Welcome to the third edition of Red Wings for 2013!

For those With a Progressive Bent
Jim Burklo discusses the Art of Manhood, a fascinating article on some roles and expectations of men in our modern society.

And the poem: “When my mind is still and alone” based on the writings of Paul H Beattie, a Unitarian clergyman who was a leader in the humanist movement.

Burning Issues includes a feature from the Brisbane Times, Asylum seekers: the story that doesn’t get told, by Pamela Mirghani, and Mailbooks For Good: Send Used Books To Deserving Causes tells the story of a new Australian innovation which has grown quickly along with the Footpath Library to share books around the world.

Reflection this issue presents a talk by Rowan Williams, entitled: Contemplation and evangelisation. It was the first address by any Archbishop of Canterbury to the Synod of Bishops in Rome. It was given in October 2012 and will become the basis of discussion at the Evening Service at St. James this Sunday, 19th May.

Finally, Discussion Corner features an article by Adrian Pyle called Apologies for an Underdeveloped Faith? Adrian is the Director: Relationships Innovation for the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

Editoral
This issue I have decided to include a new column called Discussion Corner where I will place items for discussion by our readers. I could have called it ‘Stirrer’s Corner’ or the “The Soap Box”, because it may contain some articles that will shake and stir some people up, but that is intentional.

The first article I have chosen is one of those, written by Adrian Pyle, a great thinker and stirrer from Victoria, who has a blog called Adrian Pyle’s Localistic Thoughts and another general one called Gift: a Blog.

While we as a community are going through a process of change it is I believe good to keep the status quo in terms of worship and our groups and committees stable. At the same time it is a great opportunity to start thinking of new ideas, new innovations, and other ways of “Being Church” in the 21st century.

I have to admit I come from a family of stirrers and innovators. My father was a member of the Methodist Church in Ryde, NSW and in the 1950’s he introduced “dancing”, that “sinful” activity, in the church hall. He followed that with films for the children on Saturday nights before the local theatres starting giving him some opposition!

I hope you will receive these articles in the spirit in which they are given, to stimulate thought and discussion. My hope is that they may lead us to a richer future and more fruitful spiritual community at St James.

M. Tandukar. Ed.
The Arts of Manhood

by Jim Burklo

This past week, I’ve engaged in a couple of intense conversations about manhood in America. A lovely, thoughtful young friend of our family, age 25, was lamenting that she could not find men her age who were worth the trouble of dating. She finds herself interested only in men who are at least ten years older than she is. “They’re the only ones who ask questions and follow through on commitments!” In another chat, a former student of mine who is a military chaplain recounted to me his experiences with young male soldiers who not only are sorely lacking in coping and interpersonal skills, but have few decent male role models to help them develop those abilities. He’s only 30 years old, but he’s very much in the role of “dad” for hundreds of young “weekend warriors” in the Army Reserves.

He and I noodled together about how to help males become real men. We both promised to email each other with some basic principles about the arts of manhood. Here’s my list – and please me send your suggestions for additions!

THE ARTS OF MANHOOD

What it takes to be a real man (regardless of sexual orientation):

Real men make commitments and follow through on them. They aren’t afraid of making a promise if they are sincere about delivering on it. If they say they’re going to do something, they do it. If for some reason they aren’t able to follow through on a commitment, they tell the truth about it in a timely fashion.

Real men are outrageously righteous, and righteously outrageous. Real men put fun into hard work, and they turn their play into service to others. Real men are uproarious in goodness, outlandish in kindness. They know how to have a wild good time while making the world around them a better place.

Real men are worshipped as sexual partners because they worship their partners first! They take the time – even if it is a long time – to make everything just the way their partners need it to be. They ask their partners exactly what they want, and they ask for continual feedback as they give their partners exactly what they want, how they want it, and when they want it – no more, and no less. They are masters of the arts of love because they are perfect love-servants.

Real men hang out with real men. They have long-term bromances. They make extra effort to spend time with men they admire. They mentor each other. They share what they’ve learned with each other. They show up for each other in good and in tough times. They resist the inner urge to behave “self-reliant” when they most need the support of their brothers. They go out of their way to befriend younger men who could benefit from their experience and network of relationships.

Real men are servant-leaders. They show real humility. They aren’t afraid to let the world know about their real skills and abilities – but they also recognize that they are fallible.
They are rightly proud when they climb tall summits, but they are humble about the fact that they didn’t make those magnificent mountains. Real men lead by helping others do their jobs. They support the people who report to them. Others follow them because they show the way to serve. Real men aren’t full of themselves: they empty themselves into those who follow them.

Real men are mindful. They know themselves. They pay attention to their thoughts and feelings. They acknowledge and creatively channel their emotions. They show their joy, their sadness, their grief, without being destructive. They don’t bottle up their feelings and then explode. They are pro-active with their emotions. If they are getting angry, they take a break. They take a walk, do pull-ups, breathe deeply. They let the sharpness of the emotion subside, and only then deal calmly with whatever it was that got them angry. Real men practice mindfulness in disciplined ways such as meditation, journaling, and prayer practices.

Real men are really strong. Sure, they might be able to bench-press hundreds of pounds, but they’re even stronger than that. They have resilience. If they get beaten down, they gather their wits and their strength and stand up as straight as they can. Real men don’t whine. They express their frustrations, but they don’t hide behind them. They tell it like it is in the moment, but don’t act like that’s the last word. They keep going. If they run out of road, they make a new one.

http://progressivechristianity.org/resources/the-arts-of-manhood/

“When my mind is still and alone”

When my mind is still and alone with the beating of my heart,
I remember many things too easily forgotten:
the purity of early love;
the maturity of unselfish love that seeks nothing but another’s good;
the idealism that has persisted through all the tempest of life.

When my mind is still and alone with the beating of my heart,
I can sense my basic humanity,
and then I know all men and women are my brothers and sisters.

Nothing but my own fear and distrust can separate me from the love of friends.

When my mind is still and alone with the beating of my heart,
I know how much life has given me:
the history of the race, friends and family,
the chance to build myself.

Then wells within me the urge to live more abundantly,
with greater trust and joy
with more profound seriousness and earnest striving,
and yet more calmly at the heart of life.

….adapted from writings by Paul H Beattie.
Asylum seekers: the story that doesn't get told

April 12, 2013
Pamela Mirghani

I turned the radio off yesterday. I couldn't bear to hear any more vitriol directed at the Geraldton asylum seekers. "Why do they bring their children with them?" one woman asked. "Is it because they want us to feel sorry for them?"

This woman assumed (based on what, I have no idea) that the asylum seekers are scheming and manipulative, with no real regard or love for their children.

Most Australians have no concept of how desperate the asylum seekers’ situation is – after all it's not likely they have ever needed to think about hiring people smugglers or seeking asylum themselves.

As it happens, I have.

It was for my husband who was until last Thursday, an asylum seeker. One week ago we received a phone call that ended more than two years of anxious waiting - his protection visa had been approved and he had been granted permanent residency.

In my husband Saleh's case, he had originally come to Australia as an international student before returning home to an Arab nation. In 2010 a change in circumstances put him at risk of state and state-sponsored persecution, including imprisonment, violence or even execution if he remained there.

He made preparations to return to Australia but we weren't sure if his student visa was still valid, as his enrollment had been cancelled.

We didn't know whether he would be granted entry to Australia or even be able to leave his country.

In terms of asylum, Australia is a place of protection for those who cry out for sanctuary. Once they reach our shores, they are safe – at least for the time being.

It is the UN Refugee Convention that obliges Australia to shelter those who cross into our migration zone. The government has tried in the past to sidestep this obligation by taking asylum seekers to Manus Island and Nauru, outside the migration zone, to apply offshore.

However, offshore applications take years and only a small minority will ever receive a visa to come to Australia. Saying asylum seekers who arrive by boat should wait and apply offshore is like telling someone to sit in a burning house and "wait their turn" until a firefighter comes to save them.

The offshore process would have offered Saleh little safety; he could have been killed or jailed long before a protection visa arrived in the mail and so I began to consider other options that could bring him onshore. Fake passports, people smugglers, even a rickety boat. Anything.

Thankfully, his student visa had not yet been cancelled and he was able to leave his country and arrive by plane – one of 6316 asylum seekers who arrived by plane that year. In comparison, 5175 asylum seekers arrived by boat.

That year 13,799 humanitarian visas were granted (8971 of them offshore, 4828 of them onshore), while 168,685 people migrated through the family or skilled migration streams.

Once safely onshore, the next step for Saleh was applying for a Protection Visa, Class XA.

I don't know whether to laugh or cry when people say claiming asylum is an easy way "in". The asylum seeker application places the onus of proof on the applicant – it's up to an asylum seeker to prove they are refugees, rather than the government proving they are not.

The process is rigorous and immeasurably hard on applicants, especially those who have suffered trauma. Rape and torture victims are asked to recount to strangers in graphic detail what occurred to them. Then they are asked
they have the added burden of being locked up and treated like dangerous criminals.

In this respect, we were fortunate.

Despite the many advantages we had, the immigration interview was one of the worst experiences of my life. Saleh, myself and our migration agent were ushered into a small room with the immigration case worker, a middle-aged man with a strong British accent. My husband and our agent sat across the desk from the interviewer. I was given a chair in the corner, and told I would not be permitted to speak.

We had been told these interviews usually lasted at least two hours, but could run as long as 4 or even 6 hours, while being grilled on minute details.

After about 10 minutes I was already frantic. The interviewer's aggressive questioning felt like being on trial and we were already emotionally fraught. Saleh's English was fluent but I noticed points he had missed, details which were important in proving his case. A journalist with immigration experience I was made for this type of situation and yet I was unable to help remind him of a point, or interject when I knew he had misunderstood a question. I have never felt so dis-empowered in my life.

The interview ended abruptly and the caseworker told us he would make a decision on Saleh's case within seven days, but that we would only be informed of the decision after all the security checks had been completed. For two years we waited to be told the outcome of that decision, while security checks were pending.

We drove away from the interview in silence, tears streaming down our faces, certain the interview had gone badly and consumed with grief and despair, unable even to comfort one another. Saleh was issued a bridging visa and we moved on with life as best we could. As a non-resident his opportunities were limited, but we made do.

Because he wasn't in detention he could work, support himself and pay tax, an option boat arrivals are denied, yet they are still blamed for being "dole bludgers". The nagging feeling of insecurity never left the back of our minds, sometimes bubbling to the surface in frustration. After two years without any answers I began to really struggle with the complete lack of information as we waited. I have no idea how asylum seekers locked in detention for three or four years cope, especially when many of them have already suffered trauma.

When the call finally came, it was surreal. The moment we had prayed for and imagined for years had finally come. All I could think was: he's safe.

A few days later a boat laden with 66 people who had spent 44 days exposed to the elements, without shelter, space to lie down, and probably inadequate food and sewerage, arrived in Geraldton.

The vitriol and anger levelled at these people is astounding. Putting their lives at risk to come here on a boat does not make them lazy, dishonest, welfare cheats or criminals. It makes them desperate. I am not advocating people smuggling, but it is the smugglers and corrupt officials in the countries they depart from that must be targeted.

Border security is important, but it is organised crime and drug smugglers who pose the real risk. Illegally staying in Australia is a problem – but, under the law, asylum seekers are not illegal. The real illegals are those who overstay tourist visas and simply never leave, or people who lie and come in on the wrong visa class, such as people who come on student visas and work or run businesses. Watch Border Security. These are the real criminals.

We have no problem accepting British families who migrate here "for the weather", or foreign retirees who come to spend the rest of their days enjoying the Australian "lifestyle".

But a boatload of desperate people who just want safety, democracy, first world freedoms, education and a chance at a better life are demonised like rabid dogs.

Shame, Australia

Noisy bigots drown out silent bias

Waleed Aly

April 4, 2013

As opening lines in letters go, "I find you deeply offensive", is pretty direct. Fair enough. I suspect lots of people do. It's a natural consequence of media work. But then my anonymous correspondent decided to explain why: "You are foreign, you shall always be so. Piss off back to whatever Middle Eastern sinkhole you blew in here from."

There’s nothing surprising about this. There’s nothing even particularly rare about it. Some version of that letter arrives every few months. This one was particularly unvarnished – complete with references to my wife and "half-caste kids" and cheerful threats of the return of the White Australia Policy – but the message hardly varies: this isn’t my country and my public presence is unwelcome, either because I’m a Muslim, or because in some racially determinable way not a "real" Australian. I’ve been accused of everything from taking elocution lessons to changing the spelling of my name to appear deceptively Australian before I unleash some Trojan conspiracy. Apparently, Aly is roughly equivalent to Smith. They’re onto me.

I have almost no emotional reaction to this kind of goonish racism. It’s simply too ridiculous to engage me. In fact, I’d completely forgotten about this most recent letter until racist ranting hit the headlines this week following yet another racist diatribe on a Sydney bus that was captured and posted to YouTube. It’s at least the third such case in about four months. Hence the fresh round of debate on Australian racism that always seems to follow the same unedifying pattern. First comes the shock, as though such incidents reveal something we never knew existed. Then comes the argument over whether or not Australia is a racist country. Frankly, I don’t know what the argument means. Every country has racism. How much do you need before a country itself is racist? Is it a matter of essence or degree? Do we judge it by surveying legis-

That argument is a dead end. It’s more about a condemnatory label than the substance and nature of Australian racism. The real question is not about which adjective describes us. It’s about how best to identify and respond to the racism we inevitably harbour. Debating the meaning of the occasional racist tirade does not help answer that. It’s just not that helpful to take extreme individual behaviour as the starting point on an issue like this. Sure, it’s troubling. Sure, it’s more common than we like to admit. Sure, it’s a problem. But it’s not the problem. The racism that really matters in Australia isn’t the high-level, weapon-grade derangement that winds its way via YouTube into the news.

The truth is we can’t compete with Europe for hardcore white nationalism or the US for white supremacist movements. We can’t compete with Asia or the Middle East for the maintenance of an explicit, institutionalised and sometimes codified racial hierarchy. Our racial and religious minorities are not having their communities torched (though the occasional building has been firebombed), and our handful of far-right politicians aren’t leading political parties that attract 20 per cent of the vote.

No, our real problem is the subterranean racism that goes largely unremarked upon and that we seem unable even to detect. Like the racism revealed by an Australian National University study, which found you are significantly less likely to get a job interview if you have a non-European name. The researchers sent fake CVs in response to job advertisements, changing only the name of the applicant. It turns out that if your surname is Chinese, you have to apply for 68 per cent more jobs to get the same number of interviews as an Anglo-Australian.

If you are Middle Eastern, it’s 64 per cent. If you are indigenous, 35 per cent.

This is the polite racism of the educated middle class. It’s not as shocking as the viral racist tirades we’ve seen lately. No doubt the human resources managers behind these statistics would be genuinely appalled by such acts of brazen, overt racism. Indeed, they probably enforce racial discrimination rules in their workplace and are proud to do so. Nonetheless, theirs is surely a more devastating, enduring racism. There is no event to film, just the daily, invisible operation of a silent, pervasive prejudice. It does not get called out.

It’s just the way things are; a structure of society. That is what bothers me about all the fuss that surrounds these occasional racist diatribes. It puts the focus overwhelmingly on the most exceptional kinds of racist behaviour.

But are we capable of recognising racism when it isn’t gobsmackingly obvious? Recall, for example, the widespread failure to understand why former Telstra boss Sol Trujillo felt racially offended at being caricatured relentlessly as a sleepy, sombrero-wearing Mexican on a donkey, or described as a "Mexican bandit".
Burning Issues

Certainly, criticise his management of Telstra but can we really not see the gratuitous racial stereotyping? And Trujillo is not even Mexican. Or note the strange Australian comfort with adopting blackface. Remember when Qantas gave two Wallabies fans free tickets because they promised to dress as Radike Samo by blacking up and donning Afro wigs?

No offence meant. Qantas apologised. But that’s the thing about racism: it goes beyond intentions. The most insidious kind is just so ingrained it’s involuntary. It’s not about what Qantas intended. It’s that no one responsible for the decision even saw the existence of the problem. That sort of thing worries me much more than some crude, anonymous hate mail.

It’s easy to point at the barking racists on the bus precisely because they aren’t us. They allow us to exonerate ourselves; to declare that if we have a problem with racism, at least people like us are not responsible for it. It allows us to escape self-examination of the racism we all probably harbour to some extent or other. That self-examination is crucial. Without it we have nothing to fix, and only other people to blame.


Mailbooks For Good: Send Used Books To Deserving Causes
04/04/2013

Mailbooks For Good is a genius idea. Once you’ve finished a book, you unwrap the cover, fold it around the book, seal it, and put it in a mailbox, where it is sent directly to a deserving cause. The book costs about 10% more, to cover postage costs. It’s a creation of Australian ad agency BMF, and launched in a limited circulation through a local book chain last week through a deal with Random House Australia. The books were addressed to The Footpath Library, which “aims to make books more accessible to the homeless and disadvantaged members of our society.” They’re also making the design freely available for non-profits to adopt and use.

We sent some questions to one of Mailbooks For Good’s creators Alex Caredes, the Director of Business Development at BMF, about how it works, and what the next steps are for the project.

How many copies have you printed with this cover?

The launch stage was really about establishing proof of concept, experimenting with the price point and gauging interest in the product. For launch we made five titles available:

- Crack Hardy – Stephen Dando-Collins
- Wanting - Richard Flanagan
- And Now for Some Light Relief - Peter Fitzsimons
- The Fix – Nick Earls
- Bureau of Mysteries – H. J. Harper

We worked with Random House to select these titles with the aim of providing The Footpath Library beneficiaries with as a diverse range as possible. We are going to make as many as we can, with the original goal of producing 10,000 by the end of this financial year. Though with the level of interest we’ve had in the first week alone, demand is clearly outstripping supply which is fantastically frightening. And because we are making the use of the patented design innovation free to all non-profit organizations, charitable organizations and literacy programs, there’s no reason why Mailbooks won’t be available all over the world by the end of 2013.

Do you know how many have so far been sent to the Footpath Library?

We really aren’t sure how people are going to respond just yet as we’re only a week in. Some people might buy the books and just drop them off in the post with a “that’s my good deed for the day” approach.

Others, and probably the more likely scenario, readers will take the time to finish the book and then send it on its way, which is just fine with us. The issue we were trying to overcome wasn’t just a lack of books being delivered to The Footpath Library, it was also the condition in which they arrived. Yes books can brighten your day, but if they look horrible and are falling apart they can have the opposite effect. Though in the back of our minds, we are hoping to get well over a 50% response rate.

How did you choose the Footpath Library?

BMF believes strongly in encouraging staff to create innovative passion projects beyond just the work we do for our existing commercial clients. The Footpath Library was identified by some of our staff as an outstanding organization that we’d love to help, and so we worked on developing a range of ideas that we thought would appeal to them. Mailbooks was one of these ideas. Figuring out the logistics, the prototyping, refining the design and the concept then took about six months.

Article edited for publication. MT.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/04/mailbooks-for-good-send-books_n_3015159.html?ref=comments
Contemplation and evangelisation
Rowan Williams
ABC Religion and Ethics
11 Oct 2012

Contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. In the first address by any Archbishop of Canterbury to the Synod of Bishops in Rome, delivered yesterday, Rowan Williams explores the necessary connection between prayerful contemplation and the task of evangelisation.

I am deeply honoured by the Holy Father’s invitation to speak in this gathering: as the Psalmist says, Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum. The gathering of bishops in Synod for the good of all Christ’s people is one of those disciplines that sustain the health of Christ’s Church. And today especially we cannot forget that great gathering of fratres in unum that was the Second Vatican Council, which did so much for the health of the Church and helped the Church to recover so much of the energy needed to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ effectively in our age. For so many of my own generation, even beyond the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church, that Council was a sign of great promise, a sign that the Church was strong enough to ask itself some demanding questions about whether its culture and structures were adequate to the task of sharing the Gospel with the complex, often rebellious, always restless mind of the modern world. The Council was, in so many ways, a rediscovery of contemplative concern and passion, focused not only on the renewal of the Church’s own life but on its credibility in the world.

Texts such as Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes laid out a fresh and joyful vision of how the unchanging reality of Christ living in his Body on earth through the gift of the Holy Spirit might speak in new words to the society of our age and even to those of other faiths. It is not surprising that we are still, fifty years later, struggling with many of the same questions and with the implications of the Council; and I take it that this Synod’s concern with the new evangelization is part of that continuing exploration of the Council’s legacy.

But one of the most important aspects of the theology of the second Vaticanum was a renewal of Christian anthropology. In place of an often strained and artificial neo-scholastic account of how grace and nature were related in the constitution of human beings, the Council built on the greatest insights of a theology that had returned to earlier and richer sources – the theology of spiritual geniuses like Henri de Lubac, who reminded us of what it meant for early and mediaeval Christianity to speak of humanity as made in God’s image and of grace as perfecting and transfiguring that image so long overlaid by our habitual “inhumanity.”

In such a light, to proclaim the Gospel is to proclaim that it is at last possible to be properly human: the Catholic and Christian faith is a “true humanism,” to borrow a phrase from another genius of the last century, Jacques Maritain.

Yet de Lubac is clear what this does not mean. We do not replace the evangelistic task by a campaign of “humanization.” “Humanize before Christianizing?” he asks - “If the enterprise succeeds, Christianity will come too late: its place will be taken. And who thinks that Christianity has no humanizing value?” So de Lubac writes in his wonderful collection of aphorisms, Paradoxes of Faith.

It is the faith itself that shapes the work of humanizing and the humanizing enterprise will be empty without the definition of humanity given in the Second Adam. Evangelization, old or new, must be rooted in a profound confidence that we have a distinctive human destiny to show and share with the world. There are many ways of spelling this out, but in these brief remarks I want to concentrate on one aspect in particular.

To be fully human is to be recreated in the image of Christ’s humanity; and that humanity is the perfect human "translation" of the relationship of the eternal Son to the eternal Father, a relationship of loving and adoring self-giving, a pouring out of life towards the Other. Thus the humanity we are growing into in the Spirit, the humanity that we seek to share with the world as the fruit of Christ’s redeeming work, is a contemplative humanity. St Edith Stein observed that we begin to understand theology when we see God as the “First Theologian,” the first to speak out the reality of divine life, because "all speaking about God presupposes God’s own speaking."

In an analogous way, we could say that we begin to understand contemplation when we see God as the first contemplative, the eternal paradigm of that selfless attention to the Other that brings not death but life to the self. All contemplating of God presupposes God’s own absorbed and joyful knowing of himself and gazing upon himself in the trinitarian life.
To be contemplative as Christ is contemplative is to be open to all the fullness that the Father wishes to pour into our hearts. With our minds made still and ready to receive, with our self-generated fantasies about God and ourselves reduced to silence, we are at last at the point where we may begin to grow. And the face we need to show to our world is the face of a humanity in endless growth towards love, a humanity so delighted and engaged by the glory of what we look towards that we are prepared to embark on a journey without end to find our way more deeply into it, into the heart of the trinitarian life. St Paul speaks (in 2 Corinthians 3:18) of how "with our unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord," we are transfigured with a greater and greater radiance. That is the face we seek to show to our fellow-human beings. And we seek this not because we are in search of some private "religious experience" that will make us feel secure or holy. We seek it because in this self-forgetting gazing towards the light of God in Christ we learn how to look at one another and at the whole of God's creation. In the early Church, there was a clear understanding that we needed to advance from the self-understanding or self-contemplation that taught us to discipline our greedy instincts and cravings to the "natural contemplation" that perceived and venerated the wisdom of God in the order of the world and allowed us to see created reality for what it truly was in the sight of God - rather than what it was in terms of how we might use it or dominate it. And from there grace would lead us forward into true "theology," the silent gazing upon God that is the goal of all our discipleship.

In this perspective, contemplation is very far from being just one kind of thing that Christians do: it is the key to prayer, liturgy, art and ethics, the key to the essence of a renewed humanity that is capable of seeing the world and other subjects in the world with freedom - freedom from self-oriented, acquisitive habits and the distorted understanding that comes from them. To put it boldly, contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter.

In his autobiography Thomas Merton describes an experience not long after he had entered the monastery where he was to spend the rest of his life.

He had contracted flu, and was confined to the infirmary for a few days, and, he says, he felt a "secret joy" at the opportunity this gave him for prayer - and "to do everything that I want to do, without having to run all over the place answering bells." He is forced to recognise that this attitude reveals that: "All my bad habits...had sneaked into the monastery with me and had received the religious vesture along with me: spiritual gluttony, spiritual sensuality, spiritual pride."

In other words, he is trying to live the Christian life with the emotional equipment of someone still deeply wedded to the search for individual satisfaction. It is a powerful warning: we have to be very careful in our evangelisation not simply to persuade people to apply to God and the life of the spirit all the longings for drama, excitement and self-congratulation that we so often indulge in our daily lives. It was expressed even more forcefully some decades ago by the American scholar of religion, Jacob Needleman, in a controversial and challenging book called Lost Christianity: the words of the Gospel, he says, are addressed to human beings who "do not yet exist." That is to say, responding in a life-giving way to what the Gospel requires of us means a transforming of our whole self, our feelings and thoughts and imaginations. To be converted to the faith does not mean simply acquiring a new set of beliefs, but becoming a new person, a person in communion with God and others through Jesus Christ.

Contemplation is an intrinsic element in this transforming process. To learn to look to God without regard to my own instant satisfaction, to learn to scrutinise and to relativise the cravings and fantasies that arise in me - this is to allow God to be God, and thus to allow the prayer of Christ, God's own relation to God, to come alive in me. Invoking the Holy Spirit is a matter of asking the third person of the Trinity to enter my spirit and bring the clarity I need to see where I am in slavery to cravings and fantasies and to give me patience and stillness as God's light and love penetrate my inner life.

Only as this begins to happen will I be delivered from treating the gifts of God as yet another set of things I may acquire to make me happy, or to dominate other people. And as this process unfolds, I become more free - to borrow a phrase of St Augustine - to "love human beings in a human way," to love them not for what they may promise me, to love them not as if they were there to provide me with lasting safety and comfort, but as fragile fellow-creatures held in the love of God. I discover how to see other persons and things for what they are in relation to God, not to me. And it is here that true justice as well as true love has its roots.

The human face that Christians want to show to the world is a face marked by such justice and love, and...
Reflection (cont.)

thus a face formed by contemplation, by the disciplines of silence and the detaching of the self from the objects that enslave it and the unexamined instincts that can deceive it. If evangelisation is a matter of showing the world the "unveiled" human face that reflects the face of the Son turned towards the Father, it must carry with it a serious commitment to promoting and nurturing such prayer and practice.

It should not need saying that this is not at all to argue that "internal" transformation is more important than action for justice; rather, it is to insist that the clarity and energy we need for doing justice requires us to make space for the truth, for God’s reality to come through. Otherwise our search for justice or for peace becomes another exercise of human will, undermined by human self-deception. The two callings are inseparable, the calling to "prayer and righteous action," as the Protestant martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, writing from his prison cell in 1944. True prayer purifies the motive, true justice is the necessary work of sharing and liberating in others the humanity we have discovered in our contemplative encounter. Those who know little and care less about the institutions and hierarchies of the Church these days are often attracted and challenged by lives that exhibit something of this. It is the new and renewed religious communities that most effectively reach out to those who have never known belief or who have abandoned it as empty and stale. When the Christian history of our age is written especially, though not only, as regards Europe and North America - we shall see how central and vital was the witness of places like Taize or Bose, but also of more traditional communities that have become focal points for the exploration of a humanity broader and deeper than social habit encourages.

And the great spiritual networks, Sant’ Egidio, the Focolare, Communion e Liberazione - these too show the same phenomenon; they make space for a profounder human vision because in their various ways all of them offer a discipline of personal and common life that is about letting the reality of Jesus come alive in us.

And, as these examples show, the attraction and challenge we are talking about can generate commitments and enthusiasms across historic confessional lines. We have become used to talking about the imperative importance of "spiritual ecumenism" these days; but this must not be a matter of somehow opposing the spiritual and the institutional, nor replacing specific commitments with a general sense of Christian fellow-feeling. If we have a robust and rich account of what the word "spiritual" itself means, grounded in scriptural insights like those in the passages from 2 Corinthians that we noted earlier, we shall understand spiritual ecumenism as the shared search to nourish and sustain disciplines of contemplation in the hope of unveiling the face of the new humanity. And the more we keep apart from each other as Christians of different confessions, the less convincing that face will seem.

I mentioned the Focolare movement a moment ago: you will recall that the basic imperative in the spirituality of Chiara Lubich was "to make yourself one" - one with the crucified and abandoned Christ, one through him with the Father, one with all those called to this unity and so one with the deepest needs of the world. 'Those who live unity ... live by allowing themselves to penetrate always more into God. They grow always closer to God ... and the closer they get to him, the closer they get to the hearts of their brothers and sisters."

The contemplative habit strips away an unthinking superiority towards other baptised believers and the assumption that I have nothing to learn from them. Insofar as the habit of contemplation helps us approach all experience as gift, we shall always be asking what it is that the brother or sister has to share with us - even the brother or sister who is in one way or another separated from us or from what we suppose to be the fullness of communion. Quam bonum et quam iucundum ...

In practice, this might suggest that wherever initiatives are being taken to reach out in new ways to a lapsed Christian or post-Christian public, there should be serious work done on how such outreach can be grounded in some ecumenically shared contemplative practice. In addition to the striking way in which Taize has developed an international liturgical "culture" accessible to a great variety of people, a network like the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), with its strong Benedictine roots and affiliations, has opened up fresh possibilities here.

What is more, this community has worked hard at making contemplative practice accessible to children and young people, and this needs the strongest possible encouragement. Having seen at first hand - in Anglican schools in Britain - how warmly young children can respond to the invitation offered by meditation in this tradition, I believe its potential for introducing young people to the depths of our faith to be very great indeed. And for those who have drifted away from the regular practice of sacramental faith, the rhythms and practices of Taize or the WCCM are often a way back to this sacramental heart and hearth.
What people of all ages recognise in these practices is the possibility, quite simply, of living more humanly - living with less frantic acquisitiveness, living with space for stillness, living in the expectation of learning, and most of all, living with an awareness that there is a solid and durable joy to be discovered in the disciplines of self-forgetfulness that is quite different from the gratification of this or that impulse of the moment.

Unless our evangelisation can open the door to all this, it will run the risk of trying to sustain faith on the basis of an untransformed set of human habits - with the all too familiar result that the Church comes to look unhappily like so many purely human institutions, anxious, busy, competitive and controlling. In a very important sense, a true enterprise of evangelisation will always be a re-evangelisation of ourselves as Christians also, a rediscovery of why our faith is different, transfiguring - a recovery of our own new humanity.

And of course it happens most effectively when we are not planning or struggling for it. To turn to de Lubac once again, "He who will best answer the needs of his time will be someone who will not have first sought to answer them," and "The man who seeks sincerity, instead of seeking truth in self-forgetfulness, is like the man who seeks to be detached instead of laying himself open in love."

The enemy of all proclamation of the Gospel is self-consciousness, and, by definition, we cannot overcome this by being more self-conscious. We have to return to St Paul and ask, "Where are we looking?" Do we look anxiously to the problems of our day, the varieties of unfaithfulness or of threat to faith and morals, the weakness of the institution? Or are we seeking to look to Jesus, to the unveiled face of God's image in the light of which we see the image further reflected in ourselves and our neighbours?

That simply reminds us that evangelisation is always an overflow of something else - the disciple's journey to maturity in Christ, a journey not organised by the ambitious ego but the result of the prompting and drawing of the Spirit in us. In our considerations of how we are once again to make the Gospel of Christ compellingly attractive to men and women of our age, I hope we never lose sight of what makes it compelling to ourselves, to each one of us in our diverse ministries.

So I wish you joy in these discussions - not simply clarity or effectiveness in planning, but joy in the promise of the vision of Christ's face, and in the foreshadowings of that fulfilment in the joy of communion with each other here and now.

Rowan Williams is the Archbishop of Canterbury.

http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/10/11/3608616.htm

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Apologies for an Underdeveloped Faith?

I wonder what might happen if the church said sorry to its members, past and present for lack of spiritual direction? I found myself ruminating on this question after listening to the apology to the stolen generation of indigenous children in Australia.

I am certainly not suggesting that the church's lack of spiritual oversight to "the flock" is in the same league as the horror of forced family break-up. But the events of 13 February 2008 raise interesting questions about past acts which lead to future dire consequences.....and whether the simple act of saying sorry may open doors to resolution like nothing else ever will.

The specific dire consequence I am referring to here is a sense of spiritual bankruptcy that seems to exist, certainly in many mainline denominational churches in Australia. In these environments we see many wonderful people, often deeply involved in their wider communities, but in no way able to connect their stage-managed, don't-talk-about-it-after-the-service, only-on-Sunday church experience to anything that is going on in their Monday to Saturday living. It's no great surprise of course. Those who study the sociology of the Australian church tell us that most people above fifty have been taught to regard faith as private and their faith experience as something delivered in steady measure by an expert. Some have broken that mould, some are breaking out of it but still many more never will. It's a travesty and although I had no direct part in causing it I am sorry about it.

Those who did cause it, of course, were the councils of the church and the clergy who participated in a limiting, top down approach to spiritual development. Don't get me wrong. This is not a finger pointing exercise. These were the great faithful and the saints of the church who had no idea that their approach would lead us to the place of eventual spiritual poverty.

I once attended a lecture by an eminent, liberal, mainline theologian from the USA. He said something to the effect that we should not disparage old methods of faith development, no matter how flawed they may now seem. His reason was that these were the methods of the church, so somehow God must have been in them. Part of me hoped I misheard him. Part of me thought, "Now I know what liberal, mainline triumphalism looks like."

But part of me wondered whether, broadly interpreted, there was a deeper truth in his words. Maybe, in the way this world works; in the way God works in the world; in a way we may never really understand, we needed to be that sort of church so that we might realise there was another place to go. And maybe saying sorry that we were that sort of church, and we had that sort of affect on people's spiritual lives, may give us permission to let go of that church, and be more at ease in finding that other place. Adrian Pyle.

http://www.gift-a-blog.net/search/label/spiritual%20poverty