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The deadline for submission of articles for the next issue is Thursday 2nd November 2006

Into the Light

At this time of year, with the darkest day behind us, we look forward to the return of light and warmth, and thoughts turn to planning for summer camps, bushwalks and other outward activities for our Communities.

But there are other cycles besides that of the year and the sun – as the articles in this newsletter remind us, the spiritual life has its own cycles and rhythms of darkness and light on its upward spiral path.

And outwardly also, world events reveal elements of darkness and light.

Wishing you light, inward and outwards, in this season, and may you kindle your own light rather than curse the darkness!

Tiim Bourke, Canberra

Learning to Stand Up

from Peter's Confession (Mk. 8 27-38) to Michaelmas (Mt 22 1-14)

In the Christian Year there are ten weeks between the time of St John and Michaelmas. During these ten weeks we focus on the path of self transformation. With every new gospel reading we meet another stage of the path. By the time we get to Michaelmas we are being asked to walk alongside angelic beings. In order to do this we need to have developed enough strength to stand steadfast. Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians that we need to be clothed in the armour of God. So for ten weeks of each year our focus becomes the practice of walking on this path, the accomplishment of which will take months and years, perhaps even a lifetime!

During our services we stand up when we listen to the gospel reading. We lift ourselves; our heads and hearts, our eyes and ears to another level. Can this standing up become more than physical activity? Can we also make it an 'I' activity of raising our awareness or our consciousness and allowing ourselves to become fully present?

When the Christ Jesus asks his disciples whom they believe him to be, then he is asking "Can you lift up your soul and see beyond the physical? Can you grasp the highest spiritual presence?"

At this moment it is Peter who is able to answer; "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." Peter is able to stand up and reach into heights of spiritual revelation. However, he is unable to maintain this presence of mind and spirit. Moments later he begins to argue with Christ, who rebukes him for his lack of understanding.

Most of us will know moments when we are in touch with the stream of life and when we feel inspired. Ideas flow freely and humour is enjoyed by everyone. We feel connected with one another and in good spirits. But then we lose it again. Like Peter, we're in danger of losing our balance as soon as the higher realms become accessible to us. What can we do about this? How can we learn to remain upright without being bowled over the very next moment? How can we learn to stand in our own strength and reach up to the heights while at the same time remaining firmly grounded upon earth?

Christ shows us a way. What sounds so strict when spoken to Peter; "Get behind me, Satan" is later explained to the crowds when He speaks about how to walk the path of spiritual uprightness in everyday life. He does not say that we have to leave everything and undertake a pilgrimage to a far distant country. On the contrary, he makes it clear that the path of self transformation can be practiced wherever we are. We can learn to become more constant by developing inner strength and balance in daily living. Every new day presents new opportunities. We're asked to take up our cross and follow Christ on this path. In learning to bear our destiny we develop the strength to stand upright and steadfast. In doing so, we learn to become co-workers with Michael in the service of Christ.

The Gospel reading for Michaelmas includes the parable of the royal wedding. A king prepares his son's wedding but the invited guests are too busy and are unwilling to come. We know the son of this parable. We also know who the guests are; most of us are leading such busy lives that we often find it too hard to make much time or space for Christ. But there is also the question of who is the bride? The parable does not mention her but there can't be a wedding without a bride! Christ seems to be focused on the wedding guests. Time and again they are invited to no avail. Finally anyone who can be found on the streets is called to come to the wedding. Why is this?

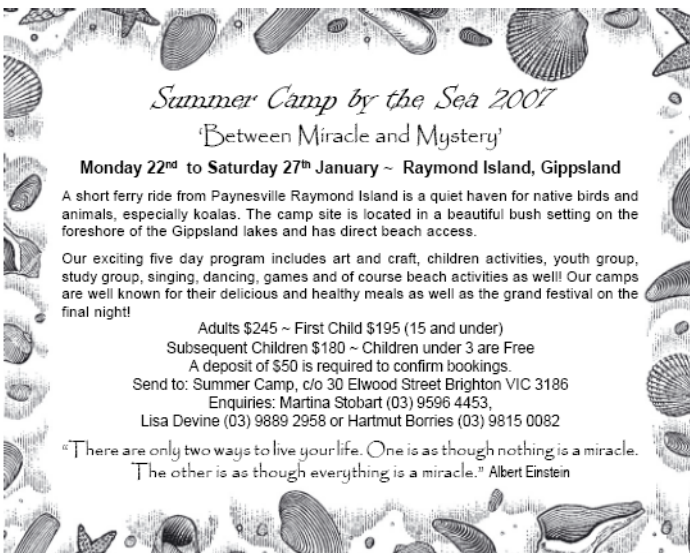
When we celebrate the Act of Consecration of Man in our communities everyone is invited. Regardless of whether we feel worthy or not, well or unwell, our help and active participation is needed. We can be like guests who come to observe and enjoy themselves. However, when we begin to participate inwardly we become aware that each service is a wedding celebration. This can become my own marriage; the marriage between my soul and Christ. Every time I allow the words of the service to enter my heart I renew and deepen my relationship with Christ.

We know how difficult it is to keep any relationship alive today. We can maintain a caring, loving and living relationship with someone only if we regularly meet in order to renew it. If there is interest in one another and the willingness to renew the relationship over and again then we can grow and deepen the understanding and love between us. This does not happen by itself but requires regular and conscious dedication.

When we celebrate the Act of Consecration of Man together, we are doing just this. We consecrate the human being in the service of Christ. We renew our relationship with the Being of Love and we practice standing up for this Being. We are not only guests at the

royal wedding; we can become the bride as well!

Hartmut Borries, Auckland



Summer Camp by the Sea 2007
'Between Miracle and Mystery'

Monday 22nd to Saturday 27th January ~ Raymond Island, Gippsland

A short ferry ride from Paynesville Raymond Island is a quiet haven for native birds and animals, especially koalas. The camp site is located in a beautiful bush setting on the foreshore of the Gippsland lakes and has direct beach access.

Our exciting five day program includes art and craft, children activities, youth group, study group, singing, dancing, games and of course beach activities as well! Our camps are well known for their delicious and healthy meals as well as the grand festival on the final night!

Adults \$245 ~ First Child \$195 (15 and under)
Subsequent Children \$180 ~ Children under 3 are Free
A deposit of \$50 is required to confirm bookings.
Send to: Summer Camp, c/o 30 Elwood Street Brighton VIC 3186
Enquiries: Martina Stobart (03) 9596 4453,
Lisa Devine (03) 9889 2958 or Hartmut Borries (03) 9815 0082

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." Albert Einstein

On a Dark Night

Our son was on the telephone from Europe. When I asked him how he was, he said "Mum, I've been through my dark night of the soul." I had never heard this expression before but his poetic choice of words immediately told me that he had been through a disturbing life-changing experience and a new day must be dawning.

Soon after, I came across a book "Dark Night of The Soul" written by St John of The Cross.⁽¹⁾ I discovered on reading the introduction that he was a progressive of the Christian Carmelite Order in the late 1500's in Spain. After co-founding a reform movement, he was locked in a windowless tower for 9 months by his more conservative superiors for over-stepping the mark. But Juan could not be thwarted; he was inspired through his solitary contemplations whilst imprisoned to write some of his most famous poetry. Anyway, the book in my hand was a thin volume so I purchased it thinking that it was likely that St John of The Cross had originally coined the term "dark night of the soul" and I could read what this saint had in mind. How much would the ideas of a 16th century Spanish mystic have to do with my son's experience, other than poetic expression?

The first half of the little book, "Book The First – Which treats of the Night of Sense" and the next section "Book The Second – Of the Dark Night of the Spirit" are each a commentary on his poem "Dark Night", but they are different perspectives from different stages of spiritual progress towards union with God. Both deal with the "passive night of the soul" in which difficulties and challenges to advancing on a spiritual path are seen to be given by God, to help the acolyte towards independence of soul, to hone soul capacities through a "dark fire" which can forge in us virtues which free us to be true individuals in union of love with God.

"Dark Night of the Soul" is very dense reading. I've read "Book The First", delighted and surprised to find it deals with the transformation of 7 common diversions (in those days called 7 Capital Sins) in a spiritual sense – the habits of pride, avarice, luxury and pleasure, wrath, gluttony, envy, and sloth. Yes, I'd heard of the 7 deadly sins but when I read how they manifest in our spiritual striving, here was a fresh view of them. They were easy to recognize! Spiritual-psychological traits are connected to experiences and examples, the author is writing of what he knows and trying to find a way to reveal his knowledge to those who don't yet know, and are somewhere delayed on a spiritual path.

St John of The Cross's analysis is of soul discomfort and distress. There is aridity and emptiness. Nothing gives pleasure. Self-confidence is lost. We feel ignorance and despair when we are inwardly failing and going off in the wrong

direction. Inner exercises don't work anymore – and that's only the Dark Night of Sense! St John of The Cross saw such symptoms in most spiritual seekers not far into their journey who came to him for guidance. To us these symptoms sound remarkably familiar. They seem very like the general malaise increasingly diagnosed by doctors as a psychological disorder called mild to moderate depression.

So the question has expanded rather than being answered. Is St John of The Cross' dark night of the soul an alternative description not just of my son's "coming of age" experience, but also of the experience of many people who are diagnosed these days with mild to moderate depression?

Could it be that what were formerly thought to be "moods" and "inner struggles" and part of the complexity of the human psyche, are being redefined as illnesses? That opinion is strongly argued by respected Sydney pharmacist Gail Bell. She has written a persuasive essay "The Worried Well -- The Depression Epidemic and the Medicalisation of Our Sorrows".⁽²⁾ She observes that drug companies fund much of current

The Sacred Flame



Come and Kindle the Flame!

Community Camp January 3rd – 7th, 2007 at

Camp Longbeach Group Camp and Conference Centre

The summer Community Camps have become an important part of our community life. We work and learn together, play and explore the holiday place and swim together, share our stories and challenges and hopes, and gather in the Chapel. Most of us find a lot to do and it's a very active holiday with a difference. For five days we are immersed in the joys and demands of forming new community with people of all ages, at many levels experiencing that we are individual beings of spirit celebrating our common striving to bring Love and Life abundantly into the world.

Camp Longbeach is set amongst 25 acres of Spotted Gum and Burrawang forest, just 11 kilometres north of Batemans Bay on the NSW South Coast. The camp is within 5 minutes walk from the beach.

COST: Single person: \$230/ concession \$190; family of 2: \$400; family of 3: \$510; family of 4: \$600; special rates for families with children 6 years and younger, and for families of 5 or more.
Concessions available on request.

**The Christian Community in Australia – Canberra
Congregation**

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research into mental illness and once a "new" illness is identified, the companies develop and market the drugs which they advertise as the modern cure. That there are some real benefits for such treatment of "clinical depression" is acknowledged, but she does not agree that mild and moderate depression need to be treated with drugs. It is surely significant that doctors are educated by drug company researchers about the benefits of new anti-depressant drugs.

Conventional doctors are also under pressure from patients who are stressed by our modern lifestyle and ready to take a pill to be cured. There are consistent reports in Australia that as many as 1 in 5 people will seek medical help for psychological distress in a lifetime. Our Australian society is materially well-off, but this has not made us happier as increasing numbers of people (including children) are not coping and are "depressed"

and treated with drugs.⁽³⁾ And we are not unique; international health organizations predict that major depression is expected to become the world's second most burdensome disease by 2020.

So the question was still whether we can say that the illness of mild/moderate depression could also in many cases be diagnosed as a "dark night of the soul". I soon discovered this was not only my question! Thomas Moore, a theologian and psychotherapist, had already written a book "Dark Nights of the Soul" affirming they are the same thing seen differently. He throws a challenge to us:

"It's helpful, then, during a dark night, to constantly broaden your imagination of what is happening to you. If your only idea is that you're depressed, you will be at the mercy of the depression industry, which will treat you as one among millions for whom there is only one canonical and approved story. Maybe you're overwhelmed but not depressed. Maybe life has sent you a great challenge, and you need a vast spiritual vision to deal with it."⁽⁴⁾

What these authors write is real in our lives. Do you too meet or hear of individuals who are finding ways to work with "spiritual vision" in such a practical, healing way as described by Thomas Moore?

The friend who suggested to our son that his experience was a dark night of the soul, gave him a bigger picture with such a "diagnosis". I know a man who was an atheist, who was so devastated when his wife suddenly died, that he appeared very depressed for months. When given Thomas Moore's book to read he was deeply grateful to find his inner turmoil so well understood. He then was in no doubt that he was in a dark night of the soul. He accepted that this strange state he found himself in was a spiritual experience and he could no longer describe himself as an atheist. An elderly woman who is a long time member of The Christian Community has recently shared, when in remission, how her deep depression has at its core to do with personal grief and loss and questioning God. These people and many others testify that their soul distress is to do with spiritual growth. Today, with so much focus on the pursuit of happiness and on how it's up to us to make a success of our lives, we take note when someone tells us that they have embraced with open arms profound inner hardship not of their own making. Gerald May writes "...as the dark night leads us into more contemplative territorysuccess and failure lose their meaning entirely. The experience feels more like "letting go and letting God".⁽⁵⁾

In summary, many of us will experience some of the symptoms at some time in our lives of what is generally called depression. Apart from our own observations, there is much evidence that a materialistic, modern lifestyle does not keep away soul discomfort and on the other hand, taking up a spiritual path brings it on! No wonder an "epidemic of major depression" is predicted. It's a gloomy picture.

What if we take another view? This is what we have been challenged to do, 'to broaden our imagination of what is happening to us'. Renewed interest in St John of The Cross' observations shows such a possibility. Instead, we can boldly name the malaise "multitudes of individuals experiencing a dark night of the soul." This is poetic. But not only that, it is a spiritual vision of what is happening. It says that many modern individuals are experiencing "the way and manner which the soul follows upon the road of the union of love with God."⁽⁶⁾

If we are in soul distress and we don't see it as a dark night of the soul, or don't believe it, we are depressed. If we do see it as a dark night, we are still in a dark night, having to learn how to be in it and how to get through it. However, a night does not go on forever. As great as the dark night may be, even in many individuals, the vision includes the dawn of a new day. What a dawning it will be with so many individuals waiting for it!

Cheryl Nekvapil, Canberra

(in March 2006 edition of Die Christengemeinschaft)

1 "Dark Night of The Soul" by St John of The Cross, C.D. Dover Publications Inc N.Y., 2003

2 "The Worried Well – The Depression Epidemic and The Medicalisation of our Sorrows" by Gail Bell, Quarterly Essay, Issue 18, 2005, Black Inc. www.quarterlyessay.com

3 "Affluenza" by Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss, Allen and Unwin, N.S.W. 2005. p114.

4 "Dark Nights of the Soul" by Thomas Moore, Piatkus, London, 2004. p. 309

5 "The Dark Night of The Soul" by Gerald May, HarperSanFrancisco, N.Y. 2004.

6 "Dark Night of The Soul", St John of The Cross p 2.

Summer Bushwalk

"The miracle is not to fly in the air
Or to walk on the water:
But to walk on the earth.
Chinese Proverb

To walk on earth, we do it every day. How can it be a miracle?

Hopefully there are still some among us who will remember one or the other of our bush walks we had in the past. We certainly do and would very much like to go for another – and you can trust us in that we would like to plan one which is not difficult, but easy to walk regardless of fitness or age, with lots of time to make nature observations and to draw.

If anyone would be interested in joining us, please let us know. Then we can make plans together for a great week in summer. The dates would be most likely from Monday 8th to Saturday 13th of January. We are very much looking forward to hearing from you.

Ann and Don Lazzaro 9589 1954 and Hartmut Borries 9815 0082

Alfalfa Alpha and Omega

Last Sunday, Victor came to his first Act of Consecration, as preparation for his confirmation in two months' time. Emily came too. She was confirmed in the Sydney congregation three years ago.

It was a special moment for me as they sat either side. I felt a sense of completion, a feeling that a seed had been planted in each child's being that had taken root. I knew this had already happened for Emily, but now here was Victor, willing to be present, to listen to the words of wisdom and watch with interest, the activity at the altar.

In my mind's eye I see a recently sprouted seed: the hard brown casing has burst apart and a vivid green head is emerging, while a thin white tendril root seeks downward, like a spinal cord.

The beginning of the true I AM

'I am the Alpha and the Omega

Beginning and end

I am coming soon'

You have come, O lord of my life..... in the dance of my life, in the sprouting arrows of my children.

Do I glimpse here a first ripening of the fruits of my labours in the vast fields of motherhood?

For days, weeks, months and years we labour as parents. Sometimes there is drought, other times floods and we fear destruction. And yet we go on hoping, dreaming, trusting, praying that our children will be able to make the journey, emerging into their own life with the wherewithal to create and flourish with the power and the beauty of their own true I AM.

Dear Emily and Victor,

You give me much hope that all will be well. From my full heart I give you joyful tears and a grateful smile. I know that there are many more miles to go and journeys to make. But at least for now I have reached a spot where I can rest for a while, and take in a magnificent view!

Melinda Turner, Canberra

Mountain Idyllic

Among folded hills a small stream has prised open the bedrock. There lies before us a sparkling pristine pool with a view of the upper glacier and a welcome of daisies near the entrance. The track has discreetly disappeared. Gratefully we slide our soaked skins into the freshening water. Our backs warm against a sloping slab of granite, we celebrate the unparalleled purity of alpine water. The lowering sun begins to sculpt a silhouette of each neighbouring peak...

...reluctant return to our tiny blister of a yellow tent, perched on the discarded moraine wall a thousand feet above the glacier. Many, many years ago this valley was full of ice right to our tent door. From here an enormous frozen river gouged what is now the dog-legged lake nurturing a fashionable tourist resort.

Ice-rivers of light

Flow between night-filled mountains.

They carry the stars.

Elisabeth Alington, Auckland ea@paradise.net.nz

A Recipe for Peace

Glenda Cloughley
A Chorus of Women, Canberra
July 2006

1. Take grain from the earth and add wa-ter. Make by

7 knead - ing to lea - ven with air. Bake in fire. Break and

13 share. Par - take with your neigh - bour the ble - ssing of bread.

18 *Refrain*

27 May you ne - ver be hun - gry. May you ne - ver be thir - sty. I wish you

34 health And a ha - ppy home My com - pan - ion, may peace be with you. 2. Re-

39 mem - ber the ma - king of bread like this I - ma - gine the

44 ma - king of peace like this Har - mon - ies with friends and neigh - bours

50 and with stran - gers Brid - ging the bor - ders of dis - cord and fear.

55 3. Hum - ble this coo - king of bread and peace Hu - man the

61 cir - cle from hearth to heart In long - ing, in hope from hand to

hand I give you the song of my dream and my prayer