



# The Journal



January - March 2012

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## World Religions And The God Within

by *Hank Mattimore, San Jose, CA*

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I have been reading Houston Smith's classic book on World Religions, A devoted Christian from birth, he writes eloquently and respectfully about the way Hindus and Muslims, Buddhists and Jews approach God. What a different world it would be if more of us shared his respectful approach to other religions.

But, much as I admire the scholarship and wisdom of Smith's openness to all religious denominations, I'm at the point in my life where I find that the dogmas of organized religion are almost beside the point. Do you know what I mean? God is bigger than our dogmas.

I find the spirit of God in art and music and poetry. God is in us in our yearning to love and be loved, in our hunger for justice, our compassion for the marginalized in society.

I don't need organized religions to show me the presence of God in the petals of a flower or in the roar of a grizzly bear. I already know in my belly that the spirit lives in the oceans and in the redwoods, in the protective instincts of a lioness towards her cubs and in the innocence of children. As Gerald Manley Hopkins put it "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

I can and do pray privately some times but I am always conscious that I am part of something bigger than myself, That's why I speak to God not as MY father but as OUR Father. The significant word is not "father" but "our." Whether you conceive of God, as Father or Mother or Spirit or Higher Power matters little to me.

What matters is that we are all connected to that spirit that gives us an appreciation for life and a hunger for something greater than ourselves. It is that spirit within that makes our own souls soar, enabling us to transcend our weakness and self-centeredness and become all we were meant to be.

Paradoxically. I do continue to attend my local Catholic parish church. I find that praying together with others who share my own perspective on God and religious values is important in my life. We are social animals and believing as I do that God is within all of us, I would never be satisfied with a private, exclusive me-and-God relationship. But neither the Catholic Church nor the Buddhist temple or the Holy Rollers have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit.

I don't care much whether you go to church on Sunday, worship on the Sabbath, pray to Allah five times daily or do none of the above. What really matters is that you look on all of creation as holy ground and tread on the earth and all of life with reverence. God is here in our world. The Creator not only made us but continues to abide with us and in us.

That's awesome stuff and puts in perspective our petty religious differences. Don't you think?

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# From The Archives Jan-Feb 2002: Were We Only Dreaming?

by Jim Doyle, Sidney, BC



A long time ago, say 1963-64, many of us began to dream of a new understanding of Church. Bishops, Priests, theological writers, and yes, even laypeople engaged in the Church's day to day activities at the Parish level, had a sense that something wonderful was happening in the Church and in our lives. There was hope that new understandings were being offered that would bring about liberation, compassion and healing. We had a loving, gentle, and honest spiritual leader in Pope John XXIII, and so many thoughtful writers and teachers were being heard, perhaps for the first time by the average Catholic in the pews. Vatican II was taking place in Rome – just imagine, some 2500 Cardinals, Bishops, Patriarchs, Heads of Orders, theologians and lay advisors from all over the world were meeting to bring the Church into the modern world.

Overtures were being made to peoples of other faiths, religions, and even those professing no faith or understanding of creation as we understood it to be. For perhaps the first time we felt drawn to those of other Faiths, the Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and others, whose beliefs were to be respected, even appreciated.

During the Fall of 1964, my wife and I were privileged to be invited to spend ten days in Rome, as tourists. We had an opportunity to attend a couple of "Council Masses", with all the Council Fathers present, and later to attend one or two de-briefings for the Press, at the end of a day's Council business. Of course, we were caught up in the atmosphere, feeling that we were witnesses to something significant and historical. By then Paul VI was the Pope when we attended an audience in St. Peter's Basilica, even having front row seats close to the Main Altar. This was pretty exciting stuff for a young Catholic couple with several children at home, and another on the way.

Returning home to Canada, we continued to read, engaged in programs searching for reform, met with Protestant communities, visited Jewish Synagogues and spent time with people just out there in our town. We appreciated Mass being said in the vernacular, and the Priest now facing the congregation. More and wonderful things were on the horizon. Perhaps Priests would be allowed to marry, and some of the wise and

holy women would be ordained to the Priesthood or even become Bishops. Why not?

About this time, the male dominated hierarchy, for the most part conservative by nature, began to exert its reactionary power. To an outsider (layperson), it seemed that so many were trying to convince us that the Council had been an aberration (mistake), needing to be shut down or short-circuited as quickly as possible. Many of our priest friends began to leave, mostly to marry, or just left to find their priestly (life's) work elsewhere. Some brave Bishops like Remi de Roo have continued to bear witness to what happened when the Holy Spirit was there blowing through the Council. Unfortunately so many others have found it more convenient to remain in communion with their fellow Bishops and Cardinals who toe the line of conservative thought. Why is it that serious, mature Bishops, to this day, continue to be intimidated from above, as they wring their hands about the lack of priests, while saying that they are not prepared to even discuss an optional celibacy allowing married clergy or to ordain women. Is it just denial or does this stem from a darker side of refusing to engage in the real dialogue of sexual dysfunction and gender bias within the Church?

My most serious concern is for my adult children and their children who have virtually no contact with the Catholic Church, nor do they seek their spiritual enlightenment in an institutional setting. We find that many of our friends who have come through the same life experience (Catholic schools, married early with lots of kids), in turn enrolling our own children in Catholic schools or Catholic Christian Doctrine courses have exactly the same results. How many generations are we going to write off before stirring ourselves to make significant changes that will inspire our children and other unchurched people to find God in their daily lives? My tone may seem urgent but this lack of inertia has gone on far too long.

So where do we go from here? Do people of Faith just sit back and wait for even graver loss of responsible leaders or do we look elsewhere among those already proven as Charismatic Leaders who no longer have the right to minister within the Church because of a discipline imposed from above. Who is going to serve the faithful?

For my part, I do not want to leave the Church, but do have the responsibility of pursuing my own Spiritual Journey. I want to belong to a community of faith reaching out to all, especially those denied a place at the table: the homeless, the poor, the recovering substance abuser, the imprisoned, and the ones we are most uncomfortable with. I want to be at the table with those who feel they have no right to be there. I want to take nourishment from all of the above, and to learn from their sorrow and loneliness. I feel that this is where I will find the **One** who sat down with sinners and doubters like me. I need a community that will help us to find the Kingdom of which He spoke so often.

Can the Catholic Church help us to reveal the Kingdom or must it go through a real Advent before finding its way? Perhaps Corpus can be a witness, but it must not get caught up in endless debate in church protocol. It must instead, do as Christ

## Were We Only Dreaming? Continued...

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himself taught through his actions, just go and do it, no matter what the cost.

Who am I to talk of these matters? What are my qualifications? Not much. Hey, I was never a priest, only a wayward altar boy, who became a caring husband, father, and adult Christian.

Were we only dreaming, and is the search for the Kingdom only an illusion?

What is to be done? And what does a caring Christian do about a dysfunctional Church whose main concern seems to be in maintaining a previous status quo? Where is the leadership within the Roman Catholic Church? When has the Church engaged in matters that concern the average person of Faith? The only initiatives that have come to light have been originated outside the control of the Roman Curia, and they are soon banned, hidden or discredited out of hand. Those who have

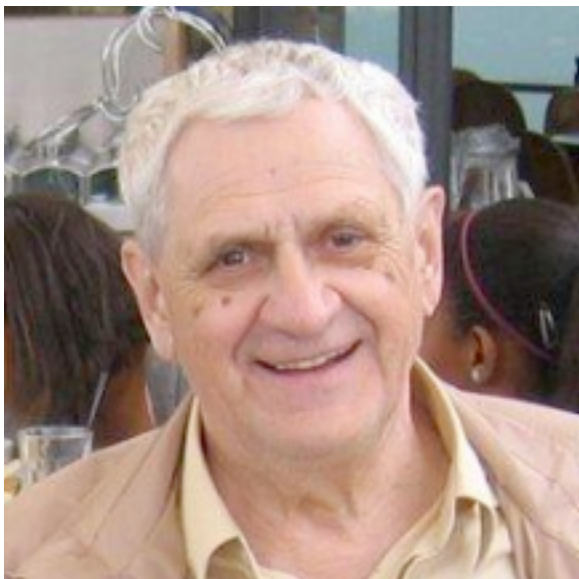
attempted to speak out on those old “chestnuts” i.e. Celibacy, Women’s ordination and responsible family planning have been threatened, silenced or excommunicated, often enough, later to find themselves reinstated, to the embarrassment of all concerned.

For me, the renewal will not come from within the Church, nor from its Hierarchy, but from writers, thinkers and theologians who have long since parted company with the Institutional Church. Try looking for something to read that will point the way out of the present state of trauma. You will most likely find it in the writings of resigned priests and teachers, theologians denied teaching privileges, or among the books written by philosophers, psychologists, Buddhists or other people of conviction, but almost never from within the authoritative Church.

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### If You Have Tears by Emil Kutarna, Regina, SK

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“If you have tears, prepare to shed them now. You all do know this mantle: I remember. The first time ever Caesar put it on: ‘twas on a summer’s evening...” (From Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Act 3, scene II. Mark Antony’s funeral oration).

**I**f you read Marie Bouclin’s book *Seeking Wholeness*, be prepared to shed tears. The book’s subtitle is “Women Dealing with Abuse of Power in the Catholic Church”.

I had this terribly sad image in my mind of a beautiful ceremony that later turned ugly. Every priest remembers the first time ever he put on the “mantle” of the chasuble. And now to learn of how this “mantle” is used to stab, to wound, to kill a trusting human heart when a priest abuses his power. In Marie Bouclin’s words “.. sexual abuse is not primarily about sex but about power”. The power signified by the “mantle” of the priesthood?

We are all reeling from the scandals of child abuse by priests all over the world. If only that was the whole story. In her book Marie writes: “When the allegations involve women, however, the subject is still largely taboo. If it is raised at all, it is usually because some formal complaint has been made or a woman has gone before the civil courts and obtained an undisclosed, but presumably large, monetary settlements. Most cases are cloaked in secrecy, rumor, and innuendo to

the point that the truth surrounding the events is seldom brought to light and the causes, circumstances, and perverse effects of clergy abuse of power are seldom dealt with. The victims most grievously hurt are women who become involved in a sexual relationship with a priest who is their spiritual advisor or pastor. According to Revered Marie Fortune, the founding director of the Centre for the Prevention of Family and Sexual Violence, who counsels victims of sexual abuse in the pastoral relationship, sexual intercourse between a priest and a parishioner seeking pastoral help constitutes both sexual abuse and professional misconduct, because the power differential between them is too great.” (Introduction, page x)

Power is a scary thing. Baron John Dalberg-Acton was a recognized historian and moralist. Here is what he wrote to Bishop Mandell Creighton in April 1887:

“I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favorable presumption that they did not wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way against the holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you super add the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.” (Google: power corrupts)

There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.

In my opinion, this heresy is rampant in the Catholic Church. It doesn’t surprise me to read what Bishop Marie Bouclin writes further:

“Considering the damage caused by a literal and legalistic understanding of a “sacred” hierarchical and sacrificial priesthood, it is not surprising that many Catholics have come to the conclusion that the current church teaching on the priesthood needs serious reconsideration. This paradigm of priesthood

## If You Have Tears Continued...

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supports a system that allows for the abuse of clerical power and is discriminatory to all women.” (page 37)

No doubt that part of the reason for this paradigm is the belief that all access to the sacred is through the sacraments, and only ordained men can celebrate them. Why don't we hear more sermons about “The truth that God is present in every person through the Holy Spirit, and that we are in Christ (Gal. 3:28)...” (Bouclin p.51)? (emphasis mine).

How subtle is the taste of power! With shame I recall my own delusion after ordination, convinced that I had an awesome power few others in the world had: that God would come down on the altar at my command! Sister gave me a holy card with a poem “The Beautiful Hand of the Priest”. I reveled in it. At a parish meeting I made it known that the proper etiquette is for all to stand when a priest enters the room. And old and young obeyed! I was only 28 years old! How ironic, the “mantle” has stabbed the Spirit!

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(Note: Bishop Bouclin will be travelling West this summer, stopping in Regina, Calgary, and Victoria).



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## Spring Life Ring by Connie Kurtenbach, Victoria, BC

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**M**ichael Walsh then: “I remember it well. It was the day of 9/11. Terrorists crashed, burned and destroyed so much that day. I, on the other hand, had just completed 30 days of sobriety and was ready for my ‘reward’, which I later allowed and crashed down again into substance abuse and addiction.”

Michael Walsh, now 45, has arrived at another spring season, sober and very much alive. It is February, 2012 and he is the executive director of

LifeRing Canada. What is that? “LifeRing Secular Recovery Society Canada is an inclusive Canada-wide, non 12 step abstinence-based organization focused on saving lives by following the secular principles of personal responsibility and self-determination.”

Michael was only ten when he first tried alcohol. Family pain and

abuse were more than this quiet boy could bear, so he took himself to a place where the pain and shame were somewhat dulled by the use of alcohol and marijuana. In his teen years, he added the experience of cocaine. The ‘party’ was on. As the years went on, he worked, he drank, he drugged, held jobs, lost jobs, felt out of place and completely lost. Serious addiction to cocaine led him into crime and he spiraled down into the winter of his isolation.

But there came another springtime in his life: his sister Debbie reached out. So with a toonie and change in his pocket, he left Vancouver for the Island and a new chance at sobriety.

Hospitalization, detox programs and, slowly, more times were spent in sobriety and working his plan. The addictions seemed relentless: now sober, now using, now relapse and, always, that secret plan of ending it all. The final years of this phase gave way to a real life-filled program, that set Michael on his present path of healing and being a healer. He might prefer more secular terms. By secular, he means separate from ‘religion’. He seeks a team of professionals and the experience of members of LifeRing to shape an individual program for the whole person, based on the bio, psycho-social and cultural model for human growth. He is wary of ‘code’ words that can easily strip a person of their own empowerment.

He has found meaning and purpose to his life: his growing passion for building LifeRing in all its aspects. Just take a look at the website: [www.liferingcanada.org](http://www.liferingcanada.org). It is a fine program.

Michael Walsh generously gave of his time to let me hear the story and practice of Life Ring. It has surely changed his life. What a thoughtful, devoted person! I hope you will take the time to look at the web site and pass along the word.

# RCWP-Canada: Where Have We Been? Where Are We Now?

by Dr. Michele Birch-Conery, Nanaimo, BC

Janice Sevre Duzinska & Michele



## The Power of Call

If we, in RCWP-Canada think back to our preparation for ordination, a lifetime's preparation without our realizing it. Because of our age, it is known retrospectively by most of us. We likely remember some luminous moments of the in-filling of the Spirit especially on the day of ordination and lasting for a long time thereafter. Then came the time of action immediately, whether we were

engaged in the formulation of our Vision, Mission and Principles for the Model of Priesthood or we joined in various circles from which our concrete work in growing our RCWP movement took root. We worked the phones and the web; we engaged in lengthy and arduous conference calls and our first leadership teams together with our entire community negotiated our first major crises.

None of us have come to the RCWP movement tabula rasa, or with a blank slate. Work has gone on that preceded the Danube Seven and from there, they bravely started. They began no matter what the cost and with a great deal of welcoming gentleness, joy and enthusiastic determination. They had a vision already but they had no idea what it would become nor do we. It didn't and doesn't belong to just us. Those founding women knew that their steps forward belonged entirely in the domain of the Holy Spirit. They just had to do their part in a great surrender of themselves and their life's safety.

I start my considerations here, because it is well to recall the momentous decision to respond to a call that has import for women and for changing men, at this time in history. It is not only for Roman Catholic Women Priests, but it has the ripple effect of making waves all through Christendom and even into other faith traditions wherever women are suppressed and hindered from leadership in patriarchal institutional constructs. What care is asked of us in responsibility and accountability to a work that is not for us alone.

Yes, action came immediately, and so it continues in our engagements with the People of God, in our ministries and faith communities, and blessed are we who have the privilege of a life from which we can still give. Nevertheless, we struggle with many constraints in our public and private lives and with death and its coming as witnessed so prophetically for us in the ordinations of Mary Styne and Janine Denome, two of our USA sister priests who died quite soon after their ordinations.

Our Canadian Vision Keepers' story starts here because we have been engaged in call, in preparing and ordaining women and men since 2004.

It is well for us to remember the graces and empowerment coming to us from each of these ordinations then and up until this moment. It is well to remember and recognize who we are, how we got here, and how we are deepening in our personal and communal calls. This is stated clearly by one of our women, Rose Mewhort, ordained in April, 2010, a woman who brings to life that original luminous experience in her call to ordination. She writes: the following:

Discernment of my daily life is no longer simply prayer to the God of Providence to provide food for the journey. Nor is it simply to ask Jesus in the Holy Spirit to go before me into my day. And at the end of each day as I recognize my limitations, it is not just to pray for the graces of transformation. There is now a new dimension. In the many faith communities in which I participate, I have understood the importance of using my gifts for the creation of loving community with God's people. Now I say "Yes" again to the call that comes to all of us from deep within and yet appears to be beyond us.

**It is a call to listen attentively** to gentle knowing, intimations of truth residing in the persons and graces of the moment. These are the voices of God, the visions of a new church that speaks of responsibility.

**It is a call to hold God's people in my heart.**

It is a call to carry the wounded in ourselves to the gentle offering of love that is prayer

**It is a call to remember the tangible needs** of each person I encounter and wait for the unfolding of love in ways I may not even imagine.

**It is a call to allow rejection and distancing** with respect for the transparent being that is unfolding in the other.

**It is a call to join in loving communion** in the many ways we share Eucharist.

**It is a call to know always** that it is the Holy One who leads us on and takes us forward and who speaks to me through 'you'.

## The Challenges of Enactment

The consensus of our Canadian priests is that presently we are growing organically. When I was the only ordained woman in RCWP-Canada, I used to imagine myself sitting on the rim of an ice floe at the North Pole, or else on the farthest of our Western Islands on the way to the Aleutian Islands, or in a boat off the coast of Newfoundland and I would visualize rounds and rounds of fiery Spirit-essence encircling our whole country while breathing a call to ordination for the Roman Catholic women. Then about the same time as Monica Kilburn Smith and Jim Lauder expressed their desires to come on the path to ordination in the West, Marie Bouclin came in the East. I would then visualize Marie breathing the fire of the Spirit at least around half of the country and from the farthest reaches of the Eastern north to the south, off the coast of Newfoundland and back to the Eastern borders of Manitoba. One priest at a time, one candidate at a time, as Marie was soon the team assistant in the Program of Preparation.

One at a time in organic growth, "Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni Sancte Spiritus" and then the completion of ordinations to the

## RCWP-Canada Continued...

deaconate and the priesthood until in the Fall of 2010, with the ordination of Linda Spear in Quebec; 7 priests! what an auspicious number given the formidable challenges not the least of which is the isolation of geography and the slow spreading of the word about RCWP through enough interested media sources and the supporting people.

Marie describes the slow and arduous growth of RCWP Canada-East and the necessities of mentoring in the program of Preparation through the lens of our mission statement (2007) and our model of priesthood (2009).

Our mission statement calls us to “spiritually prepare, ordain and support” women and some men who are qualified and called to priestly ministry. A significant part of my work, as the only priest in our region, has been to journey with our women in their vocational discernment process. This has not always resulted in women seeking ordination within our RCWP community. However, if we keep in mind that our primary mission is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, the primary mission of the Universal Church, then we are justified in concluding that, as a community, we are meeting a need within the People of God. That need is to find and call workers to God’s vineyard and then let God’s Spirit direct those workers to where they are most needed.

Our statement calls us to inclusivity which embraces other church traditions, and especially the ordained women within those churches. I am led to believe that this too is going to be one of the major contributions of RCWP to the renewing and rebuilding of the universal Church according to Gospel principles rather than outdated canonical rules and traditions. The fact that clergy members of the United Church of Canada, for instance, support us personally in our ministries and open their churches to us to hold services for both ordinations and Eucharistic celebrations brings forward hope for our movement. The canonical *latae sententiae* excommunication of ordained Catholic women is often simply disregarded by other denominations. What unexpected gifts they bring us from their heart-felt understanding of ecumenism!

While we slowly build renewed, more inclusive RC small faith communities, there is no doubt that, besides embracing other denominations, disengaged, divorced, and GLBT Catholics may find welcome in their first spiritual home. Two important services we offer is the Sacrament of Marriage and the Anointing of the Sick and Dying to people who have given up on the current institutional Church.

Now we now have the growth of faith communities in the West; St. Brigid’s in Calgary is the largest with priest Monica Kilburn Smith; the Living Word Inclusive Community in Duncan with priest Kim Sylvester; St. Iris community in Victoria with priest Jim Lauder; the continuation of the Community of Sts. Clare and Francis on Mayne Island and on Galiano Island with priest Rose Mewhort; and Church in the Round in Parksville with Michele Birch-Conery. Whereas there were two communities up until May of 2010, we now have 4 on Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands and 5 including the community in Calgary.

Similar growth has happened in the East. Marie Bouclin, supported by her already developed faith community in Sudbury, travelled to Christ the Servant parish in Cobourg after the departure of Ed Cachia. There, in the role of copastor, she celebrated Eucharist once a month for several years. Our most recent RCWP ordained priest, Roberta Fuller

came on the path to ordination from within this vibrant faith community. At the same time, Marie, in her role as Regional Coordinator for the Program of Preparation, prepared candidates for ordination. Consequently, there are now 3 priests including Linda Spear in Sutton, Quebec. Two more diaconate ordination are scheduled for summer 2012.

Within our East-West contexts, we search for a balance between the autonomy of our leadership within the needs of our faith communities while at the same time hoping to network between our communities in building a larger wider RCWP community of recognition. Our way of going forward speaks to discovering what we need to know from listening to the People of God and meeting their needs. In this way our pastoral experiences inform our theological searches rather than the other way around. Our personal, communal, and formal study, and our reading and sharing of our experiences enhance the richness of what we learn with the People of God.

Our challenges remain formidable. In Canada we have two progressive groups who support us and who have given much to us: The Catholic Network for Women’s Equality and Corpus Canada. And, as described by Marie, we do have varying support from Anglican women priests who support us as Sacramental mentors and Spiritual Directors. United Church women ministers collaborate with us and provide space for ordinations.

Jim Lauder and Kim Sylvester have provided significant information about other obstacles. Jim notes that sociologically, in this age of boomers who are not ‘joiners’, we are presented with a real challenge; there is as well the fact that there is the general decline in Church attendance in most denominations. Further up Vancouver Island, Kim sees that we are surrounded by persons whose major commitments in spirituality and personal growth unfold outside organized Churches. She says, “Many people have had negative and/or demeaning experiences in lifeless automaton congregations.”

Jim adds “We have many negative perceptions to overcome.” But he also expresses his hope as follows: “Listening to the People of God is of foremost importance, but first finding them is also a challenge; if we walk our walk, I am



Dr. Dorothy Irvin & Bishop Ida Raming

confident that people will be attracted to our movement.”

Jim also emphasizes an important point that, once into the push and shove of the needs of people, we run the risk of being convinced by groups to follow what they envision. Thus, we lose our grounding in their attempts to hijack us with their agendas rather than carrying on with our own clear vision about what we are doing as stated in our mission, vision and principles. We have all encountered supportive openness from the people we serve in ministries and from the responses of spiritual people in general who may not necessarily belong to a denomination or faith tradition.

Lack of openness has come from the RC clergy both in private talks with our members or in out-and-out denunciation from the pulpit. The latter has effectively stopped people in their tracks. Our first community on Mayne Island dropped from 10 to 5 persons after our first Eucharist, and it stayed at 5 after that denunciation of us by the local parish priest. It has taken 5 years for people to be ready in Parksville after the denunciation of me. That resonated throughout the pastoral ministers all the way down Vancouver Island. I became known as “that woman”.

But things are changing as people become increasingly distressed with the behavior of the clergy worldwide and in particular the sexual abuse realities so deep and wide and complex. Those who have been faithfully working towards Church renewal for the past 50+ years are ready to cease being fence-sitters. Young people too are beginning to enquire about what they can do to find their way to something different and they are turning to us. I am supporting a group in Vancouver and Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan through the use of technology including conference call Eucharistic celebrations.

Monica acknowledges “There have been days when I feel like I’ve got a life sentence as a priest, wondering what I have done with my life and how I can get out of it. Then usually, something happens. I meet someone or read something and I feel hopeful again that this is something worth devoting my life to. I must say it does come and go, especially in accordance with how the community at St. Brigid’s is feeling.” Monica describes this but she also puts into perspective what it is like to have a community of 30 to 50 people all in somewhat different places in their expectations of what is possible in this renewing space of worship and community. And as with us, they bring their socialization from Roman Catholicism in the best and worst senses. Tensions arise. But as with the rest of us, she is willing to ride

it out. “The people are what matters; the proof is in the pudding; if it’s to be a go at this time. We’ll know by the way it is serving the people.”

Monica and the rest of us are keen for the growth of RCWP community and the chances to be involved despite the difficulties of money and distances. She says, “It’s important we stick together and keep the bigger picture in mind. I love our listserve and conference calls. We are all very different, in different places, just as it was in New Testament times. It would be great to know more of the priests and visit each other’s communities, but that’s not possible for me or for many of us.”

That is my dream too, that we link our communities in some ways by priests coming and going and people coming together in larger gatherings of our small communities being brought together occasionally.



Viola Heffner, Michele Birch-Conery & Jim Lauder

Finally, Kim sent me an important addendum to her considerations noting that she does not want to see RCWP become an institution to which we relate as if it were a person. This leads to de-personalization often enacted in stringent and harsh treatment and reactions. Institutions are not people and so are non-relational.

I conclude by saying that communities can and should be relational and this is what we are called to create. I hope we create a community with a beating heart in RCWP Canada and RCWP-International. I have just a quick list of words coming from the latest congress of a

congregation of sisters’ that identifies some of the characteristics needed for such communities today. The list goes like this:

- common transformative values;
- respect the dignity of all especially women and children;
- self-determination and self-realization;
- Millenium Development move from competition to collaboration;
- right relations;
- use of power/mutuality;
- awareness of the common good;
- helping people to help themselves and so on.

### **Transformational Leadership**

There is such a thing. What does it look like and sound like? Monica asks one more question which relates to the transformational potential in RCWP international: “Is there to be

## RCWP-Canada Continued...

with us a pastoral role for our bishops besides their role in ordinations? We would like to see this more clearly articulated by all of the Bishops.”

### Conclusion: Joys of Realization

In RCWP-Canada, we are in discussion about spending the next months, even years in providing a container -- for want of a better word -- for holding ourselves accountable to our model of priesthood and for committing to stand in solidarity with each other in community. We do not ask for conformity or discount our important diversities of gifts and talents in expressing our call. We have gathered some substantive materials from a retreat day spent with Bishop Patricia Fresen. We worked with Patricia in relating our model of priesthood to Karen Armstrong’s Charter for Compassion. This is one of our starting points for further research, reflection and conversation.

It is from within this RCWP development in Canada that we chosen Marie Bouclin to be our first Canadian Bishop for Canada. Marie brings particular gifts relevant to our communities in Canada right now. How should we follow and formulate our evolutions in Canada as we go forward together in what we say is “the Canadian way”? We know we mean ways within the many

pluralisms and languages that shape our country. Marie brings awareness of some of these differences particular between English and French Canada. Her fluent bilingualism and experience in translation is an asset for a bishop in Canada at this time. Deep in Marie’s heart she had hoped we would have a priest from Quebec as our first RCWP Canadian bishop but time and need foreclosed this possibility.

Marie has long involvement with the Catholic Network for Women’s Equality and their consistent leadership efforts for establishing equality for women in the Church and for the ordination of women in all our Christian denominations and faith traditions. As our representative within the RCWP-International bishop’s circle, Marie brings leadership experience from years of involvement in Women’s ordination worldwide. Marie’s theological scholarship in contemporary issues within the Church, particularly in clergy sexual violation of women and children, models compassion from a woman

priest during this time of crisis in the worldwide Church. She is acutely aware of the flaws in the clergy culture that have driven this particular violence and that continue to energize papal inaction.

Marie’s episcopal ordination took place in Germany during the 2011 Canadian Thanksgiving weekend. It was a small ordination gathering that required care for some of the women organizers and women activists from other parts of the world. Some of these women could not have publicity due to the danger of losing their jobs and livelihood within the Church. It was a quiet and deeply contemplative celebration of joy and hope. It also was a gathering that quickened us in the Spirit by bringing us once again to the women who were the source of our initiative for women’s ordination in the Roman Catholic Church.

Rose Mewhort commented that through time spent with Bishop Ida Raming, one of the Danube Seven, she now understood what

we have accepted in coming forward for ordination. I have found a deepened understanding of my priesthood since the time of the first ordination and from that of the women in 2002 and Dr. Patricia Fresen in 2003. In 2004, 6 of us, 3 from North America and 3 from Europe were ordained on the Danube. Thus, a wider reach forward continued with women in greater numbers from USA,



Patricia Fresen, Gisele Foster & Michele Birch-Conery

Canada, UK, South America, and Europe. Finally, some of us were astonished when American theologian and archaeologist, Dr. Dorothy Irvin, who continues her research to uncover the presence of women in the early church, arrived at the last minute. It felt like a gathering in the Acts of the Apostles since she was accompanied by priest Janice- Sevre Duzinska and deacon Donna Rougeaux. All three were on their way to Rome for demonstrations in support of women’s ordination and in support of our courageous supporter Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois. The presence of the Holy Spirit on this softly lighted autumn day, luminous in the reds and yellows of the foliage outside and brought within from the sun and from our attentive, hopeful hearts, could not be mistaken. All of Christian history seemed suspended and gathered together for one beautiful afternoon of gentle assent in a small chapel in Germany and afterwards in a warm gathering at our celebratory banquet of thanksgiving.

# Working To End Homelessness

by Alanna Menu, Sidney, BC



I minister to an elderly congregation of approximately 150 people who have a beautiful United Church building (originally Methodist) which seats 600 people. We're on the edge of downtown Victoria in what is now the industrial

district. Our geographic area, the Burnside-Gorge, has experienced a number of economic and demographic ups and downs.

When the first church was built in 1885, it was at the boundary of the city. As the population of Victoria increased, housing grew around it and the church building expanded in 1891 to its present size to accommodate the influx. The area had many prosperous homes. But the demographics changed as people moved away and industry moved in. This section of the town became a little shabbier.

Housing is expensive in Victoria but the present houses in the Burnside-Gorge are modest and relatively inexpensive. Many artists moved into the Burnside-Gorge area and there is a thriving community with fairs in the summer along the Gorge waterway. However, about 10 years ago another change occurred when the city decided to move the prostitutes off the downtown streets, forcing them to ply their trade on a street near our church. The drug population followed. We had more people sleeping on our grounds and our Property Committee had to pick up needles around the church. Not a good scenario for a church that is home to a Day Care for three- and four-year-olds.

When the members of our church heard two years ago that the city had decided to build an 84-bed homeless shelter a half-block from the church, they were incensed. It felt to them as though all the city's problems were being transferred from the lucrative tourist/business area to an area where the problems would be less visible – dumped, as it were, in their laps. Although there was vocal opposition to the shelter, the shelter was built and became our neighbour.

But how to live with such a neighbour? Our members are not homeless. Nor do they have family members who are homeless. People who live on the streets are like aliens, people from another planet – viewed with suspicion because of the congregation's bad experiences with the sex trade workers and the drug addicts.

However, God works in mysterious ways (and in small ways) to achieve a great purpose. One of our members decided that, if the shelter were to be a home to people on the street (they are allowed to stay for one month), these people needed to be welcomed. She mobilized approximately 50 people – members of our church and from the wider community – to knit or crochet afghans for the beds. The women (and one man) knit and crocheted 150 afghans, each with

a hand-sewn tag that said 'Made with love'. Our congregation had a special blessing service to pray for all the people who would be warmed by these afghans.

Because of our proximity to the Rock Bay Landing shelter, I was asked to represent the Downtown Churches on the Mayor's Coalition to End Homelessness. The Coalition's mandate (as indicated by its title) is to end homelessness in Victoria. Representatives on the Council come from the City government, BC Housing, the University, the Capital Regional District, United Way, and the private sector. They are all committed to moving people from homelessness to homefulness. To this end the Coalition initiates housing projects by pairing private developers with corporate and business funders and then finds partners who will carry on the long-term work of managing the projects. Rock Bay Landing was such a project.

Another project is called Streets to Homes in which home owners and landlords are willing to rent part of their housing to people coming off the streets. This project started with only a few willing landlords but has been so successful that more landlords are becoming involved. Each person housed is provided with tailored supports to help them be successful as they move to permanent housing.

The majority of the members on the Coalition do not attend church. I have no idea what their religious beliefs are. But they are people who are blessed and are a blessing to our city. They are committed to working to provide dignity and hope to vulnerable people, people who have to sleep rough, people who have lost hope.

There's a parable in Matthew (25:34) where the sheep and the goats are being separated. The king says, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat'. Matthew continues with the blessed providing a drink to the thirsty, clothes, a visit to the sick and those in prison. If Matthew lived today, he probably would have included 'For I was homeless and you provided me with a home'. I believe that the people who work for the Coalition's mandate meet Jesus in their work although they may not recognise him explicitly. They are ministers to the poor of our city but they would scoff if I named them as such.

According to polls, homelessness is not the same urgent issue to the Victoria electorate that it once was. As people are housed, the problem is less visible and with less visibility comes less electoral concern. However, the Coalition works to keep that concern before the electorate, the donors and their partners in providing housing. They are the faithful, the blessed of the Lord.

Matthew noted earlier in his Gospel (7:21), 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven'. Doing the will of God without knowing it, recognising Jesus without recognising him – these are the new ministers of the world, the ones to whom God has given the heart of compassion. Let us give thanks for the mysterious ways in which God works to achieve a great purpose.

# Jesus Of Nazareth, Power Of God

by Chris Diamond, Cobble Hill, BC

*"No Christianity without Jesus, but equally none without Christians."*

Schillebeecx *Jesus* p 58



For some time, Christus Duncan has been focused on the developing understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as it can be ascertained in the New Testament (NT). We did this not for the purpose of discovering the

historic Jesus, but so that we might know better the beginnings of our christian heritage, the origins of our common "deposit of apostolic faith".

What was God's 'good news' at the end of the age that so inspired Jesus and his Judean followers in Galilee, Judea, and abroad wherever diaspora Judeans gathered and worshipped Yahweh? What was it that lured Galilean fishermen away from their boats, tax collectors from their toll booths, and knocked Saul, the Pharisee, off his horse on his way to Damascus so that he reverted to what he said he had been called to be from his mother's womb, namely, a true Israelite?

The Social Science Commentaries on the NT by Bruce Malina, John Pilch, and Richard Rohrbaugh are very helpful in the search for answers to these questions. "To get to this first-century audience living in the capital of the Roman province of Asia, we have to travel through two thousand years of historical interpretation of Luke's work. That journey has revealed a landscape littered with a layer of intellectual debris that makes the understanding of first-century Jesus groups rather daunting. Much of this debris is due to the sloppy work of modern historians who have allowed anachronisms to reign supreme in their explanation of these documents... In Jesus' day, there was kinship religion and kinship economy -- but no religion as a freestanding, unembedded institution as we know it today." Introduction to the *Book of Acts* by Malina and Pilch

New Testament writers did not write for the sake of recording history even when they wrote about events that had happened. They did write, however, to proclaim their understanding of what Yahweh had done for Israel in Jesus of Nazareth. As Israelites, his followers were very impressed with his sense of the presence of God. The sense of God's presence in and with the Israelites was one of the most distinguishing features of Judean life: "Two who sit together and occupy themselves with the words of the Torah have the divine presence." (from the Mishnah)

Jesus as a Judean lived in the presence of God and he passed this on to his Judean followers who tried to live God's way as Jesus understood it. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." is the way Matthew's Gospel puts it. Mt 18:20 Jesus' followers waited for the imminent presence of

God in a re-established religious state based on God's rule. God was with them, Maranatha, Emmanuel! For Jesus' first, second, third, fourth... generations of followers, he was still alive with God and with them. They were in a partnership with God, with Jesus, and with one another to make known that "the present age" was at an end and that God's Kingdom was imminent.

Jesus and his followers lived in the milieu of first century AD Judaism, an internal amalgam of groups and a potpourri of religious and political ideas and external influences that had their origins throughout the Middle-East. Many Judeans lived in the hope that there would be a resurrection from the dead when the "Day of the Lord" arrived and those who lived right would be vindicated by the justice of their faithful and reliable God. They would be rescued from the evils of their day and spared the sufferings of those who had not lived right. The larger Judean society, however, did not accept Jesus' view that the coming of God's Kingdom was imminent. Jesus, nevertheless, by the rightness of his living, the conviction of his teaching, and the power of his healing raised expectations in some Israelites that the "Kingdom of God is at hand".

After the initial shock of his execution by the authorities, some of his followers regrouped believing that God had not left him among the dead but instead had raised and exalted him. For them, Jesus was the first to be raised up by God; he was as Paul says "the first born of the dead", God's anointed, messiah, christ. These followers searched their holy scriptures for what their past inspired writers had written in anticipation of God's final prophet, and they put their own stamp on the prophetic writings and on the traditions they had received. I think it was Bernard Cooke who wrote "Jesus' followers were thinkers not memorizers, disciples not reciters, people, not parrots."

In Paul, where the word 'disciple' is never used, he writes "I handed on to you first of all what I myself received: that the christ died on account of our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, and in accordance with the scriptures rose on the third day, that he was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that he appeared to more than 500 brothers at once..." 1 Cor 15:3 f "I have been crucified with the christ; it is no longer I who live, but the christ who lives in me, and that life which I now live in flesh, I live in accepting that the son of God loved me and gave himself for me." Gal 2: 20

"Bear one another's burdens..." Gal 6: 2 "Put on the lord"; "Welcome one another as christ welcomed you, for the glory of God." Rom 13:14; 15:7

"Discern" christ, or else you profane christ's body (his living self) and his blood (his life force). 1 Cor 11: 29

Our weekly scripture discussions have examined the development of the 'titles' that Jesus was known by during and after his ministry. Starting with 'prophet' and 'christ', Jesus was known for the way his life and his deeds were perceived: he was called by the respectful address of 'master' (kurie) usually thought of as 'Lord' (This latter is one of the Septuagint names for God.); then came the title 'christ'. These titles have stood the test of time to this day. They are still part of the christian liturgy in the "Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison". Jesus is also looked on as "God's unique

## Jesus Of Nazareth Continued...

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son”, a title that has also stood the test of time. “Son of man”, however, faded gradually and does not say much today; in fact, its meaning varied greatly in the NT. ‘Son of David’ was important in early christian writings, and Jesus was also called “King of the Judeans” but only in the mouths of foreigners -- the magi, Pilate, soldiers, the title on the cross in the Passion account.

Schillebeckx writes the following: “In the oldest Quelle (Q) tradition the earthly Jesus is the eschatological prophet; it is only the heavenly Jesus who is identified with the coming son of man... the eschatological community, being grounded in the heavenly Jesus, is itself the dawning of the final kingdom. As for the suffering and death of Jesus, these have no significant place in the theology or the kerygma represented by this particular type of credal affirmation. They are the lot of every prophet.

The oldest Q tradition reveals a community (a religious movement within Jewry and the synagogue) which, being full of hope and enthusiasm for the coming Parousia, went to great lengths in renouncing possessions, a community in which the poor, the hungry and the sorrowful were held to be blessed because, in view of the apocalyptic transformation that would reverse every condition and relationship, they would soon be rejoicing... later, when Greek-speaking Jewish Christians had taken charge of it (the community) essentially new elements were added... the strikingly new factor that now emerges is a dogmatic concern with every facet of the earthly Jesus... (this is) a polemic aimed at a theios aner Christology (a man sent from god theology) that demands sensational miracles for reasons of self-advantage and legitimation.

In the Q tradition this theology is most clearly exhibited in the temptation stories. In this narrative we have a Jewish, Scriptural and polemical interpretation of what the title ‘Son of God’ implies for the Q community. Here for the first time in the Q community the notion of the ‘Son of God’ is transferred to the earthly Jesus.” *Jesus* pp 411-413

Teacher, healer, paraclete, shepherd, miracle worker, emmanuel are perhaps the best known of the designations given to Jesus. They reflect the way his followers interpreted how he lived his vision of God’s Kingdom, the place where those who have nothing, the displaced, the poor, the hungry, the helpless, the rejected, and those abused by the ungodly order that prevailed in their society. Their situation would soon be reversed when God’s rule was re-established.

*Jesus and Christ* two volumes by E. Schillebeckx;

*The Marginal Jew* four volumes by J. P. Meire

The Social-Science Commentaries by B.J. Malina, J.J. Pilch, and R.L. Rohrbaugh;

These works provide extensive well-balanced information on the way that Jesus was understood and misunderstood. There are also many other sound academic commentaries that focus on exegesis of the NT texts. It is necessary to have both a good translation of the texts as well as authors who go beyond that in explaining the context of Jesus’ times.

Meier’s hundreds of pages are well worth careful reading. For example, before explaining Jesus’ miracles, he defines what he understands a miracle to be: “A miracle is

1) an unusual, startling, or extraordinary event that is perceivable by any interested and fair-minded person, v.g. a person known to be

totally blind from birth, with no hope for a cure, suddenly sees everything with perfect clarity and demonstrates to others that he can do so. (Not Grace, Jesus presence in the eucharist, or his Resurrection);

2) the event has no reasonable explanation in human abilities or in other known forces that operate in our world of time and space. (This avoids the slippery concept of “the laws of nature” or “natural law” which is defined differently at other times and places.) It is God who governs creation (by word and wisdom) and holds creation in place. Nature is not an independent reality nor is it identifiable with God. ‘Phusis’ comes into the Hebrew Scriptures only after contact with Helenism through Philo in Alexandria (Wisdom of Solomon) and Platonism;

3) the event is the result of a special act of God doing what no human can do. The special act of God is the essence of a miracle; it usually takes place in a religious context and with religious significance. As such, it is not open to the charge of fraud, trickery, delusion, or psychiatric illness.

J.P. Meier *A Marginal Jew: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* Vol 2 pp 512f

Malina et al. present contextual information on Jesus and his times.

It was expected that those who followed Jesus would be faithful to God and to Jesus. He gave himself totally to them and they put Jesus and his mission above everything else. Some of those who followed him would take a leave of absence from their families and their business concerns. This called for great self-denial on their part, but they believed it was for a short time. God would soon make things right again. Jesus’ followers were not disciples as it was understood at the time; they were followers and for a short time some of them were ‘apostled’ on a mission.

Groups get together when they believe that things are not the best that they can be and that some change can be brought about. The change that they seek may cause some authorities “to break out in a mental rash that reveals their allergies.” Jesus personally invited some men to follow him and to help him in his mission of proclaiming the imminent arrival of God’s Kingdom. “He saw Simon and his brother Andrew... he said to them ‘Come follow me.’ Mk 1:16 And so it was with others. Their action was directed to taking care of the people of Israel and to make their living conditions somewhat resemble what they would be like when God’s way was established and followed. The leaders of the people had failed in doing this. Like John the Baptist, Jesus and his group were a living prophetic criticism of the authorities. They paid the price of standing up for their convictions.

For us today, writing is “memory externalized” (McLuhan), a reason not to have to remember something,

Shortly before and after the time of Jesus, Judaism was an internal amalgam of groups and a potpourri of religious and political ideas and external influences that had their origins throughout the Middle-East. Internally, the Hasmoneans took over the Temple High Priesthood and Judean Kingdom. They reigned in Jerusalem from the defeat of the Helenists until the arrival of the Romans when the

Herodians were appointed. During the Hasmonean period the Essenes founded Qumran;

The Pharisees opposed Helenism and were patriotic and conservative. The Saducees were more liberal.

Pharisees; Essenes (the Damascus Document published in 1910); Samaritans; Sadducees; 4th philosophy; Zealots; Sicarii; Zealots & Temple priesthood disappeared with the Temple; Halakah, Hagadah, and Wisdom literature interpretations; The Psalms of Solomon.

Apocalyptists, Chiliasts (Chiloi) Millenarians, with an enthusiasm, for the extraordinary, the exuberant, and following the lure of exotic forms of religious experience that often ended in despotism or a reigm of terror. Jesus says "Dont go looking for it." Mk 13:21

Philo the Jew; Josephus; the other Gospels and christian

pseudepigraphs; The Didache; Talmudic writings;

Hemerobaptists & Masbotheans were small baptist groups; Docetists; Nazorenes or Mandaeanes went to Iraq in 3rd c. (and still survive there) -- They were gnostics;

Ebionites & Elkasites sects that may have come from the Zealots - survived the destruction of Jerusalem; Helenists; Cerinthus,"A born-again believer"; Nicolaitans; Menandrianists; Marcianists; Carpocratians; Valentinians; Basilideans; Satornilians

A 1989 Gallup survey found that 82% of today's people in the US believed that miracles are performed by the power of God; therefore, not only the poor and the least educated believed in miracles; only 6% disagreed with the position that even today God works miracles.

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## Searching For A More Inclusive Spirituality #3

*by Dave Pogue, Corpus Calgary*

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"To get to heaven, you have to keep your feet on the ground" 1.



In the first two articles, we examined the origins of Celtic spirituality and the important role it played in re-civilizing Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. Our purpose in this final article is to show how this history provides some important clues leading to a better understanding of the conflicts, religious, cultural and political, that continue to plague our world today.

I admit my bias may be obvious, but it is not my intent to prove A is better than B. We can't reconstruct the past, but

we would be fools to ignore it in our attempts to build a better future.

Let's return to Celtic Christianity, a somewhat mythical combination of pagan beliefs and practices, overlaid by Eastern and Roman elements of Christianity. Although suppressed by Rome and by Anglo-Saxon neighbors, it rises phoenix-like in the imagination of Irish people everywhere, and others searching for a more relevant spirituality. First, we will look at the amazing strengths of this strand of Christianity and infer its weaknesses when confronted with an imperialist foe.

The Land - Visitors to the sacred sites in Ireland stand in wonder at the sacredness of the land. There was no private ownership of land

until it was imposed by foreign rulers - it was everyone's inheritance. Like all of creation, the land was a gift of God, and blessed by God, so was treated with great respect. The land was not an item with a dollar value; it was integrated into and supported all of nature -the animals, plants, water, and the people. The intensity of this feeling for the land can only be understood when we realize that Ireland was almost entirely rural, without cities or centralized government, Roman highways, or the parochial divisions imposed by the Church.

The Unity of Creation - There was no false separation between the sacred and the secular. God created all, and all was good. Celtic Christianity approaches everything in personal terms: we are thoroughly grounded. "The Celt", as one author tersely puts it, "is our own aborigine". 2. Teilhard's insight that consciousness is inherent in the hydrogen atom is wholly consistent with the Celtic vision and experience of Creation. The unity of Creation is beautifully symbolized in high-standing Celtic monuments with a common center for the Cross of Christ and the orb of the universe.

The Feminine was recognized as a universal aspect of life, so there was no need for feminism or artificial divisions between male and female roles. Female leaders were known for their strength and wisdom. They held high offices in the Celtic monasteries which largely filled the role of 'the Church'. Creativity is unleashed when men can acknowledge their feminine nature, and women their own masculine inheritance.

Myth provides depth and wisdom to the Irish character, expressing in song and story what cannot be expressed in other ways. Because of their pagan history, which was not denied by Celtish Christianity, the Irish understood that the dimensions of spiritual life were much broader than what any orthodoxy could provide.

One author recalls an Indian story about the sage pointing to the moon with his finger. The idiot looks only at the finger. All the creeds, doctrines and dogmas of the Christian Church are only pointing fingers,- they can be no more. Every institution of the Church is but the sage pointing a finger. "It is depressingly true", he adds, "that the idiot still looks only at the finger!"<sup>2</sup>

## Searching Continued...

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Paradox is an important dimension of the Celtic character, which places together opposing elements, causing laughter, utter bafflement, and finally insight. A tolerance for opposites is a key dimension of creativity, discovering new truth in the combination of things we don't normally associate. Jesus used paradox in his parables to stun us into changing our minds and hearts: the last shall be the first; leave the dead to bury the dead; love your enemies; by gaining his life, a man shall lose it.

As Celtic spirituality spread its wings into mainland Europe, it was inevitable that it would come into conflict with a centralizing church backed by universal decrees, the threat of excommunication, and the armies which could be raised by the Holy Roman Empire. These were two opposing world views and interpretations of the Word of God.

One of the first to experience the Roman lash was John the Scot (an Irishman), born in 810, a theologian imbued with the Celtic spirit. For him, creativity was the essence of being human, and all creation was a theophany (that is, evidence of the divine). He downplayed original sin, which seemed out of touch with the goodness of all creation. He was excommunicated for a view of life inimical to that of the Church.

These were testy times for the Roman Catholic Church, which felt it necessary to sort out the many competing strands of Christian thought, and condemn those which did not meet its criteria. It was not a pretty scene. For decades, it fought an internal crusade against the Cathars, sometimes referred to as Albigensians, after the town of Albi in southern France. Cathars rejected the authority of the Hebrew Bible, regarding only the Gospels as Holy Writ. Pope Innocent III declared war on the Cathars in 1207, condemning them as "heretical filth", and called on the King of France to raise an army to exterminate them, for which spiritual rewards such as reduced time in purgatory would be available. "Innocent was setting a precedent for a new kind of holy war that would become an incurable disease in Europe" 3.

The war on heretics became a pretext for the lords of northern France, who lusted for the wealth and property of the unruly aristocrats of southern France. In the first battle at Beziers in 1209 a whole town of at least 7000 men and women was massacred, without the nicety of sorting the good from the bad, and the local cathedral was pulled down to punish the Catholics who had not cooperated. Simon de Montfort (1165-1218) became the biggest landowner in France as a prize for these bloody battles. At the final battle in 1244 at Montsegur in the Pyrenees, the last of these infidels, including two Cathar bishops, were marched under armed guard to an open field and burned alive.

At Pope Innocent's death in 1216, the Inquisition did not yet exist, but his long, fierce battle against religious liberty led irrevocably to its creation. The Council of Toulouse in 1229 endorsed the Inquisition as a permanent fixture of the Church. His second successor, Pope Gregory IX saw the Inquisition as "an integral part of pastoral care, and a necessary means to restore spiritual health".

To be fair, the Inquisition was more than a killing field. It was a process rooted in Roman law, including house-to-house searches, judicial reviews, instruction, and for the intransigent, torture and a cruel death, all intended to terrorize the population and eliminate heresy. "The men who invented and operated the Inquisition always

aspired to "uniformity, continuity and ubiquity". 4 In other words, there was only one way, supposedly ordained by God. Inevitably, the process was contaminated by personal ambition, political feuds, incompetence, sadism, and the abuse of women and children.

To return to Ireland, the Synod of Cashel in 1171 abolished the traditional Irish monastic episcopate and replaced it with Roman rules. Land, the precious inheritance of all, became a commodity owned by foreigners and gifted to English lackeys. The Irish Celts had no say in this, for indeed they had no political power. Celts were either urbanized or turned into tenant-farmers or slaves. Religion replaced traditional spirituality, - not just any religion, but one which left its schizoid stamp on women, replaced the wholeness and joy of creation with the Augustinian taint of pessimism and determinism, and buried Irish tolerance and laughter under the Church's iron law. No longer would Ireland be fertile ground for its storied creativity. In all, the effect of Roman colonization on the Irish people was catastrophic.

St. Columba, when asked about the apparent laxity of the Celtic Church, replied "Love has nothing to do with Order". Unfortunately, Order rarely has anything to do with love. Therein lies the strength, and the weakness of Irish spirituality - and the weakness and the strength of the Roman Church.

There is some hope to this otherwise sordid story - you can destroy a nation, but you cannot destroy ideas. If they reach deep enough and resonate with the soul, they will rise again, and history will determine their truth. In our own time, we understand in ways we could not, centuries ago. Celtic spirituality and the legacy of the Rhineland mystics speak to us in ways that transcend years of rationality, domination and neglect.

The Church of Rome has much to apologize for, but has hardly begun to contemplate the damage it has done to itself. In fact, the failure to heed the prophets of today has become a crusade against self-examination and change -almost 100 theologians and clerics have been silenced since Vatican II. Appointments to the hierarchy have snuffed out any inclinations to support another renewal. Priests must keep their hands off 'politics', meaning keep silent in the face of the worst violations of human rights, while the Church praises the activism of Catholic right-wing movements buried in the past. 'Uniformity, continuity and ubiquity' continues to be the style.

The Church appears to be tightening its grip rather than opening its arms, leaning toward fundamentalism rather than an expanding spirituality. For how many more centuries will it remain imprisoned in its own past?

1. Anthony Duncan, (an Anglican canon) p.97, "The Elements of Celtic Christianity, 1992, Element Books

2. quoted from Duncan, op cit p 98

3. quoted from Karen Armstrong, in *The Grand Inquisitor's Manual, a History of Terror in the Name of God*, by Jonathan Kirse 2008, Harper-Collins.

4. Kirse, op cit p 56

# 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 baptized 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)**  
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**Corpus USA**  
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**Corpus Canada Treasurer**

**Alanna Menu**

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