opened up a whole new world. They applied an inductive process of investigation to their observations of human experience and earthly realities. With the help of new equipment, e.g. the telescope, they described what they saw, touched, heard etc. In later centuries, this unleashed a wide variety of investigations into the mysteries of nature. The discoveries were truly enlightening. This led others to describe with great precision the rigorous process by which investigations were undertaken. Thus, 'modern thought' was born. Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton are the pre-eminent expressions of 'modern thought.' They posited the existence of a rigidly organized mechanistic world of which God, the 'clockmaker' was the creator. In the 18th and, particularly, the 19th century, this scientific process was applied to the field of history. Thus, the 'scientific' critical method for determining historicity was developed. Various criteria and their strict application were established.<sup>4</sup> Nineteenth century scholars, mostly German, applied these principles in their studies of Jewish and Christian sacred scriptures and related literature. The field of scholarly exegesis was born. It flourished beyond imagination during the 20th century with scholars from many continents and countries broadening the scope of the investigations as new discoveries of ancient manuscripts have seen the light of day. This whole process has generated what many contemporary scholars call the quest for the 'historical' Jesus. I will address this issue in **Part 2 of this series on reconstructive Christianity.**

A further revolution occurred in the 20th century, so-called 'post modern thought.' It is characterized by: 1: Recent cosmological discoveries updating and expanding Darwin's 19th century theory of evolution, what some refer to as 'the universe story';<sup>5</sup> 2: Einstein's theory of relativity as it applies to the space/time continuum and to the interchangeability of matter and spirit as two manifestations of one same energy; 3: Finally, the very recent developments of Quantum physics, positing the tendency of infinite creative possibility (random? or intentional?).<sup>6</sup>

Each of these points would need to be expanded in order to show their impact on traditionally held teachings of Christianity. Briefly, however, I would make the following

points. The new cosmology puts an end to the literal interpretation of the Genesis stories of creation. This is a wonderful development, first because it allows us, finally, to plumb the depths and mine the riches of the metaphorical interpretation of these texts. Indeed, the Creator revealed by the new cosmology is far more *transcendent*, yet also *immanent*. Theologians today speak about the Holy Spirit (or other metaphorical expressions) as the Immanent Presence vivifying the ongoing story of creation. From the story they also detect two major characteristics of this Presence: a pervading *Benevolence* and *Intimacy* with all that is created.<sup>7</sup> In my view, this way of 'picturing' God is far richer and far more inspiring than the traditional distant, theistic, patriarchal God of the Jewish/Christian writings.

The contributions of Einstein, as well as developments in Quantum Physics break down the 'steel walls' dividing matter and spirit. They provide a more permeable view of these realities and suggest an interrelation that theologians and others are exploring in many ways, but particularly in terms of the significance of death and the after life in the ongoing journey of creation.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion:

This article provides a basic overview of factors that have contributed to the birth of reconstructive Christianity. Readers will need to pursue these points by consulting either their own or the suggested bibliography in the notes below.

Reconstructive theology replaces what was known in past seminary days as "systematic theology." The factors presented in this first part have broken down beyond repair the traditional system. One might ask if reconstructive Christianity has produced a new system. At this point, it hasn't. Rather, it is in the process (sometimes 'messy,' just like creation) of investigating a wide variety of issues related to the Christian story. I suspect that this will go on for quite some time. That's how the creative process works. This is why we do not speak of 'reconstructed' Christianity, and why some prefer the expression: 'reconstructing' Christianity/Catholicism.<sup>9</sup>

So, where do we go from here? Normally, in systematic theology, we started with "De Deo Uno," God as One. Based on 'revealed' information found in the sacred scriptures or the Fathers of the early Church, theologians determined the traits or characteristics of God, the Creator, through the process of deductive reasoning. This is a top

down method. By contrast, reconstructive Christianity works from the bottom up. It works from human experience expressed in many different formats. Thus, it starts with the human experience of Jesus of Nazareth as best we know it from scholarly, historical research of the Gospels. We look first at his background and then, more importantly, at his public ministry of word and deed. Secondly, we study what the first Christian communities believed about who Jesus was and what was his significance, especially in the light of the resurrection.<sup>10</sup>

This is what I intend to cover in Part 2 of this series.

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5. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, "The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos," Harper San Francisco, 1994. See also, Thomas Berry, "The Great Work, Our Way Into The Future," Bell Tower Publishing, N.Y., 1999.
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8. Diarmuid O'Murchu, "Quantum Theology," Crossroad, N.Y., 1997a. See also, Deepak Chopra, "How To Know God," Three Rivers Press, N.Y., 2000.
9. Robert A. Ludwig, "Reconstructing Catholicism for a New Generation," Crossroad, N.Y., 1995. I used this book as a basis for the seminar that I gave.
10. Marcus J. Borg, "Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time," Harper San Francisco, 1994.

### Michael Winter from Advent, the UK married priest movement, sent the following:

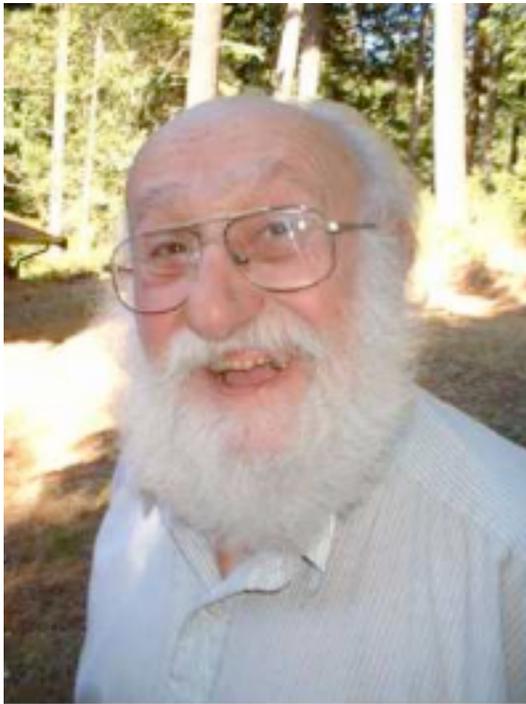
For some months now I have detected a significant change in the collective consciousness of the Church. All over the world parishes are being closed or amalgamated, and many more people now realise just how serious is the shortage of priests. An element of justifiable anger has entered into their attitude.

The petition in England which was taken up by one inspired woman in the north of England, has reached the bishops. The total was 4000 signatures, which is disappointing, but I can assure you that the English bishops have never received that number of signatures for anything!!!

Elizabeth Price, our chair, who has a good working relationship with Bishop Hollis of Portsmouth, wrote an excellent letter to accompany the postal packet. He wrote back to her saying that he had sent the matter to a certain Monsignor who actually draws up the agenda for their meetings. That was about a month ago, and it has not been sent back, so we are reasonably sure that the matter is on the agenda of the bishops' half yearly meeting which starts on November 10th.

# From The Archives: Eucharist Diversity In New Testament Times

by Dr. Michael Zarb, Duncan, BC (from *The Journal* Nov-Dec 1997)



The last meal Jesus had with his disciples has been held by Christianity as the main event in the life of Jesus to be habitually remembered and reenacted by his followers. This remembrance and reenactment took various forms based on the different interpretations of it by the various movements and communities of the New Testament times, and it produced a

variety of liturgical expressions.

The Synoptic Gospels tell us that the last meal of Jesus was a Pashcal meal... yet they do not describe a Pashcal meal, but only the ritual of the words of Jesus at the sharing of the bread and wine, probably employing the formulations the different communities used during their communal meals. Only in Luke do we find the Passover mentioned in the account of the meal - in the words of Jesus with the first cup (22:15).

On the other hand, in the Gospel of John the meal is definitely not a Pashcal meal. The Jewish people are eating the Passover after Jesus is sentenced by Pilate. John interprets the death of Jesus itself, not the meal, as the equivalent of the Jewish Passover... There is no indication that the Johannine Community understood the Last Supper as the Jewish Passover meal. The symbolic action of Jesus that is emphasized is not the breaking and sharing of the bread and wine, completely absent in John, but rather the washing of the feet, together with the injunction to all disciples to do the same which is equivalent to the Paul/Luke formula: "Do this in remembrance of me." ....

While the communities represented by the synoptics and Paul employed these words as the thanksgiving or eucharistic prayer, other communities employed different formulas. The "Didache" (Teaching), an early 2nd century christian writing, has different prayers for the bread and the cup entirely unconnected with the actions or words of Jesus in the Last Supper scene. They are thanksgiving to the Father for their connection to David and the life and knowledge given to them through Jesus. I quote the text (J.B. Lightfoot translation) since it is not as readily available as the canonical ones:

"But as touching the eucharistic thanksgiving, give ye thanks thus. First, as regards the cup: We give thanks, O our Father, for the holy vine of Thy son David, which Thou madest known to us through Thy Son Jesus;

Thine is the glory for ever and ever.

Then as regarding the broken bread: We give thanks, O our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou didst make known to us through Thy Son Jesus;

Thine is the glory for ever and ever.

As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may The Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

Maran Atha. Amen."

Besides the diversity of the actions and prayers, the food elements were sometimes also different. For example, water is attested in The Acts of Thomas: "And when she was baptized and clad, he brake bread and took a cup of water and made her a partaker in the body of Christ and the cup of the Son of God..."

The Acts of Peter 1:2: "And they brought bread and water to Paul for the sacrifice so that after the prayer he should distribute to everyone. Among them, as it proved, there was a woman named Rufina who indeed wished that even she should receive the eucharist at Paul's hands." Hyppolytus of Rome mentions an interesting eucharistic rite including cheese and olives!

In conclusion, there was no sacred Congregation of Rites in the first and second centuries. Every community in every area was pretty much a law unto itself, though as we know from Justin, a great Father of the Church, attempts at the imposition of uniformity were already under way.

From the diversity of forms and the significance given to them, three common points emerge:

1. the disciples who celebrated a Eucharistic or Thanksgiving prayer, gathered around a table to eat and drink;
2. the prayer was directed to God, the Creator, through Jesus whom they believed to be resurrected and present among them;
3. those that gathered believed they were powerfully encouraged to live the Gospel message of loving service by remembering the lived experience of Jesus.

## From the Archives of The Journal Jan - Feb 2000

"The weakness in a spiritual life that rides on rules and regulations, definitions and doctrines is that it knows only as much of God as authority defines for it. People who rely only on pre-digested answers know the rituals and canons of the faith, perhaps, but they may know far too little of the God who dwells within them... To say "I believe" is to say that my heart is in what I know but do not know, what I feel but do not see, what I want and do not have, however much I have. To say "I believe" is to say yes to the mystery of life...Life is so gracious and gifting. Its value, its impact, its beauty depend only on the things we say 'Amen' to as we go. It is what we believe that sculpts and guides us. It is the quest for meaning that leads us to eternity now and the now of eternity. The Creed does not define God. The Creed posits God. The Creed confronts us with the concept of faith and requires us to face the fact that God is as good an answer as we have to anything. Faith itself, devoid of answers, brings us to the appreciation of mystery."

*In Search of Belief* by Joan Chittister

# Theological Soapbox: A Radical Change Of Attitude

by Arthur Menu, Sidney, BC



This week I took a day of spiritual retreat. It was a good time but the greatest grace came as I was driving home from the retreat centre. I was moved to make a resolution. Henceforth I would regard everything that happened to me, including my own actions-with one exception-to be a blessing. The exception is this. I

will not regard as a blessing anything I do that is an intentional rejection of God. Which is to say, I will regard as a blessing everything except my own sins.

In my mind I engaged in an imaginary dialogue with a skeptic:

Skeptic: So if you get a flat tire, you will regard that as a blessing?

Me: Yes.

Skeptic: If you get cancer, you will regard that as a blessing?

Me: Yes.

Skeptic: If a very dear friend dies a painful death, you will regard that as a blessing?

Me: For me, yes. I don't know if the friend would regard it as a blessing for themselves.

Skeptic: If you do something you know to be wrong, you will regard that as a blessing?

Me: No, that would be a rejection of God, a sin. Sins are not a blessing for the one who commits them.

Skeptic: If someone hurts you intentionally, let's say, tells vicious lies about you, and they know it's wrong, you will regard that as a blessing?

Me: For me, yes. For them, no, if they are rejecting God by their action.

Skeptic: You're crazy!

Me: Thank you.

Skeptic: And you know what else?

Me: What?

Skeptic: I don't think you can do it.

Why indeed would anyone make such a resolution? Let me explain. In my life I have been made spiritually unhappy on many occasions by things that have happened to me. My unhappiness was the result of my believing that the thing that was happening to me was a bad thing, that I would have been better off if it had not happened to me. I have also been made unhappy by anxiety over bad things that I believed would happen to me in the future. And I have been made unhappy by believing that the bad things that happen, or would happen in the future, are my fault. Believing "What is happening to me is bad for me" is a recipe for sadness, anxiety and guilt.

But if I stop believing that these things are bad for me, if I regard them as a blessing, I shall not be made unhappy by them. These events may leave me perplexed, afraid or in pain, but not unhappy in that spiritual

sense with which I am concerned. Nor will I be anxious that bad things will happen to me in the future. If I view everything that happens to me as not bad (save my own sin), I will not feel guilty or at fault (save in the case of my own sin).

The imaginary dialogue with the skeptic continues:

Skeptic: But how can you make yourself believe something so contrary to common sense? That's like saying you're going to start believing that the moon is made of green cheese. Your own mind, your own sense of reality won't put up with it!

Me: But this isn't about scientific truth, about how the world is made. It's about the value we put on things.

Skeptic: But what you are proposing to believe goes against our instinctive response to harmful events that, like it or not, nature and evolution have programmed us to fear and avoid.

Me: I shall continue to fear and avoid the things I have always feared and avoided. But if they happen, I will count it a blessing. I will place a positive value on them. That is a spiritual act, not an instinctive one.

Skeptic: Okay, let's look at this from the point of view of spiritual belief. You say you are a Christian but I don't see anything in the Bible that supports your new outlook. In fact the Psalms are fully of lament over just the kind of bad things-sickness, betrayal, death-that you say you will now regard as a blessing.

Me: I think the Bible shows that the attitude I am adopting is the attitude that Jesus had.

Skeptic: Prove it!

The proof I offer is this. The worst thing that ever happened or ever will happen to a person happened to Jesus. He was the best, the most loving, most God-filled, most innocent person who ever lived. Yet he was tortured and executed in the cruelest fashion for a crime he did not commit by those who knew he was innocent. He knew this would happen to him but he accepted it because he believed that through his sacrifice God would bring about the salvation of the world. Although afraid ("Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me"), he chose to believe that his death would be a blessing for him and for the world ("Yet, not what I want, but what you want" Mark 14:36).

If Jesus could do that, can I not at least try to do the same? We also have the words of Paul: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). And although sin itself is never a blessing God can repair the spiritual harm sin causes the sinner, if the sinner repents.

This doesn't mean I will always know why something is a blessing. Jesus did not know how his death would bring salvation until after his resurrection. God's plans for the universe and every creature in it, being the product of an infinite intelligence, for the most part remain utterly mysterious to us in this life. "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11:33). How all the things that happen to me are a blessing is knowledge that I will not possess until I am raised from the dead. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but

then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (I Corinthians 13:12). I know that it will be hard to change the habit of a lifetime. Thinking negatively about what happens to me is deeply ingrained, embedded quite solidly in the neural pathways of my brain. I do not expect to see a big change in my feelings of unhappiness. To start with I shall simply be saying the words, "This is a blessing" about

things that make me unhappy. Nevertheless I have already experienced that saying those words has had an effect on both my spiritual unhappiness and my emotional unhappiness. My spiritual unhappiness goes away. My emotional unhappiness has lessened to a degree, and I entertain the hope that it will decrease more and more if am disciplined in following the resolution I have made.

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## I Too Opted Into The Clerical Culture

by Phil Little, Ladysmith, BC

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*Over the past years I have developed a profound respect for Fr. Tom Doyle, the American canon lawyer who has stood apart from the majority of American church leaders in that he made a deliberate option to stand with the despised and the*

*spat upon victims of abuse by clergy and their superiors.*

I wander about the cyber halls of the web sometimes finding little gems but more often it is through referrals in emails or newsletters that link me to what is happening or being nuanced by others. Over the past years I have developed a profound respect for Fr. Tom Doyle, the American canon lawyer who has stood apart from the majority of American church leaders in that he made a deliberate option to stand with the despised and the spat upon victims of abuse by clergy and their superiors. So when I come across an article about him or by him, I want to read more. In one such encounter using "Catholica Australia" it was his introduction that stuck with me - perhaps it was like an echo of my own experience.

Fr. Tom Doyle said:

"I have been a Catholic all my life. I was ordained a priest in 1970 and at that time and for many years thereafter I accepted without question the doctrine and law of the Catholic Church in every way. I believed in the particular teachings about the pope, bishops and priests. I believed that the Church was a response to a personal God who knew what I did at all times, responded to my prayers, was deeply concerned about human behavior and was displeased by sin and sinners. This God invoked both love and fear and gave us the security of communicating his will for us through the special medium of his popes and bishops.

I believed that all of the robes, rituals, customs, rules and traditions had an essential place in God's special community on earth. I believed that priests and bishops really were "different" and possessed special powers given them by God through ordination. I firmly believed that this was the only way to God and the only true Church."

(the abbreviated text is well worth reading and a link is found for the full pdf. text)

[http://www.catholica.com.au/gc2/occ/020\\_occ\\_110808.php](http://www.catholica.com.au/gc2/occ/020_occ_110808.php)

Well, it would be foolish to pretend that this echoes my own

beginning as a cleric, for too many people know me too well. I never did accept without question doctrines and dogma nor did I really believe that bishops and popes had an exclusive pipeline to God. But I did opt into the clerical culture because it was "different" in a way so specially defined by those already within the club.

This began perhaps when I was still in elementary school and some of us boys were selected to be "Knights of the Altar". We learned the Latin responses and got to do some of the special things around the altar with the priest. We were told that as altar BOYS (girls were allowed to learn the Latin responses but could not ever be altar servers) we were next to the priest in the special grace that flowed through the mass, above other participants such as choir, ushers, and certainly way above the common faithful including our parents kneeling on the other side of the rail. There were also some perks that came with the job: Occasionally we got pulled out of school for a funeral for which we received a \$2 stipend (and that was big money back then) and if we were senior altar servers we assisted at Saturday weddings where the stipend for the server could be as much as \$5. We learned early that being "different" and close to those with the powers had its advantages. I was an altar server right up to grade 12, and I enjoyed being separate from others. I enjoyed wearing the long dress and lighting the candles, and carrying the thurible and the incense. What exclusivity and prestige for an introvert so young.

I entered the seminary the year Vatican II ended. Continually I heard about the way it was before Vatican II with the "Chapter of faults" and the use of the discipline although I never heard stories about anything resembling Silas, the Opus Dei albino monk in the Da Vinci Code. Usually it was a matter of humour how one would go to the bedroom and strap the bed with the discipline while crying out in feigned pain. My studies in philosophy were part of a general B.A. degree and my theology came at St. Paul University in Ottawa. I did not excel at anything, mainly because in 7 years I didn't find anything really interesting. The courses were for the most part quite insipid, other than the scripture courses. I actually enjoyed Canon law because it was a challenge something like Sudoku, and my professors were quite human about the legalistic quandaries of the ordinary folk presented as case studies.

At St. Paul's University there was a faculty called Missiology (today called Mission studies). I had joined a missionary order and in fact went to South America for my pastoral year of studies and all my years as a priest. I never took any courses in Mission studies nor did any of my fellow missionaries. I was clearly on track to be a priest - but in the 7 years of formal studies I took no

## Clerical Culture Continued...

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courses in psychology or counselling. I took no courses in sociology dealing with marriage, or youth, or even deviant behaviour (which may have had some relevance to confession at least).

This is what Fr. Doyle is saying that I think was so true - that we thought we were different because of our ordination which was assumed to give us special powers that were far superior to professional training in the social sciences. I can think of no other profession where the training was so unrelated to what one actually had to do. Of course it all hinged on maintaining a passive Catholic population committed to the pre-vatican 2 "pray, pay and obey" paradigm. The clergy needed to believe (or at least pretend to believe) in their own powers and it was essential that the faithful not discuss or examine the basis of this claim to power. The Eucharist has been appropriated as the exclusive property of those with the powers. What happens when people discover a different meaning of Eucharist, based simply on the words of Jesus "when two or more are gathered in my name ..." - that Eucharist

happens when bread and wine are shared in fellowship and love. Or when people discover that Eucharist happens so often that it is not something magical or exclusive to the mumblings of a select few. The big show events such as World Youth Day or the Eucharistic congresses are really meant to reinforce the importance of exclusivity and privilege by the dominant few.

Sometimes when I am expressing a critical or cynical view about the old paradigm, the way things used to be which is too often the way things still are, my wife will quite calmly say "didn't you once do that?" Well, yes I did, but I sort of believed in it then or at least that was what was expected of me - and at least then I had all the answers. Now I have lots of questions - and wonder - what a great time to actually study philosophy. Hopefully in the future I will be found to be far less arrogant and more resembling the pilgrim. That would be another thought some day.

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### *Sophia*

by Dianne Peck, Halifax, NS

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As our year softly closes, I am thinking about some of the experiences the past months have brought me. One is as recent as the week I spent in November at the Shadhdhuliyya Healing Center, located in a place called Pope Valley, in northern California.

It is operated by North American Sufis; yes, there is such a thing. It is carved into the side of a mountain, situated on ground that was once sacred to Native Americans. It is still holy ground.

Accommodations are rustic, water is rationed, and indoor plumbing is limited.

The site is also used by the University of Spiritual Healing and Sufism, which is the reason I was there. I have signed up for a year's studies with the University. The program structure requires on-site participation for a week, four times a year. I have completed session one. The rest of the course is carried on via phone and Internet during the three-month intercessions.

I voluntarily took part in Sufi prayer practices (not a course requirement), and attended classes about ancient Sufi healing practices. Many of the prayer practices are the same as those practiced by the religion of Islam.

"Sufi" means "wool", the idea being that we need to be as docile in the hands of God as a piece of wool is in the hands of the weaver.

I experienced and observed much, and would like to share two of my observations.

The first is the devotion and commitment of the Sufi community to the practice of a very real, in fact, very in-your-face asceticism.

I'm talking an annual month-long fast from both food and water from dawn to sunset, plus twice weekly the rest of the time; ritual prayer several times a day (somewhat parallel to the Christian practice of the

Divine Office), beginning at daybreak; the practice called the Remembrance which is advocated to be done in the last third of the night (yes, before dawn); and tithing for the poor.

These are men and women of all age groups (at least a third of the group attending with me were in their twenties), who are raising families, working, taking part fully in everyday life, and wearing "regular" clothing except when they gather as a Sufi community. Then the body is covered modestly, often in loose-fitting garments, and both men and women cover their head. And all the while they are living deeply interior lives in a somewhat 'incognito' fashion.

I am not aware of all the geographical locations, but do know that there are communities in various states across the US, and three newcomers in my group were from Mexico City where there are established communities.

Sufi prayer is primarily recitation. It is done from a heart space, and involves the use of the voice and the breath to raise the personal and collective levels of vibration in order to connect to the Divine vibration.

Chanting is done in a lyrical Arabic, and is usually comprised of the name for the Divine, primarily "Allah" (which is pronounced "al-law"). The divine attributes are also chanted, such as Allah the loving (al Wadude), the compassionate (ir Rahim), the truth (al Haqq), the light (an Nur), the healer (ash Shafi).

The body as well as the voice and the breath are used in prayer. Even though we didn't understand the Arabic language, we were encouraged to take the prayer into our bodies by taking part in the practices. From there the divine connection will be made with the heart, often by-passing the intellect until the language is gradually learned.

I experienced personal healings that went into hidden areas I didn't know I was still protecting. In fact, the Sufi requirement to becoming a healer is to first heal yourself. And time is not wasted. You faced your life and your story in a way that I describe as compassionately confrontational. More than one life

was transformed.

I am now required to conduct 20 healings before next session in February (so if anyone wants to taste healing the Sufi way, email me at [coach@diannepeck.com](mailto:coach@diannepeck.com))

*“Learning to differentiate the Divine voice from all the other voices that are inside is an essential part of the teaching at USHS. The simplest way to do this is by remembering the Name and sensing the light that emanates from the Name” (This is called the practice of Remembrance). “The Divine Essence reaches us through the Name, which acts as a portal or doorway...the voice of Allah does not come as left-brain reality, but comes rather as a dancing knowledge of all that is”. Dr. Ibrahim Jaffe, Pres. USHS.*

The second observation I want to share is the context in which Sufi men hold the meaning of the Feminine.

It was unsettling, on first encounter, to see the formation for prayer. In the Mosque, prayer participants stand in straight lines, shoulders touching, the lines of the men in front of those of the women.

The explanation is that Sufis see women as the containers of the Divine in very specific ways, ways in which men aren't. Women hold all life in a sacred place within, symbolized in the body by the womb.

For this they are to be revered, and protected the way a sacred vessel is protected. Sufi men testify to the infusion of divine life that comes to them from women. Hence the physical arrangement of the prayer lines. The men are actually strategically positioned in order to receive as much as possible. One prayer leader described an experience in which he was leading prayer for ten lines of women. It remains one of the most profound experiences he has had of being enveloped by the divine Feminine.

I am reflecting on this theology as the celebration of the Nativity story approaches. I already know that my heart focus will expand to take in not only the Child, but also the Mother in a new way.

### **Sophia wisdom:**

*“It is from the Neolithic era that we have inherited all the images related to the Divine Feminine as an invisible flow of energy which brings life into being, sustains and transforms it, and withdraws it into a hidden dimension for rebirth or regeneration.*

*How hungry the human heart is for an image of a Divine Mother that would, like an umbilical cord, re-connect it to the Womb of Being, restoring the lost sense of trust and containment in a dimension which may be beyond the reach of our intellect, yet is accessible to us through our deepest instincts.”*

*from The Divine Feminine, by Andrew Harvey and Anne Baring*

## Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs)

The following information is taken from the book *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*, written by Rev. Bernard Lee and William V. D'Antonia, in collaboration with a number of other colleagues.

### **Average size of IECs:**

Men - 30

Women - 31

Children - 21

**Note: IECs range in size from 15 to several hundred, but the average size including children is 82.**

Age of IEC Members:

Under 18 - 21%

Adults 18 and older:

11% Post-Vatican II (Catholics born since 1961)

46% Vatican II (Catholics born between 1941 and 1960)

43% Pre-Vatican II (Catholics born before 1941)

### **Values held as very important to IECs**

89% Helping others

88%. Family

67% Environment

66% Spiritual matters

59% Prayer

47% Political issues

### **At the national level:**

71% of Catholics said they would follow their conscience when confronted with a moral teaching in which the Church taught one thing and their conscience led them in a different direction

17% said they would obey the pope

12% were unsure

### **On matters of social justice:**

48% Work in a Soup Kitchen

61% Attend meetings of a Catholic Social Justice group

19% Said you can be a good Catholic without donating time or money to help the needy

21% Discuss social issues at every gathering of their community

21% Discuss helping members

27% Discuss helping those in need

### **IECs and traditional Catholic activities:**

25% belonged to a bible study group;

33% were in CCD/Religious Ed;

18% participated in at least one RENEW program

61% were Eucharistic ministers

63% were lectors

66% were married

22% had never been married

12% were divorced or separated

IEC members fit the model of Catholics found in Dillon's *Catholic Identity*, that is, they combine reason, faith and their lived experience to struggle to find a place within the institutional structure, even as a significant minority have moved beyond caring about their relationship to the institutional Church.

17% of our national survey said they considered themselves no-longer Catholic. Most often, their reasons were similar to those expressed in interviews, casual conversation, or in one or more of the questionnaires: an authoritarian hierarchy that is out of touch with the laity, and whose teachings on sexual morality do not reflect their lived experience, and whose refusal to rethink the priesthood puts the Eucharist at great peril.

IECs have a strong commitment to social justice that goes well beyond serving in soup kitchens. IECs are most active in their communities on social justice issues, that is, trying to address legal or other structural issues that affect the poor and near poor, peace and reconciliation, and the like. Still, most of them know that their individual efforts do not do enough.

**You are invited to join us...**  
***“Intentional Eucharistic Communities:  
Embracing and Shaping Our Future”***



**A Gathering of Intentional Eucharistic Communities**  
**May 15-17, 2009**  
**National 4-H Conference Center**  
**7100 Connecticut Avenue**  
**Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815**

The planners of the **2009 Gathering** have developed a rich program to help us share our faith and deepen our commitment to the Gospel.

**Our keynote speaker will be Robert McClory, a respected Catholic journalist and author of *As It Was in the Beginning: The Coming Democratization of the Church (2007)*, who will relate his research on the early church to his experience with the Dutch Dominican theologians and the transforming presence of IECs.**

Themes for other sessions include:

- Women in Ministry
- Religion and Spirituality
- Social Justice and IECs
- Young Catholics and the Future of IECs

We will gather from Friday evening through Sunday morning in a setting which will enable us to participate in presentations, workshops, and worship as well as to socialize, sleep, and share meals. Residential facilities are attractive and costs are modest. Payment for room reservations and meals is made through the registration process.

Our Gathering will conclude with the celebration of Sunday Eucharist and sharing a meal.

**Intentional Eucharistic Communities and interested individuals throughout the US have been invited to participate. All are welcome! Early registration discount deadline is February 15, 2009.**

We look forward to seeing old friends from prior Gatherings and making new ones as we explore current issues and share experiences of community life.

If you have further questions contact:

**Network of Intentional Eucharistic Communities**

5410 North 11th Street

Phone and Fax: 703-538-6128

Arlington, VA 22205

eradday@verizon.net

[www.intentionaleucharisticcommunities.org](http://www.intentionaleucharisticcommunities.org)

*Visit the website often to see updates about the 2009 Gathering!*

**IEC 2009    May 15-17    REGISTRATION FORM**

**Please print:**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Name of your IEC \_\_\_\_\_

# A Middle Ages Church In The Modern World?

by Tom McMahon, San Jose, CA



The Polar Express takes a bypass switch on the Trentan priesthood: Who is qualified to be a priest in the age of technology?

My father lost his life in a train accident, yet I still carry his railroad genes. As I write today I see a "rail switch" that steers me off the main line, the Trentan priesthood, and "sides" me along the old-time man in black and roman white collar. I recall one of my favorite songs, Johnny Cash's

"The Man in Black" and nostalgically I display a picture of myself, young and bushy-tailed at 25, the newly ordained cleric, pre-Vatican II model.

As I was preparing film for my class on World War II for 30 Almaden seniors, two pictures slammed into my memory: one of an abandoned Chinese baby in the debris-filled streets of Shanghai and the other of a US Navy chaplain with his hand held over a dying seaman in the midst of the flames that consumed the USS Franklin, the image from the deck of the doomed carrier jet blasted the Roman Catholic priesthood into hero status, and Bing in "Going My Way" added the cherry and cream to the banana split of fantasized priestly perfection when he went about his clerical duty in spite of Ingrid Bergman.

The main line train of clericalism today has twisted track under its truck-wheels and is going nowhere. Is there any value on the side track? One might not find the approving episcopal bar code on men and women who have been sidelined. Is a Middle Ages priesthood a fit sacred sign for modernity? Will the men in black do the job? Will they survive under the noon-day sun of close scrutiny?

Psychology is a discipline that has been around since the first Neanderthals figured out that the Cro-Magnons had entered their hunting grounds. The Greek plethora of gods and goddesses is a text book display of human emotions and the psychological exchange common to human life, the Greeks' version of heaven being Mt. Olympus. My Mom was the best psychologist I have ever known, raising four kids in the Great Depression after my father's death in 1931; Mom's psychology was crisis orientated, apt for her time. When I was in the throes of considering leaving institutional ministry and going to counseling Mother said "But Tom you are not crazy" and my reply was "Maybe that is why I am not going crazy." The human psychology of the church in the era of the Black Plague is soaked in fear and coupled with a doomsday theology. In "Pacem in Terris" and in the Vatican II documents there is not one prohibitive or threatening word: Vatican II projects much needed hope for human kind; John the 23rd was a keen psychologist. God and Jesus are our friends.

This afternoon on our Public Radio I heard a report of new federal laws that mandate money, care, and time to be allocated to mental illnesses as equal to physical pathologies; the discussion entailed the stigma attached to mental illness. I had just come from our first session at our Senior Center, the subject HEALTH CARE OF THE BRAIN, featuring information on prevention of Alzheimer's and Dementia. We have 1400

Senior members; five came to the discussion. As I drove home, I pondered who would be the priest of information who would merit access to the aging senior mind; there is not a single person among the 1400, including myself, who is immune to the mental illnesses that accompany old age. We are quick to go to the foot doctor or have a hip replaced; few know about health care of the brain; most prefer to pretend there are no problems. I agree with Page Smith in his book *Old Age is a Different Country*. As my Mom believed, psychology is linked to the crazies. The roman catholic church is dysfunctional because it has not up-dated psychologically.

In 1976 when Archbishop Joseph McGucken heard of my being licensed as a mental health therapist by the State of California, he said to me: "Why don't you leave mental health to the professionals?" and I responded "Indeed, Archbishop, and I am becoming one of them." I think Joe was afraid I might analyze him. But that's not my style; I prefer Victor Frankl and his logotherapy which is heavy into hope. The Archbishop had knowledge then of sexually abusing priests and we can see today the psychological mess. Before I left institutional ministry, I worked in an agency that dealt with run-away teens and children; our work called for in home visits and little did the dysfunctional families know that the therapist was a roman catholic priest; I did not tell them while gaining much knowledge of the dynamic involved in families, especially Catholics who forced their kids to go to church. It was on the job training for me. I viewed the whole as a service that Jesus would approve of, all along having the successful model of the Worker Priests of Paris during World War II, started by Yves Congar and broken up by Pius XII as the pope protected the elite clerical class.

What am I suggesting concerning a priesthood for the age of technology? Two issues are clear to me: access to people and willingness to serve. The man who wears a clerical collar elicits fear, respect, and distance. Based on early archetypes, Protestant, Jew, and Catholic see in that person a special power who has an in with the gods and they won't be real with him. I know the drill; while celebrating on New Year's Eve in New York City with a marine corporal and a navy swabbie (both kids I had in parish back home) I took the crosses off my army chaplain's uniform and enjoyed the show. And as for women being ordained priests, I have a reservation. I have never considered myself a genuine priest of Jesus because a bishop laid hands on me in a roman ordination; I have seen men ordained in ceremony and in no way did they change to be followers of our Christ. I have seen many ordinary people priest their lives in service to others and they wore no clerical collar or had no title; this I learned from my priest uncle and from the Worker Priests of Paris. People ask me today "Tom, are you still a priest?" and I smile responding "Which kind of priest are you asking about?" The fact that I take time to listen to people or take a sick person to the hospital qualifies me in my own mind that I am in sync with Jesus. I have little personal interest in a liturgical priesthood that lives aloof from the people; I do see value for men of my era who were bridge builders. I often think of Monsignor (Mons to us) Keenan of the hick town of Coalinga, CA, former WW II

## Middle Ages Church Continued...

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chaplain, who used to eat every night at the Greyhound bus station restaurant and talk to someone he did not know.

Paul the Apostle was a tentmaker. I have had a number of jobs in my life time, before and after clerical ordination. In each of the experiences there was opportunity to serve and, by this service, to grow in happiness and wisdom. The world is a big place and there are many people. When I was departing institutional ministry, I talked with Jim McEntee, a great social justice worker, and I expressed fear that I would not be used by anyone anymore. Jim gently said to me "Tom, if you are open to people, they many will come." I have since had a rich priestly life of service to people and I don't say mass or wear a clerical collar. A Jesus priesthood is there for every human being. The people of God have been sorely cheated by so called bishop educators who continue to claim direct descent from Jesus (that bogus idea of Last Supper ordination) and a magic power of salvation in ordained clerics. Once of great value in the Middle Ages, the hero priest of Trent has lost his seasoning and must be replaced by women and men who are dedicated to Jesus Christ. Vatican II sounded the death knell of the old European Church and priesthood when the bishops signed the document of "The Church in the Modern World". The Holy Spirit of the Creator-God is at work while clericalized men and women continue to offer opposition.

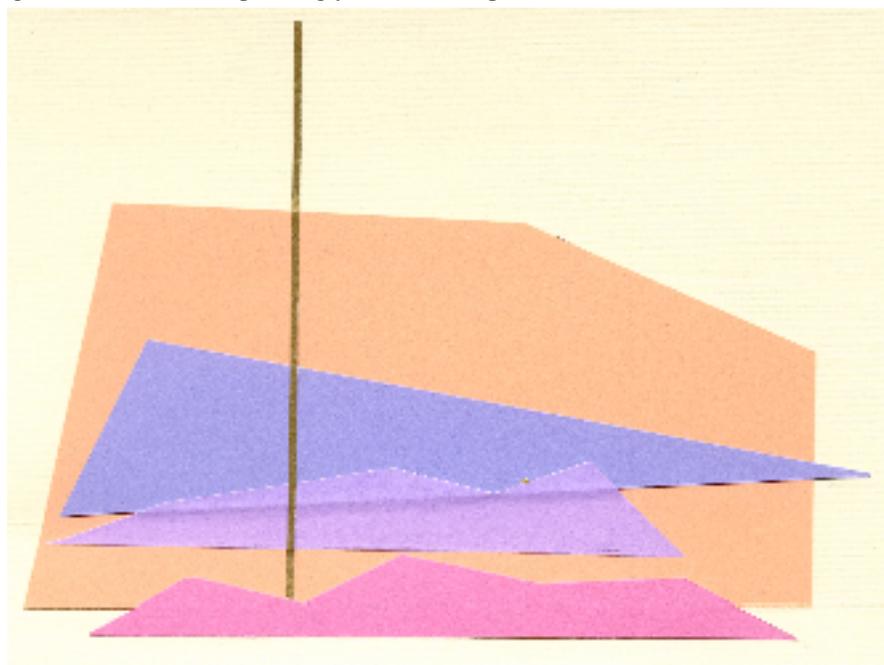
What would I say to a person who wants to be a Jesus priest in today's world, whether she or he be one publicly ordained or privately aware of the Christian potential? In true Gestalt fashion, I would offer 3 negatives and 3 positives: Negatives 1. Avoid the limelight. No titles, no outward show, no costumes; 2. You will be rebuffed, particularly by indifference, because the Gospel of Jesus is counter culture, especially consumerism; if you live by the Gospel be prepared to be hurt and ignored by wealth and power. 3. Don't be fooled by the numbers game, the large crowd, your name in the paper, or an honor seat at a wedding feast. Christianity is a salt, an influence. Positives 1. Trust yourself to an Anam Cara, perhaps a soul-friend individual or a base community with whom you can speak from your genuine inner self, expressing your dark and positive

thoughts; 2. Know by name those to whom you speak and listen and speak only after serious reflection; 3. Be aware that results of your efforts may not show in your life time (cf. my closing story); Fly on the radar beam of what you think Jesus would do and trust his Spirit to guide you. (p.s. 4. - a personal cheat - Make friends with the old people; they know what life is about and they have put up their money at great sacrifice years ago only to be neglected in old age; they have sweated out raising their kids Catholic only to find the kids don't want it anymore; they want to enjoy what they have left of life without being afraid.)

### **Closing story:**

At a reception after a funeral, I spotted a table of old friends, going over shaking hands and saying hello. I stopped before one woman and I said "I don't know you." She smiled and said " But I know you! I am a San Leandro High School girl, one of those Public School kids that you worked with in 1956. You loved and respected us and we loved you and I will never forget you." The old Irish pastor and I fought as he saw value only in the Catholic School children, calling the Public School kids "your damned kids." I assured him I had not biologically fathered any. Ah, bitter and sweet memories and the reward offered by that beautiful person who made my day fifty years later. I have no regrets about being ordained a priest in a pre- Vatican II church; I enjoyed all 26 years of service to God and people; I consider it a privilege to be a transition man, to have met John XXIII who thereafter moved a church of the Middle Ages into the 22nd century. I do advocate a good look at the risen Jesus, the priest needed in the age of modernity who now wears a different disguise and welcomes all comers to join in his work. "Take up my burden; it is sweet and light."

Today, I spent time at the seminary library, and I came away with seven books on the modernization of the sacraments. I had a strange feeling that others have had the same ideas I have written about. At least I am not a plagiarist. I look forward to reading the seven books to see what they have to say and what I can learn.



**Christmas is  
a way of life.**

# 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**  
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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 2009 (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.

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