

Vol. 1 No. 2 of the
SGM JOURNAL:

"Refresh"

Soul-
Tending

Summer 2001-2002 ISSUE

Spiritual Growth Ministries has published a newsletter twice yearly since our inception in 1981.

This has now grown into our **SGM Journal of Contemplative Spirituality**, *Refresh*.

Each issue works with a theme that is both relevant and stimulating of thought, prayer and discipleship.

Previously the full version of the SGM Newsletter has been available on the SGM website. With the commencement of *Refresh* we are placing a nearly full selection of key articles from each issue on the website.

The full Journal is available by mail. There is a suggested donation of \$5 per issue to help cover costs of publication and postage. Simply fill out our [online request form](#), or email our Administrator, Carole Hunt, with your name and address and you will be added to our mailing list:

Carole Hunt: sgm@clear.net.nz

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of Spiritual Growth Ministries Journal of Contemplative Spirituality:**

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COMMENT by Andrew Dunn

Here's something on tending the soul, again from the viewpoint of contemplative spirituality. That's an important point to make: we represent the rich historic depth of contemplative spirituality as well as the fresh ways of knowing and meeting God here and now. The old springs have not run dry, as Karl Rahner would say – and the new springs are equally important for our refreshment. Baxter's poems on the Holy Spirit make the same point. SGM represents both the old and the new and sees the need to draw deeply from the tried and the true as much as from the new, which is often so true but untried!

Soul tending is a very delicate matter, and in a sense it's not possible to offer a recipe for all. My hunch is that the more we explore the ways people did this in the past and do this personal nourishing and nurturing in the present, the clearer we will be that there is no single way for all.

The research of Alistair Hardy and the Religious Experience Research Unit at Oxford and of David Hay (Nottingham) together with the writings of Paul Hawker, Mike Riddell, Joyce Rupp and others suggest that the personal meetings of people with God, with transcendence, with spiritual experiences in daily life and devotion are so varied and unique that to try to systematize them or to produce a way to care for all is bound to have its limitations.

I suggest that each learner of the way, each person on their journey of discovery of the spiritual, must find suitable ways to care for and feed themselves appropriately. But of course this is not a lone or individualistic occupation – we are a people on the way, and the further we travel the more clear it becomes that there is something communal about all this, and something to share.

Soul tending also touches every part of us – not just the spiritual. John Calvin's oft-repeated opening to his *Institutes* (I.1) is significant here too: "Our wisdom ... consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes or gives birth to the other". Indeed! What does this mean for soul tending?

In this issue of *Refresh* we offer a variety of ways to tend the soul in the expectation that there will be things here to interest and extend.

We appreciate the support of those who have written and submitted material for this issue and say a very warm "Thank you!"

SOUL-TENDING by Andrew Dunn

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me bless his holy name.*

Psalm 103:1.

We don't use the word *soul* much these days, perhaps as a reaction to the dualism of much past thinking, where life and persons were divided between the physical and the spiritual, often seen respectively as bad and good. Yet it's a good term to describe our whole being of body, mind, spirit, heart and life.

That's how it is used by the Hebrew poets and song writers. For them their whole being was known as *nephesh*: this is what is translated into English as *soul*. And that's how we use it in this issue of *Refresh* on soul tending. How do we tend this whole complex, delicate person that is body and spirit, mind and heart, packaged so beautifully and made in the image of God?

Soul damage

There are bucket loads of soul damage around these days. From the pressures of overwork to the speed of daily life and too few slow times for attending to oneself, to the theft of idle moments by the electronic devices we are all plugged into today – yes, even to the increasing demands on our discretionary time as well as our discretionary dollars. Damage is widespread and increasing.

It also occurs through the mistaken idea that increased work, travel, noise, sport and anything and everything else that snatches at our spaces is good for us. They must be: the adverts keep telling us so!!

However, we are delicate mechanisms, tender plants who are not designed to be programmed and controlled in these ways. We need careful tending and wise nurturing if we are to be creative *human beings* rather than frustrated *human doings!*

Finding soul

Many people today are finding they are souls when they have an experience from beyond themselves, what Paul Hawker describes as *secret affairs* of the soul – experiences of a spiritual nature, transcendent moments of being met or addressed, known and loved. British research is now suggesting that up to 70% of people in Britain, Europe and Australia have these experiences. My hunch is that in Pacific nations where the spiritual is part of the fabric of life this figure is much higher. Most of these experiences do not occur in a religious or church arena and are not generated by religious activity. What an exciting notion - that God's loving and grace happen anyway, unexpectedly, uninvited, unearned and often unsought! Sounds very like St John's discovery that "God first loved us" (1 John 4).

We are soul – spiritual as well as everything else – who can sense, feel, hear or see these often unexpected meetings.

Tending soul

How then do we foster this delicate stuff? We can't make it happen just as we can't make a prayer come to pass or a devotional time bear fruit. Yet we can encourage the delicate growth of soul times and spiritual deepening.

Paying attention is a good start, or, as Anthony de Mello describes it, being aware of the love that loves us, and being aware of God's presence, responding in an appropriate way. "Can you teach me how to respond?" asked one person, who was being addressed regularly when she was out jogging. So learning to respond in appropriate ways is a splendid way forward. That will vary for each of us. For me that includes writing about it in my journal, taking time to be in the presence when I am met in the bush or in the night, in worship or whenever. How is it for you? Each of us can develop our own appropriate responses.

Growing soul

Another way of tending our growth in soul awareness is to develop a mindset that sees God in everything: "Am I not everywhere in heaven and earth?" asked the Lord (Jeremiah 23:24). We could say that in terms of soul E = Everywhere², when describing God's presence. There is nowhere that God is not! As Ronald Ferguson says of Celtic views of God, "The material is shot through with the spiritual; there is a *within-ness* of God in all life. The whole earth is sacramental: everything is truly every blessed thing ..." (**Chasing the Wild Goose**. 1989). "God to enfold me, God to surround me, ... God in my life, ... God in my ever-living soul, God in mine eternity" (Carmina Gadelica 3/53).

And another is to embrace the notion that in this soul growth stuff we are on a journey from early beginnings to later and deeper insights and understandings. That helps a lot. There's a movement on in our spiritual life as much as in ageing or working, so that living is full of expectancy and hope.

Here are five movements by which this growth and expansion of soul can be understood and embraced:

Adolescence to Adulthood

Like children learning to stand and walk and run, we pass through the teenage years of first discoveries and captivating insights. But we don't stop there – we move on through transition times to more settled adulthood and life's long journey in the same direction (Peterson).

Simplicity to Complexity

Initially everything can seem so clear-cut and simple, yet as the journey with God moves on we are faced by more complex situations, less clear choices and often perplexing glimpses into mystery. For many of us mystery becomes more how it is and will be to the end.

Enthusiasm to Maturity

The wonder of our early discoveries and the energy and passion they create grows on into more reflective and mature understandings, that stand the tests of life and the deep commitments for the way ahead.

Action to Solitude

The urge to action and fruitful activity stimulates and satisfies and finally tires, frustrates and invites us into spacious solitude and inner silence. There grace meets and loves us for who we are rather than what we do or can produce – there all my being praises and is thankful. And isn't it out of solitude that the nourishment of soul comes that fires and sustains the action and mission of life and faith?

Intervention to Incarnation

Then there's a movement from intervention to incarnation. God becomes less of the one who intervenes in life to change the pain or circumstances and more of the one who joins us there to companion us and walk with us through it all, meeting us in every dark valley as much as on the sunny slopes of Mt Victoria. Yes and we hear enticing invitations to be like that for others.

So

Soul tending is the art of attending to the delicate and strong, tender and urgent, insistent and pervasive stuff of life that won't be held down or ignored. It seeks attention; it needs, even demands, our co-operation and participation in the growth and the journey that is unfolding for each of us. And it brings a quiet confidence that, as Julian of Norwich said, "All, all is well".

My soul is safe in your keeping;
 My soul reaches out to you
 And knows your generosity towards me.
 My soul rests in your peace
 And delights in knowing you.
 My soul is full of light, love and joy because of you.
 You are God in whom I trust.
 And so I enjoy a long life, God of my salvation.

(Reflection on Psalm 91 – Jean Cotter. 2.10.01)

SILENCE by *Paul Hawker*

A few years ago I attended a retreat at St. Joseph's Convent Kincumber, New South Wales. The convent is sited among lush green paddocks that gently dip down towards a tidal inlet. The bird life is prolific and goats quietly graze the meadows. The occasional small dinghy putt putts slowly past and the occupant more often than not lifts an arm to wave an acknowledgement. It is a beautiful and tranquil setting, very peaceful.

Being a silent retreat, from Friday evening through to Sunday midday, the twenty of us didn't speak to each other. Although we met every few hours for group worship and to eat meals, conversation was absent.

Here are some thoughts on such shared silence:

- Silence like sorrow is a great leveller. The learned cannot impart their wisdom so the less learned don't feel so dumb.
- In silence with others I don't have to "keep up" with outer conversations, so I can pay attention to inner ones.
- In silence I don't have to discuss, defend and debate, instead I can better hear the inner voice of love.
- Silence means those who are verbal and dominate conversations are now as equal as the shy.
- Silence peels off the masks I wear, leaves me more open and vulnerable, less judgemental, more accepting.
- Silence teaches me to wait – to pray rather than talk, to turn to the Father first rather than last.
- Silence shows that not all things can be solved or salvaged by others' words, for as reassuring and kind as they might be, they are no substitute for the Father's .

- Silence makes me look and listen, see and smell – to pay attention to what is going on around me, rather than thinking of what next to say, where next to be, what next to do.
- Silence imparts reverence and peacefulness. It is infectious – our tranquility reaches out and comforts in ways that words cannot.
- Silence lets my child heart rise up within me, the part of me that is closest to the father, the place where my longings cease and I find myself at peace.

At first silence catapults me into a cacophony of thoughts. A fireworks display of conversation rehearsals, sentence try outs and unformed distractive thinking. I pray for such thoughts to die, for if I fight them they will control me.

I pray for my heart to do the thinking, not my head. Like holding on to a handrail of a roller coaster, I hang in there through the hours and days of jostling, tumbling, jumbling thoughts. Eventually the thoughts exhaust themselves and as they die they provide nutriment for the roses of my heart to grow in.

Finally, they blossom and I smell their fragrance, revel in their perfume. I pay attention to the here and now, see and hear wonderful creation.

I feel the earth vibrate with life. I sense the infinite generosity that gifted supernovas and galaxies to spawn all this. I realise too that each time I am generous with my gifts I am partaking in the blessed mystery of this outrageous fragrant love that is the source of all.

Silence

No wonder Jesus so often took himself off to be alone. To listen and to be with his Father, for He is so very fond of us and loves our company so.

Truly this is heaven on earth.

FINDING SOUL by *Rosemary Russell*

I think I mislaid it
somewhere between the clothes line
and the kitchen sink
Careless of me, for I know its value.
At first, I didn't realise
that it was missing.
Crisis-laden phone calls
and sleepless nights
and the heaviness –
needing it but no energy
to go looking for it.

Then one August morning
at the clothes line,
I glanced upwards
beyond the pegged rows
and I saw a cloud
rising to the horizon,
following the line of old plum trees
that climbed up my steep garden-
blossom-laden, white
against a strangely blue sky.

And I went back to the house
lightly and full of soul.

USING THE SCRIPTURES TO NOURISH MY SOUL by *Barbara Sampson*

I remember as a child being given my first Bible. It was small and squat with a black cover and tiny printing in the King James Version. My ordered mind told me that there was only one way to read it and that was from the beginning chapter by chapter, through the laws of Leviticus to the begats of Matthew and beyond, right to the end. I tried to read three chapters a day – that sounded like a holy number. If I missed a day, I'd skim though a double portion the next day. If I missed several days, I'd feel a kind of despair about this Bible-reading thing. Somehow I knew that it needed to be regular, like medicine, in order to do my soul good. The prospect of missing the daily doses was fearsome. Who knows what thunderbolts might fall on a neglectful little girl?

Along the way I found some friends. Promises in the heart of Isaiah ("I will never leave you"), and the words of Jesus in the storm-tossed boat ("Don't be afraid, it is I"), spoke reassurance to me at a time when my Dad left me by dying much too early, and I tried to find my way in an adult world where not everything was "happy ever after".

For years, these and other promises kept me going. They were road-markers on my journey that kept me on the straight and narrow. But daily Bible reading was more like checking up on familiar friends, rather than exploring new territory. For seven years of public ministry I dug deeper to prepare sermons, food for other people, but my own personal Bible reading was a very thin diet, surface and unsatisfying. And that's how it seemed to be for ages.

Then I discovered St. Ignatius and his imaginative approach to Bible reading. "Put yourself in the picture" he says. "Imagine you are the person Jesus is talking to. What does he say to you? How do you respond? Let this be your prayer." Suddenly a world of colour and shape, taste and sound, fragrance and texture opened up to me.

I'm Zacchaeus, invited down from my leafy hiding place to take Jesus home for lunch. Lord, help me to have an open Zacchaeus heart that welcomes you into the privacy of my heart's home.

I watch the woman who washed Jesus' feet in such a brazen display of love and I envy her spontaneity and unselfconsciousness. Lord help me to love you like that.

I'm Peter's mother-in-law, steamed up with annoyance about my impetuous son-in-law, then calmed down when his friend Jesus lays a cooling hand on my forehead and the world stops spinning. Lord you know the things that steam me up. Please lay your hand on them, and on me as I look for solutions.

I'm Thomas after the death of my dearest friend; my face turned to the wall. I'll believe what the others are banging on the door to tell me, when I see it for myself. God, you know the things I find hard to face. Help me to walk towards them rather than turning away.

I'm next in line after Peter for foot-washing. In anticipating Jesus' gentle hands and the cold water on my grimy feet, I feel a whole range of emotions.

I'm a guest, led every day to a table prepared for me. Who are the enemies that sit back in the shadows? How can I welcome them to the table? What is spread out before me? Who leads the conversation – Jesus or me? What do we talk about?

This is one way the Bible nourishes me now. It touches my every sense, my whole being in fact. It asks the questions I cannot avoid. It exposes me in a way I cannot escape. It takes me deeper, to a meeting place with God. In contemplation I gaze at him. In this way of using the Scriptures to pray, he gazes at me, gently, probingly, and asks me the same question he asked Bartimaeus, "Barbara, what is it you want me to do for you?"

COME ASIDE AND REST AWHILE A GUIDED SCRIPTURE MEDITATION FOR A GROUP based on Mark 6:30-44

by Clare O'Connor

Ignatius of Loyola encouraged the use of the imagination when praying with the Scriptures. The imagination allows us to enter into the Gospel story, which then comes to life in the present time. Using our imagination in prayer can lead us to a deeper relationship with Jesus today.

As you lead this meditation take your time, go slowly and pause often.

Begin with a relaxation exercise e.g. tightening muscles and relaxing them, or focussing on breathing.

Take some time to invite God's presence:

May we be open to the spirit of God as we listen to the Word, and so come to know Jesus more deeply.

As you listen to the story, imagine the sounds, smells, what you can see and feel and taste.

Read aloud Mk 6:31-44.

"Then Jesus said to the apostles, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves.' etc.

Now picture the scene and imagine yourself as part of it – whether it's in the time of Jesus or in a present day setting. You're with some friends of Jesus, see the surroundings and hear the sounds around you.

Hear Jesus saying to you, "Come away to a lonely place and rest for a while." What response do you notice within you as you hear that invitation? ...eager, tired, reluctant?

You find yourself getting into the boat with Jesus and his friends. Is there a part of you that longs to rest for a while?

As the boat comes to land the crowds are there again and Jesus begins to teach them. What happens in you as He focuses on the crowd? Do you listen, do you grumble? Tune in to your response...

Enter into the discussion about sending the people away to get food.

Hear Jesus ask you, How many loaves have you? Five and two fish. Jesus takes the loaves and the fish, blesses and breaks them and asks you and your friends to give them to the people. How do you respond? Who are the people you see in front of you who stretch out their hands? What do you feel as you distribute the bread? How much bread is there in your basket?

As you finish distributing the bread, tune into your own hunger, your need to be nourished. Allow Jesus to meet you in your need right now, perhaps with words, or with touch or a piece of bread. Spend time in the scene with Jesus.

For the next five (ten) minutes sit in the silence, and go back to whatever part of the story attracts you or challenges you. I'll let you know when the time is finished.

At the end gently call the group back together, perhaps giving a few minutes for people to write down what happened for them. There may be opportunity for some sharing.

Before ending the group, make sure everyone is fully present in the room by inviting them to: See the colours around you, hear the sounds in the room, feel the chair/floor support you, use all your senses so that you know you're back here in the present.

INVOCATION by *Mary Maitland*

God, Name Unnamed, Source of Life,
More than Mother, More than Father,[1]
We celebrate You and we praise You.
Shaper of stars and seas, of planets and people,
We celebrate You and we praise You.
Nurturing Presence and Faithful Love,
We celebrate You and we praise You.
God, Breath of the universe, Midwife of our first breath,
We celebrate You and we praise You.

1. Pattern of Our Days – ed. Kathy Galloway. Wild Goose Pub. 1996. P 109 and P 141.

VISIT US by *Anne Powell*

Visit us
in breathe of wind
in endurance of cliffs
in glow of Kowhai
in silence of stars
in solitude of mood
in eyes of the poor
in embrace of a mother
in pleasure of friends
in faith that does justice

From *Enough Clear Water* by Anne Powell. Steele Roberts. Wellington 2001. P84

QUIET DAYS by *Sue Pickering*

Driving behind a milk tanker on a rural Taranaki road.

Thumbing through a children's book about a greedy billionaire.

Reflecting on the purpose of waiting in my life.

Sitting in a dentist's chair ...

What do these unlikely partners have in common?

They have all provided inspiration for a Quiet Day - a time when we can come to a 'sacred stop' and let our ever patient, gently pursuing God catch up !

What is a Quiet Day?

A Quiet Day (some use the term 'Retreat Day' or 'Day of Reflection') usually consists of several hours away from the usual busyness of life so that, in the substantial periods of silence, God and the participant can engage in soul tending.

The venue may be a private home with a tranquil garden, a small country church, or a suitable location where the facilities are adequate and the environment is free from interruption and excessive noise.

Different Quiet Day conductors will have their own preferences as to how the day is shaped, but over the years I have found the structure outlined below to work well, with participants free to choose what parts of the programme they attend, according to their needs and experience.

9.30 Gather for tea/coffee and a chat.

10.00 A brief introduction to the concept of the Quiet Day and to Silence.

10.10 Opening worship followed by a short talk on the theme and time for personal reflection .
(Guideline sheets are provided)

12.00 Prayer at Mid-day

12.15 Lunch. Silence is maintained but quiet music is played.

1.00 A second short talk may be followed by a guided meditation, or a suitable activity before further time for silent reflection.

2.30 Closing worship and /or Eucharist

3.00 Homegoing. (people may choose to stay for a cuppa afterwards)

Putting a Quiet Day Together

I find it helpful to begin by considering a possible theme, something around which Scripture, short talks, reflective material or activities can be gathered. Although themes can come from virtually any stimulus which God chooses to use, for me themes usually surface after a period of contemplation (using this term to mean focused attention) when I am open to God's creativity and guidance. Frequently the theme is grounded in my own experience and is a natural extension of something that God has been doing in my life. I like to live with the theme over some weeks or even months so that there is an authenticity about the day, and an integrity to the material offered.

Once the theme has emerged, I keep alert for material which might contribute to the different parts of the Quiet Day – the process at times seems like a magnet drawing items to itself – an example will illustrate:

The theme "Teacups and Tankers" arose from an encounter with a milk tanker.

Over the years I have seen scores of milk tankers, but for some reason, on this trip I really looked at the tanker ahead of me. As I thought about the contents of that vehicle and the nourishment it contained, I reflected on the enormity of God's love. It came to me that if I tried to get a drink of milk from the tanker I'd probably be washed away in a creamy deluge! As I reflected I was reminded that I could manage the amount of milk in a teacup...and there was that moment

of grace when the connection was made - God's love for most of us needs to come to us 'teacup sized' in the context of relationship or we are likely to be overwhelmed.

As I let the theme 'percolate', two poems came to my notice and it wasn't hard to identify Scriptures that spoke of God's loving nourishment and desire for relationship. A plain pottery beaker and a gilded Victorian teacup provided visual links and some material from Joyce Rupp's 'The Cup of my life' helped with the short talks...the Quiet Day was ready to come to birth.

If you have not yet been to a Quiet Day may I encourage you to try one soon, to take a break from your routine and spend time with the God who loves you. Amazing things can happen when, in the silence, you open yourself up to the limitless grace of God.

(The SGM [Short Events Programme](#) has details of Quiet Days being held near you.)

FILLING EMPTINESS by *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

You have said "yes" to Jesus and He has taken you at your word. The Word of God became Jesus the poor one. And so this terrible emptiness you experience. God cannot fill what is full. He can only fill emptiness – deep poverty – and your "yes" is the beginning of being or becoming empty. It is not how much we really 'have' to give – but how empty we are – so that we can receive fully in our life and let Him live His life in us. In you today – He wants to relive His complete submission to His Father – allow Him to do so. It does not matter what you feel but what he feels in you. Take away your eyes from yourself and rejoice that you have nothing – that you are nothing - that you can do nothing. Give Jesus a big smile each time your nothingness frightens you. This is the poverty of Jesus. You and I must let Him live in us and through us in the world.

Letter to a friend. 7.2.74. From Vidyajyah - Journal of Theological Reflection. Vol. 64 Sept. 2000. P658.

WHAT WILL YOU DO THERE? Reflections on a Dominican Ashram by *Mary Concannon*

"And what will you do there?" they asked. It was a common question. "What will you do during the holidays?". "What will you do after work?"

We ask these and many similar questions frequently but I was hard put to find an answer for my friends. "There" was a Dominican Ashram at Kenosha on the shores of Lake Michigan in USA. I knew little about it except that it was a Dominican Community of men and women which, for varying lengths of time, accepted guests who could participate in the life of the community. It seemed an ideal place to have time out while on sabbatical.

I decided to hazard a guess by way of an answer to my questioners. "Well" I said "I expect I'll pray". I was to learn that praying is indeed part of what one does at an Ashram but I also learnt that doing as commonly understood is not of an Ashram's essence.

Doing implies some activity and in a church context it at least infers that the activity will represent one of the church's outreaches in some visible form, for instance, teaching, nursing, caring for the elderly. All these and many others are properly accepted as part of the church's ministry in the name of Christ. Nobody would deny either that work done in the name of Christ should be underpinned by prayer which fosters the doer's relationship with Christ. This was clearly explained by Christ himself in a vision to Catherine of Siena. "You must walk, in fact, on two feet, not one, and on two wings fly to heaven".

Now if doing in the sense mentioned above is not the motivating force behind an Ashram, you may well ask how it can justify its existence as a Christian establishment. What is its outreach, its second wing or foot? In answering this question it is necessary to understand something of the nature of an Ashram.

Ashrams have their origin in Asian religious traditions. To many westerners they are most often associated with India, with the unfamiliar East. Beneath the seemingly innocent question of my friends lurked a suspicion that I would be involved in some Hindu practices, albeit with a Christian veneer of a Dominican variety. In reality Christian Ashrams, both Catholic and Protestant, are now of some longevity in India, where they first appeared early in the twentieth century. Probably the best known is that founded by Dom Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine monk, who like the French monks before him, established monastic life in an Indian context.

Ashrams have many similarities to monasteries, but there are significant differences. They can be open to both men and women, irrespective of status in the church. Commitment to the community is made for varying lengths of time. Members generally offer something to the Ashram's support.

According to Bede Griffiths, an Ashram should have three basic qualities: a simplified lifestyle, intensive spiritual exercises, and an openness to all religions. Since they are open to seekers of any religion, culture or class and seek to promote and contribute to interreligious dialogue they may be considered truly ecumenical.

The Ashram at Kenosha is called Friends of God, a title taken from a fourteenth century network in the Rhineland known as Friends of God, associated with Eckhart, Tauler and Suso. It is an apt title: God, it seems, has many friends. Since it opened in December 1999 a constant stream of guests has visited from within the United States and elsewhere. Clergy, religious and lay – they have come from all walks of life and yet there has been very little advertising. Word has simply spread.

What are they seeking? There is very little of entertainment value, no television or radio. The Ashram does not offer programmes. It is not a retreat house, though many guests do make private retreats. What then is the attraction? Why do people come?

I would suggest Friends of God offers two things very lacking in modern society, namely contemplation and community. Just as the thirsty explore until they find water, modern Christians are seeking places where they can satisfy their need to be alone with God, while yet being supported by others. They find the Ashram to be such a place. It supplies silence and solitude to be alone with God along with regular liturgical and personal prayer, and all with a community of similar intent.

Like all Ashrams, Friends of God is designed for contemplation and genuine contemplation demands great intentionality. It is not a refuge for the lazy, the intensely introspective or the dropout from society. It is meant for those willing to encounter God, themselves and reality. Such an encounter usually demands hard work and courage.

Ashrams then are essentially places of being and in that I would suggest lies their greatest claim as a Christian establishment. They are a witness to the need for space and quiet in the following of Christ if one is to avoid engulfment in the excessive activity of modern life. Supplying this witness in an age sated with noise and frenetic motion could be described as the second foot, the second wing of an Ashram. In "doing" this Ashrams are countercultural. They show that while the church is in the world, it is not of this world.

Supplying the wherewithal for people to wait upon God is in itself a ministry. John Milton knew something of this when, reflecting on various works of the angelic choirs, he wrote in his famous sonnet "On His Blindness", "They also serve who only stand and wait".

It is worth noting that Milton produced his finest poetry, amongst the greatest the world has known, after his discovery of this truth.

I hope my friends ask me again what I did at the Ashram (if they have not already read this article, that is!). This time I shall be able to reply, "I sought God in the company of others".

THE GIFT OF JOY by *Ngairé Beehre*

For some years I have worked as a nurse and more recently as chaplain to the elderly in rest homes. Among the people I visit are some who are very frail and suffering from Alzheimers and other dementia related diseases. I often feel deeply challenged by these people. How can I be effective in bringing God's love to them? And I often wonder where God is for them and me as we spend time together, for I have an overwhelming desire to let them know that their lives now are valuable and precious.

A Great Mystery

There seems to be a great mystery here. I think God often sees things differently from the way we do, and I'm reminded of the words in Isaiah, *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts, says the Lord* (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Just Existing

A few weeks ago Joy died. She'd suffered from Alzheimers disease and I'd known her for the last nine years while she was in rest home care. I went to her funeral. It was beautiful and lovingly led by a minister friend who invited family and friends to express their loss, tell stories and remember and value her life. He acknowledged her last years as "just existing", not life as we know it. His words caught my attention. It was these words *just existing* that prompted this reflection. Yes, Joy's body and mind had wasted away and *just existed*, but her emotions, her feelings were unaltered and her spirit was well alive Perhaps even vibrant at times. I felt strongly that I wanted to say that the last years of her life were precious, valuable and valued.

I was glad to have an opportunity to speak, to say I'd appreciated knowing and visiting Joy - that I would miss her. I said it's strange how we often think we're going to do something for someone, we're going to give of ourselves, then we find we are the receiving ones! That's how it was for me when I visited Joy. Her sweet and gentle spirit touched mine.

A Way To Meet Her

When I got home I felt stirred up emotionally. I went for a walk in the rain along Onerahi Beach. Yes, I had been able to value Joy's later life publicly, but there was a lot more that needed to be said. I had found some way of communicating with her in that place of *not knowing*, that *place of lostness*. By just being there with her, of not saying much; touching, holding her hand, giving voice to her tears, for her emotions were still intact. Then discovering from her family that she had sung in the church choir for over 40 years, I sometimes sang a favourite song or hymn to her. Often she would respond to this, so I knew I'd found a way of connecting with her, I'd found a way of affirming God's love for her.

LISTENING INTO LIFE by Andrew Dunn

"Attention" writes Mary Rose O'Reilley, "Deep listening. People are dying in spirit for lack of it. ... if someone truly listens to me, my spirit begins to expand".[1]

Yet in this era when time for listening is strangled by pressures and pace it's difficult to get a hearing! I read of a survey in Australia a year or two ago, which found that if a child gets any time of quality daily listening they are fortunate, and for adults that may be no more than five minutes in a day, even for married couples.

So Peterson's observation that "Listening is in short supply in the world today" is closer to the truth than we might want to own. As a result we not only starve each other of the gift of being listened to but our own ability to listen is stunted. "People aren't used to being listened to".[2]

Yet listening is loving, listening is nourishing, listening is a rich offering to another. Douglas Steere's glimpse of this is a delight. "To *listen* another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another. ... One can listen someone into existence".[3] Margaret Guenther's "holy listening, presence and attentiveness"[4] catches the wonder and mystery of this offering, this gift.

It requires unhurried leisure - not as a quantity of time so much as a quality of spirit. "Only in that ambience of leisure do persons know they are listened to with absolute seriousness, treated with dignity and importance. ... I can't listen if I'm busy".[5] Indeed "Listening is a conscious reverence for another person" said Mary Maitland at a Deepening Our Work training event a couple of years ago.

Thus listening is sacred work, even sacramental, a means of grace we withhold if we haven't the time or inclination to listen.

Listening is rich soul-tending.

1. *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*. Upper Room. IX/3 P22
2. Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*. Word, 1989. P30
3. *Weavings* IX/3 P25
4. Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening*. Cowley Publications, 1992. P1
5. Peterson, *Op. Cit.* P20-21.

NURTURING THE SOUL by Brian Hamilton

I saw a seal the other day as I walked across a bridge. Harbour waters poured in vast amounts and tremendous power through the piers of the bridge, and the seal was holding itself stationary on the surface of the current.

I stood motionless for some minutes, transfixed by the sight. At first I thought it was a dolphin, as I had never seen a seal in the Tauranga Harbour before. What was it doing, I wondered? It twisted and rolled continuously with hardly a movement of flippers to hold its position. Every now and then it lifted its whiskered face clear of the water, and then gave wriggles of seeming enjoyment.

It was **playing**, gambolling in the wash of the current rushing by. I thought of my doves, set free each morning and caged at night, and recalled the way they play, swooping across the garden in the early evening, enjoying the rush of wind over their wings as they brake suddenly to change course, chasing one another through branches.

Does God play, I wondered? The One who created the playful flipper, the fun-filled swoop, must surely be more than able to do what God's creatures do. I thought of some of the creatures of God's creation and wondered if they were created out of playfulness: the camel with its hump, the mischievous monkey, the giraffe and the pelican.

It seems that we have often created God in our own image, at worst a dour and tyrannical fun-hater, eager for our obedience and conformity to exacting moral standards. Are we missing something here? Perhaps the capacity to play is part of God's plan for us to refresh and nourish the soul?

Historically the Sabbath rest has often been debased to a series of negatives, a list of *don'ts*! But surely the Sabbath was meant for rest and *recreation*. We know we need time out regularly, to leave behind the worries and concerns of life to be refreshed. Was that a smile on the bewhiskered face of the seal, conscious of its audience? Even the animals and birds need a break from the constant work of food gathering and nest building.

This week I entered a meeting feeling dispirited and bored, tired and a bit depressed. Some honest sharing of common foibles produced some deep belly-laughter, that left me feeling refreshed and enlivened. We played with ideas. My heart was lightened, my burdens lifted, and I returned to work with a new energy and zest. Laughter and playfulness often go together.

Often something creative happens during play. The writer speaks of playing with ideas. The musician plays with variations to a tune. As with Newton and his apple, Archimedes and his bath, some of the world's great discoveries have happened during a period of rest and playfulness.

Many of us seek a playful creativity in our times of *recreation*. Bookbinding, gardening, and cooking each bring to me a new energy through the creative process. I feel closer to God, nearer to the One who is my Creator. Made in the Creator's image I can bring back a little of my own creation for examination and approval by The Creator, and to celebrate being!

SEPTEMBER 2001 by Sue Pickering 14.09.01

Sombre angels
with eyes as kind as chocolate
wait to enfold
countless stunned souls
wrenched from earthly life
while
God weeps tears
enough to depth an ocean.

Ten thousand miles away,
Love's waves wash gently
on the beach at Waikanae
while
gathered hearts
weave hope in rainbow strands.

REFLECTIONS ON THE WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE, OCTOBER 2000 by Roger Woodward

My first ever retreat was at Mt Ruapehu, during an unseasonably cold, windy southerly week. It was testing and experiential in more ways than I anticipated.

Here are some of my reflections about that week, in random order. I have left out matters concerning the pleasant scenery, wild wintry conditions, relating to others on the retreat, etc.

Attitudinal shifts

During this time I was aware of changing my attitude to God. I shifted from, or rather added to an older, rich view of where and how I encounter God to something new. In the past I had been taught to experience and meet God in the church service which included such elements as singing and teaching from the Bible. I had very little appreciation of finding God in nature and this was a new way of looking at the world around me. As the retreat went on I thought often about "Nature" being the first "book" that God wrote to humankind, and how it expressed his nature and love for us.

And God himself was still actively working in and through the natural world, upholding it and breathing through it, if only we could sense his presence.

Moving

I am also aware I have moved from the charismatic and evangelical wings of the church, but am not quite sure when this has happened. I still enjoy parts of these groups, and miss them too, but they are not enough any more to reflect the totality of my experience of life and God. I need meditation, towards the mysterious element of the Godhead, to be enveloped in and draw into. God has a being and presence beyond my free flowing prayers, thinking about Bible texts, or cognitive reasoning. Somehow God is just there, to be entered into like one would enter a cloud of mist and be absorbed into it.

Useful sounds

While up the mountain, I was reminded that nature keeps on going, daily, although no one else is there to enjoy or experience it. The story goes on, as it were, and it just remains for me to tap into it to enjoy nature. Usually I can do this by going to a park, or a picnic by a beach or ocean. One special insight came while eating lunch beside the stream running parallel to the Chateau village. I intuited that God had created parts of a total symphony of sound for us to enjoy. The babbling stream running over volcanic rocks was there to rest our souls. As are the sounds of wave on sand, the cry of the birds, winds rustling in spring-green trees, animals calling in farm paddocks. These sounds are far more restful to our souls than everyday civilized sounds like car horns, commercial radio, TV, factory machinery.

Paying attention more

I also began to pay more attention to the small things. I was impressed by the variety and delicateness of the little flowers, coloured leaves and bushes. From a distance the low scrub below the snow line looked a uniform, drab khaki colour. In contrast, close up it was made up of rich oranges, purples, greens and browns which had a lot of beauty in them. The larger picture hid the beauty of the parts. While I have long enjoyed the grand beauty of sunset over the Waitakeres, the sparkling sea in winter sunlight by the Coromandel Ranges, mountain and desert scenes, I was introduced to the small, exquisite beauty at my feet. God had created a carpet for my feet. Wasn't there an advertisement for carpets that quoted the poem "Tread softly for you walk on my dreams"? God has planted beautiful dreams under my feet if only I will bend down to see.

Awareness

One last insight was to be aware of the place of the mountains, heights, craggy rocks and "going up" in the Psalms and elsewhere. While looking at the high cliffs and sheer sides of the rock, sometimes with misty cloud swirling by them, I meditated on God. He is "high and lifted up" "a mighty fortress is our God", "The Lord is our rock", "he answered from his holy mountain". We get a fresh insight into our smallness, "like grasshoppers" in Isaiah's words, when we stop and reflect upon eternal truths while in the mountains. On one day, as I watched a swirling cloud around a rock face, I thought of the Holy Spirit and wondered how he swirled around us. Was the mist like him? How did he brood over the face of the deep, as Moses put it in creation's story?

These experiences have started me on a new path in my spiritual walk, and it will add a richness to what has gone before.

NIGHT PRAYER by *Anne Powell*

Dear God
you hold me
like water
lover
chalice
hammock
like melody

From *Enough Clear Water* by Anne Powell. Steele Roberts. Wellington 2001. P73

POHUTUKAWA CHRISTMAS by *Barbara Sampson*

In this southern place
pohutukawa stands all year
green and murmuring
wind-whipped

clinging to rocky shorelines.
 But when pohutukawa breaks
 glorious red
 against a clear blue sky
 to the roar of rolling surf
 we know Christmas has come!
 Time to light the barbeque
 slap on sunscreen
 and celebrate.

Pohutukawa Christ,
 You stand in our midst all year
 singing your ever-green song of love.
 But at Christmas you break out
 blood-red, flesh-soft
 to the sound of a baby breathing.

Gift beyond description
 we kneel to welcome you.

THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE by *John Heberton*

An understanding of the development of young people should be framed within an understanding of human development in particular. But it is more than that. Spirituality "requires that at some point in the process of our development, or our articulation, we are opened up to and by a sense of mystery and wonder concerning our own purpose and destiny in a way which is at once challenging, meaningful and formative" [1] What takes Christian spiritual development beyond simply developing a philosophy of life, is the task of bringing a young person to the point of encountering his or her identity as someone of inestimable value in the eyes of a loving God. It is also working with young people as they become converted to Jesus and his way, and helping them respond to the leading of God in a way appropriate to who they are now.

This understanding of spiritual development stands in contrast to what is often offered to young people in the name of religious education or discipleship: they are taught about the faith. Many authors, while not disputing the need for such teaching, are clear that if young people are only taught about faith, they will have no "firm foundation", no freely chosen search-then-encounter with Jesus or his Father upon which faith becomes alive, a verb, a re-ordering of lifestyle.[2]

Making faith their own

Stephen Jones suggests that young people need to work through a series of tasks to make faith their own. He describes these as "experiencing spiritual feelings; categorising and sorting out their feelings, values, experiences and memories; choosing or deciding what is true to me; claiming or deciding to what I will be true; deepening and maturing in faith; separating or setting aside faith for a time; responding by making a commitment to a life calling. He describes memorable faith experiences as crucial for young people to be able to work through these tasks. Other authors also highlight the importance of memorable faith or religious experiences.[3]

William O'Malley describes this as "sensitising the soul". God comes to each of our souls in a daily Annunciation, and asks, "conceive my son in you today?". "But most of us are too busy or not at home when God knocks". [4] Young people, like people of many other ages, need to be sensitised to the presence of God in their lives. "Why should young people not find the discovery of God in their own day to day lives stimulating and exciting?" Because they are not taught to look there, nor are they helped to reflect on their experience."[5]

In her review of the research on adolescent religious experience, Jacky Sewell notes the importance of distinguishing between the trigger, the experience and the outcome. The triggers of each of these experiences are extremely varied, but very few are associated with formal religious settings. The list includes such things as nature, worship, depression, crisis, solitude or loneliness.[6]

Describing religious experiences

In describing what is meant by a religious experience, it is important to have as broad an understanding as possible. Two descriptions are relevant to our discussion. The first is either an inner awareness of the presence of the love of God, or an awareness of the spiritual dimension to one's life. The second is the intense peak experience, an ecstatic or supernatural moment.

While popular culture would attempt to limit the definition to the peak experience in the discussion of spiritual development, the broadest understanding is the one needed most. For while all religious experiences are important to

both spiritual growth and, through that, identity development, if the focus is on the experience alone, then they can also act against growth of either spirituality or identity. Two things can help mitigate this danger.

The first is the teaching of the great Christian mystics, that the sacred is in the ordinary, that it is to be found in one's daily life. "The significance of the insignificant is a theme central to the biblical and the Christian tradition. The still small voice, the grain of mustard seed, the one lost coin, the single dead sparrow – these are the stuff of which religious experience is made." [7] This approach avoids making peak experiences the goal, and places the emphasis back to the meaning of the experience. It also allows the young person to become aware of God who is active in their daily lives, and who is interested in the whole of their lives, and not just the religious parts. The young person can then experience faith as something that affects the many contexts in which they live their lives, and not be restricted to their "religious" contexts.

The second is the role played by non-parental adults [8] in helping young people distinguish between the experience itself and its meaning. Young people need help to talk about and to critically reflect on their everyday experiences, and to face the questions raised by that experience. They need help framing those questions, and sometimes they need help to know how to find their own answers. This process of questioning needs to be both inward, helping young people to reflect within themselves, and outward, [9] helping them reflect on the society in which they live, and how that shapes both the meaning they give to these experiences and their sense of identity. While this skill of critical thinking is important to the ongoing life of faith, it is one that takes time and practice to learn. Young people need to have people to help them learn this skill and use it. "The key element is having adults available who prize faith, care deeply about young people, and have some ability to communicate with and mutually explore faith with young people in natural and frequent ways" [10] The role of these adults is to give young people the space to express their hopes, fears, doubts, confusions, joys and sorrows. Their role is not to give the answers, or make it better, but to allow the young people to discover for themselves a sense of meaning in their lives, and through that to discover their uniqueness in God's eyes. [11]

Aiding growth

Spiritual development in young people then is greatly aided both by adults helping young people name some of their everyday experiences as religious, and then helping those young people reflect on those experiences to grow in self understanding both in relation to God and to the social context in which they live. When this happens, young people are given the tools with which they can continue the life long challenge of becoming more whole, and more holy. Sharon Reed describes this as developing a spirituality that goes both inwards and outwards, that both attends to the presence of God in their lives in awe and appreciation, and acts on behalf of that presence in service. One without the other she warns, ceases to be Christian spirituality.

The adolescent's overriding concern continues to be with relationships – with self, Jesus, others and the world – that serve as the foundation for their developing spiritual identity. It is the experience of God in and through these relationships that allows young people to see themselves as graced and gifted and called to respond in their own unique way. This can only happen if we take them where they are and enter into their experience rather than try to bring them to where we are. As a church, we need to recognise the special contribution adolescents make to the collective wisdom, precisely because of their worldview at this stage of development. Shelton challenges us to harness their spirit and perspective as a means of re-energising the spiritual life of the community (not to mention ourselves, individually!). [12]

Spirituality and justice

Michael Warren [13] articulates the connection between spirituality and justice well:

"One cannot approach the question of Christian spirituality, particularly in cultures tied to an economics of consumption, without careful attention to lifestyle. The challenge of finding an appropriate spirituality is partly the challenge of finding an appropriate lifestyle".

Second, the crisis of the human spirit in our time is the crisis of knowing what things to pay attention to... Any side-stepping these twin religious challenges of attention and behaviour would betray the inner core of spirituality."

1. Paul Hamill & Anne Stewart, *Young People and Spiritual Awareness* P118
2. Reynolds Ekstrom *Youth Culture & Teen Spirituality: "Signs of the Times"*
3. Stephen Jones *op cit.* is very clear about the importance of religious experience in adolescent faith formation. He is critical of the usual emphasis of churches in teaching children and young people basic doctrine, when what they need is memorable experiences, and the tools to reflect on these experiences. It is in the experiences that questions of faith are raised. So too William O'Malley, *Teenage Spirituality - an Oxymoron?* Sharon Reed, *Directions for a Spirituality for Adolescents*, and Charles Shelton, *op cit.* are explicit that religious experience is the foundation of all Christian spiritual development.
4. William O'Malley, *ibid.* P50-52

5. Sharon Reed, *op cit.* P95
6. Matt Roberts' research into how young people constitute place, and how the important places in young people's lives often have a spiritual element to them. See *Spiritual Places: Christ and the Car Park*.
7. E. Robinson, *The Origin of Vision*, P147, cited in J. Sewell, *ibid.*, P40.
8. Thomas Groome, *On Being "With" Late Adolescents in Ministry*. This article, along with that written by Stephen Jones, *op cit.*, Maxine Green and Chandu Christian, *Accompanying Young People on Their Spiritual Quest*, and Creasy Dean and Foster *op cit.* provide an excellent introductory discussion on the extremely important role that non-parental adults play in the spiritual formation of young people.
9. Joan Chittester, *Spirituality and Contemporary Culture*, explores the link between spiritual maturity and cultural consciousness. This theme is also an important part of Michael Warren's *op cit.* explication of youth ministry.
10. Stephen Jones, *op cit.* P96
11. There has been a growing appreciation within youth ministry circles of the importance of non-parental adults within the lives of young people. Over recent years there has been an increasing emphasis placed on the role of mentors, with several books coming out to describe the role of mentors and encouraging their use within youth ministry settings, both on a formal and informal basis.
12. Sharon Reed, *op cit.*, P97
13. *ibid.* P97

GRACE by Anne Powell

A warm wind is worrying the curtains
 rattling flax
 blowing grace
 all over the place.

Grace

falling from the sky
 healing earth
 lapping on shore
 glowing in eyes
 dawning Christ.

From *Enough Clear Water* by Anne Powell. Steele Roberts. Wellington 2001 P68

TAIZE WORSHIP by Carol Grant

The Taize Community is situated in the wine growing Burgundy district of France. Not far away is the ancient monastery of Cluny. This small village is a centre for ecumenical prayer and reconciliation where thousands of young people come every year. They arrive for many different reasons, and most are searching for the answers to questions that seem too big to answer. The ecumenical community of Taize was founded by Brother Roger after the Second World War to be a place of reconciliation. The community of about eighty brothers, along with the thousands of young people who arrive, gathers together three times a day for common prayer. Because these young people come from so many places and speak so many different languages, a particular style of singing has developed and evolved over time at Taize. These Taize chants may be used in any time of prayer for others, for personal meditation, or as part of a regular service of worship. They are usually repeated, and are very easy to learn.

Arranging a Service

It is not hard to arrange a Taize Service of Prayer. Keep it simple, use lots of beautiful candles, and a cross, icon or flower arrangement as a focal point. You will need a Taize CD, or an organist or piano. It is important to keep the music meditative, and not to let it become a solo performance by a single musician. Short selected scripture readings are used without explanation for contemplative prayer. Brief prayers of adoration and intercession follow a longer time of silent prayer. Lighted candles may be held, or lit by those praying special prayers. The service may have a theme of peace, justice or perhaps one that enhances the church liturgical year. Easter, Advent and Pentecost themes can enrich these high points for worshippers. Evening Prayer works well, and these prayerful services, if held occasionally, are always deeply appreciated by those attending, especially if they can be ecumenical or a regular part of the worship of the gathered community.

No separation

Brother Roger of Taize says, "In a technological society there is a clear separation between prayer and work. When inner life and human solidarity appear to be in competition with one another, as if people had to choose between them, that opposition tears apart the very depths of the soul. Prayer is a serene force at work within human beings, stirring them up, transforming them, never allowing them to close their eyes in the face of evil, of wars, of all that threatens the weak of this world. From it we draw the energy to wage other struggles – to enable our loved ones to survive, to transform the human condition, to make the earth a fit place to live in. All who walk in the footsteps of Christ, while being in the presence of God, remain alongside other people as well. They do not separate prayer and commitment".

Resources

Useful books include **Songs and Prayers from Taize** (published by Geoffrey Chapman, Mowbray, 1995), fifty songs and an outline for a prayer service adaptable for parish worship or for a group; and **Prayer For Each Day – Taize** (GIA Publications Inc. 1998) with practical instructions and essential elements, such as prayers around the cross, the icons, the meditative chants and personal prayer. Material for the seasons of the year is also included. Taize CD's may be purchased at Christian book stores.

BOOK REVIEWS

SECRET AFFAIRS OF THE SOUL

Ordinary people's extraordinary experiences of the sacred

by *Paul Hawker*.

Northstone 2000 pp.223

Reviewed by Michael Watson

Paul Hawker attracted favourable attention with his first book, *Soul Survivor*, which described his forty days of wilderness experience and solitude in the Tararua mountains north of Wellington. Now he looks at people's experiences of moments of transcendence, which he calls *soul affairs*: "those moments in our lives when we are touched by a presence or power outside ourselves, something awesome, extraordinary and exponentially different from anything else we have ever encountered." He establishes that such moments are widely experienced – most people have had them – and yet they are hardly ever talked about. Why ?

The book draws on a wide range of personal accounts, some from Alister Hardy's Religious Experience Unit at Oxford University, others from people he has talked with, from books and in response to radio programs, and some again from his own experience. He uses David Hay's Nottingham research "as a framework for reading the anecdotal accounts." Paul writes in a simple, friendly style, laced with gentle humour and refreshingly free from jargon or pretentiousness. He writes for ordinary people, in the hope that by uncovering the nature and extent of these soul affairs, "others who have had a passionate affair of the soul - whether it be a 'celestial one-night stand' or a lifelong romance – will be made aware that they are not deranged, out of their minds or temporarily insane, but rather that they are experiencing something common to the majority of the population."

It is clear that most of the *soul affairs* come unbidden, usually when the person is alone, that they are overwhelmingly experienced as good and that they bring a changed – more loving and accepting - perspective on life. There is usually a deep sense of knowing, which it is hard to put into words, but which touches and often enhances the deep core of a person. Paul dips into some of the mystics, both within and beyond the Christian tradition and looks at Abraham Maslow's *peak experiences* and concludes that such experiences of transcendence are strikingly similar across time and cultures.

Why are they so rarely talked about ? Partly this comes from the nature of the experiences themselves and a sense of humility that often accompanies them. But there is also a strong fear of being thought mad or a religious fanatic. Sometimes churches and some of the clergy seem to want to deny, diminish or exclude the mystical dimension – perhaps because they cannot identify with it personally or feel threatened by something which is beyond logic and words and beyond the control of the institution. One respondent concludes: "I think the churches are paranoid about losing power, and hearing directly from God threatens their power because it cuts right across their rituals and dogma." Quoting a British survey which showed that nearly half of churchgoers said they had never experienced God or a presence or a power, Paul comments; "Perhaps church for many of these people is not about connecting with the divine, but rather about participating in religious procedures which make them feel spiritually safe and secure."

The problem of what words to use is a real one and there is a barrier that often intervenes between those who speak religious language and those who do not.

There is a moving account of Paul's own struggles to tell of his *soul affair* moments, and what it cost him. He goes on to suggest that reading books, a private experience, and going to movies that touch on spiritual themes without using religious language, are ways forward for some.

This is a good, straight-forward and helpful book, which both church-goers and those who are not "religious" could profit from. He achieves his aim in an accessible way and makes an important contribution to overcoming some of the divides that all too often separate ordinary folk from the Churches and from the great religious traditions.

Available from December 2001 through Nationwide Books, Christchurch, NZ.

THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION BIBLE

Growing in intimacy with God through Scripture.

Zondervan Publishing House 1999. \$79.95

Reviewed by Neil Churcher

I first heard about the Spiritual Formation Bible when John Franklin mentioned that he was doing some writing for it, setting out prayer suggestions for, strangely enough, the Gospel of John and the Book of Jeremiah.

I bought a copy because I'd given my portable Bible to the local parish in an effort to persuade them to use a decent text for the Sunday lessons. I'm glad I did both of those things.

The text of mine is NRSV, (it is also available in NIV) well printed in 8cm. columns. On the outer edge of each page are "Entry Point Notes". They are pointers towards prayer and often they open a way into the passage you've been reading.

There are over 1500 notes. Of course, some are more helpful than others; sometimes the note doesn't grab me at all, but when I come to it again, it may. The Bible's like that.

Then there are seven articles on the spiritual disciplines, and others on what it means to engage in spiritual formation. Among the writers are people like John Mogabgab, Robert Mulholland, Sheila Pritchard and Marjorie Thompson. New Zealand is well represented.

This volume is made more attractive by the inclusion of 20 pages of quotations presented in beautiful lettering on good quality paper.

I'm glad I bought this bible. I use it every day for my own prayer and make a point of letting others see it.

THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM – Spiritual Direction and Encounter with Christ

By Thomas H. Green S.J.

Published by Ave Maria Press. Price \$34.00 (128 Pages)

Reviewed by Christine Bannan

I had the pleasure of meeting Thomas Green when he visited New Zealand in 1987 and immediately enjoyed his marvellous sense of humour.

In the introduction, he explains this new book is experiential rather than theoretical. He invites the reader into his experience of 50 years as a Jesuit Priest, teacher, and the offering and receiving of spiritual direction. The first three chapters are primarily for those seeking spiritual direction with the remaining chapters having emphasis for directors.

Thomas Green takes the contemporary context of spiritual direction and discusses the difference between "Novitiate", being the building where adherence to the rules and a life of obedience was the outward sign of a good novice, and "Noviceship", which has more to do with the crucial questions of motivation, sincerity and an honest listening by the directee to the call of God.

The role of the spiritual director and what spiritual direction is, unfolds in chapter two. Encouraging the directee to reflect on their life experiences, helping to interpret the experiences, and a reminder the directee is the primary discernor. The director's role, while being subordinate to the Holy Spirit and the directee, is usually crucial.

To find a good spiritual director and what qualities to look for, are the subject of chapter three. Thomas Green writes of spiritual direction as an art and a charism, a gift from the Holy Spirit and no amount of skills training will fill in for the lack of this charism.

Danger of the "Blind Guide" is the title for chapter four. Thomas Green brings to life the teaching of St John of the Cross regarding the mature stage of contemplative prayer – "the dark night" and the danger of an inadequate director he calls a blind guide.

Chapter five – The True Friend of the Bridegroom, was for me, the piece de resistance of this latest book of Thomas Green's. He takes the person of John the Baptist as the model for good spiritual direction, because he understood his calling as being the "matchmaker" between Jesus and his first disciples. The epilogue offers a synthesis of the main points of the book. He writes of the risk and the reward of the charism of spiritual direction and closes with a reflection on his life's work as a teacher and director. Always the good teacher, each chapter ends with questions for reflection and sharing, and he leaves us with this encouragement: "I believe that good spiritual direction is perhaps the greatest single need in the church today".

MICHAEL LEUNIG: A CARTOONIST TALKS TO GOD

Book Titles : "Common Prayer" and "The Prayer Tree"

Reviewed by Murray Hewitt

Where to start? Both are genius. Michael Leunig's many books comment on society, the madness of cities, and modern life. He is one of Australia's best known cartoonists; most people would recognise his drawings. These two books are different as they look specifically at our spiritual experience. They are a collection of drawings he produced for the *Sunday Age* in Melbourne. In the preface to *A Common Prayer*, he explains why he put the books together.

"It seems to me that newspapers might carry some small spiritual message of consolation as a tiny reparation for the enormous anxiety and distress which I believe they (the newspapers) can create. An anxiety and distress which I felt was not and could not be addressed or relieved by humourists".

Leunig is a contemplative as with many artists. He brings small contemplative observations and appreciations, into drawing, by finding mystery and beauty in the ordinary and everyday. Some of the subjects looked at are simplicity, contradiction, singing, summer, winter, autumn, truth, ducks, emptiness, colds, wheelbarrows and sleep. The drawings and messages reveal his own obvious, personal experience of perplexity and wonder. Leunig has travelled the road.

The books are about \$17 each and you can find them at Borders in Auckland and Whitcoulls elsewhere. The last word is from him.

We pray for the fragile ecology of the
heart and the mind. The sense of meaning
So finely assembled and balanced and so
easily overturned. The careful, ongoing
construction of love. As painful and
exhausting as the struggle for truth and
as easily abandoned.

Hard fought and won are the shifting
sands of this sacred ground, this ecology.
Easy to desecrate and difficult to defend,
this vulnerable joy, this exposed faith,
this precious order. This sanity.
We shall be careful. With others and
with ourselves.

AMEN

THE CHURCH OF THE SAVIOUR

A RADICAL EXPERIMENT

A CHURCH THAT DARED TO STAND AGAINST THE STATUS QUO

By Peter Renner. Moonchpa Publishing 2000

Available from the author, Box 12 423 Hamilton Cost \$NZ22

Reviewed by Marg Schrader

What would it be like to belong to a Church where all the members had spiritual direction, went on a silent weekend retreat every year, belonged to a mission group that comes out of their deepest longings, had done some theological training as their preparation for membership, gave a minimum of 10% of their income, where they minister to the billionaires as well as to the poorest of the poor?

A church that does not spend money on church buildings, but worships in dining rooms of homes for the homeless, in buildings used to house and educate the poor, in a farm house, at the centre of beautiful land from which many dedicated to the care of the earth and others who run silent retreats are active in their mission? Where a faith community is considered "too big" if the membership reaches around 30?

Peter Renner, a New Zealand Pastor, describes such a church, The Church of the Saviour, in Washington D.C. I relished the book as I have spent much time with the people Peter has written about both in the States and here in New Zealand. These people have helped form my understanding of the church as the body of Christ and a radical community.

The Church of the Saviour in Washington DC began with a few people in 1947 and has continued to minister ever since. Gordon Cosby is the visionary, the prophet, the leader, who along with his wife Mary the teacher, the enthuser, the hospitable one, began it and continue to lead it on from the position of real servanthood.

The church now consists of 13 faith communities small enough to know and be there for each other.

The church is centred on a radical belief in the love of Jesus for all, so there is a basic call to the inner journey to discover more of who he is and who we are. From that is the strong call to serve the poor and to know the heart of Jesus for those on the edges of society and to be actively involved in serving them.

As a condition of membership each person must belong to a mission group that is actively serving the world. These vary from those focussed on the poor to those who serve by using their artistic talents, others who work with people in the Ministry of Money which has now expanded to serving billionaires and helping them wrestle with the gift of their wealth.

Being a mission group is often hard work. Usually meeting weekly to share their lives, members speak of where they have met God, they study scripture or a book together, support each other in their living out their call both inner and outer. There is a degree of honesty in the groups that I have visited that is striking and growth producing and a wonderful marrying of spirituality and psychology that is real and refreshing.

Peter Renner not only gives a clear and exciting picture of this church but also picks up some of the radical teaching about prayer, about church, about community, some excellent material on call, all spiced with living examples of people and their struggles, their life and their commitment.

While I recommend this book strongly to those who are serious about their life in Christ and the church as the body of the living Christ I also pose a warning. This is a dangerous book. It may shake the foundations on which you live and push you into a newer more radical commitment to Jesus and the church.

LOSING SOUL

When a local church loses its soul it begins to slip into mediocrity and is unable to give life. The average person doesn't even know when a church begins to lose its soul. It takes unusual deeper wisdom to see it, and then when we see it, it is costly beyond words to retrieve it.

Gordon Cosby

SGM NEWS

We are delighted with the response to the first edition of **Refresh** and trust that this has begun a new era in our publications.

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Sue Pickering of New Plymouth as the Co-ordinator of our Spiritual Directors' Training Programme. Sue is an Anglican priest, spiritual director and member of the SGM Trust and Workgroup. Sue has already taken over from Margaret Dunn in a smooth transition and we invite your prayers for Sue and the Programme as she takes up the load.

SGM will be 21 next year and we are planning a small celebration at our next Workgroup Meeting time with a Church Service at Albany Presbyterian Church, North Shore City (Sunday March 3rd at 10.00am) to which all friends of SGM

are invited – and with a dinner for past and present Workgroup members in the evening. Anne Hadfield is also writing up the story of the past 21 years and we hope to have her book published sometime in 2002 as a way of marking this milestone.

Barbara Sampson leaves the Workgroup and Andrew Pritchard of Raumatī and Warren Deason of Albany join the team. Thankyou Barbara for your contributions to SGM and we trust your devotional writing will bless many lives in the years ahead.

Our Spiritual Directors' Training Programme Advisory Group (TAG) is taking on more responsibility for oversight of the Programme. Members of TAG are David Crawley (Henderson - chairman), Clarice Greenslade (Governor's Bay), Sheila Pritchard (Torbay), Aileen Martin (Auckland), Mary Concannon (Dunedin), Maryrose Wilson (Point Chevalier).

The first of our Supervision Workshops for Spiritual Direction and Ministry was held in Dunedin in August. Nine participants from the South Island and lower North Island spent a busy and stretching weekend honing their skills in supervision. The next Workshop will be held at Albany over the weekend of February 1-3 2002.

WANTED – someone who knows their way around the field of grant applications!

We need help in the area of grant applications. If you know someone who could help us please contact Andrew Dunn, Box 300-277, Albany, 1330. 09 415-9686. Email: dunnzalbany@xtra.co.nz

FRIENDS OF SGM

Thankyou to all who supported our last Friends Appeal. We do appreciate you interest, prayer and financial support. At the beginning of last year we were asked by our Auditor to supply a letter stating that we would have sufficient funding to see us through the year! That's how delicate our financial situation has been. Thankfully we are now through that tight spot and are able to report that we are in a much improved position financially.

We need prayer for wisdom in decision making and for shaping the future as we move away from focussing mainly on retreats to the shorter prayer events, training and publishing suitable materials. Yes, and we need continual financial support as well and commend our Friends of SGM Appeal form to you.

BOOKS

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McInnes, Elsa.

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Castle, Auckland. 2001. pp149.

Powell, Anne.

Enough Clear Water. Steele Roberts, Wellington. 2001. pp88.

Riddell, Mike

Alt.spirit@metro.m3 - Alternative Spirituality for the Third Millennium.

Lion PB 1997. pp190. \$24.95.

Ruffing, Janet.

Spiritual Direction – Beyond the Beginnings.

Paulist Press 2000. pp183. \$43.96.

Rupp, Joyce.

Out Of The Ordinary – prayers, poems and reflections for every season.

Ave Maria Press. 2000. pp252. \$44.95.

Russell, Rosemary.

Dave's Story.

Church Mouse Press. 1999. pp59.

Simpson, Ray.

Celtic Blessings For Everyday Life. Prayers for every occasion.
Hodder PB. 1998. pp111. \$24.95.

Sullivan, James.

The Good Listener.

Ave Maria Press. 2000. pp128. 26.95.

Weaver, Andrew & Furlong, Monica (editors)

Reflections on Forgiveness and Spiritual Growth.

Abingdon PB. Pp 176. \$42.95.

Yancey, Philip.

Soul Survivor – How my faith survived the Church.

Hodder PB. 2001. \$34.95.

CONTRIBUTORS

Christine Bannan works in Auckland as a spiritual director, is married to Gilbert and is studying theology at Auckland University.

Ngairé Beehre of Whangarei is a Rest Home chaplain and a spiritual director with an interest in care of Alzheimer sufferers. Her research paper on this area of spiritual direction has been warmly received.

Mary Concannon OP from Dunedin works as a spiritual director and supervisor and assists in training spiritual directors.

Neil Churcher of Dunedin is retired from parish ministry. He is a spiritual director and a past Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly.

Carol Grant lives and works at Mt Pleasant, Christchurch, as a parish minister and spiritual director.

Brian Hamilton is parish priest at Holy Trinity Anglican Church, Tauranga and is training in spiritual direction.

Paul Hawker lives with Christine his wife at Masterton. He is a documentary film maker and writer with a special interest in religious experience and is a Franciscan Tertiary.

John Hebenton of Mt Maunganui is an Anglican priest, spiritual director and Franciscan Tertiary co-ordinating, with Bonny his wife youth ministry among Anglican and Methodist young people in the Waikato and Bay of Plenty.

Murray Hewitt is an artist living in Grey Lynn, Auckland, where he works part-time in a wine shop.

Mary Maitland manages a small retreat house near Parua Bay, Northland, and is a spiritual director and teaches people to pray.

Shirley Murray is a prolific writer of contemporary songs and hymns with a New Zealand flavour. Shirley is from Raumati Beach where she lives with John whose inspiration and energy is used fruitfully by the New Zealand Hymnbook Trust.

Clare O'Connor is a Cenacle sister working in Auckland as a retreat giver and spiritual director.

Sue Pickering of New Plymouth, is an Anglican priest, spiritual director and the new SGM Spiritual Directors' Training Programme Co-ordinator.

Anne Powell lives at The Cenacle, Johnsonville, where she is a retreat giver and spiritual director and writes poetry, with two books published thus far.

Rosemary Russell is an Anglican priest in Oamaru and is a spiritual director with a concern for social and environmental justice. Her book *DAVE'S STORY* was published recently.

Barbara Sampson is a Salvation Army officer living at Trentham where she works as a spiritual director and writes the Salvation Army devotional guide *WORDS OF LIFE* which is available in bookshops and supermarkets.

Mary Simeon of Hamilton has contributed the artwork for this issue. Mary is an Anglican priest and hospital chaplain and is training in spiritual direction.

Marg Schrader of Palmerston North works at *Still Point*, is a spiritual director and is a past Moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly.

Michael Watson works at Berhampore, Wellington, as parish priest, is an Anglican Franciscan Tertiary and is training in spiritual direction.

Roger Woodward lives in Epsom, Auckland, and is married to Dorothy . He has been a secondary school teacher and is now involved in real estate and Bible School tutoring.

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