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Fr. Sean Coghlan S.J. is a member of the Irish Jesuit Mission of over a hundred Jesuits serving Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, Singapore, and Macau. Since 1926 for a span of a hundred years these Jesuits became involved in many different areas of people's needs in these regions, particularly in education – spiritual and academic, in social work and in media communication. Fr. Coghlan came to Hong Kong in 1959, and for the past six decades had taught in the two Jesuit managed high schools in Hong Kong - Wah Yan College HK and Wah Yan College Kowloon, and the University of Hong Kong. He was head master and rector of the two schools for a span of ten years each, and warden of Ricci Hall HKU where he also lectured. Besides academic and teaching, Fr. Coghlan contributed in the later year's a significant portion of his services to pastoral and social work which included especially for sick children and the homeless of Hong Kong.

The following is a selection of enlightening essays, reflection, sermons, and lectures written by Fr. Coghlan that were presented under different forums at their publication.

Cancer Wards
Treasuring Life
Come and See
Joy
From Fear to Awe
Compassion
Thank God for Books!
Making Friends for Ourselves in Heaven
The Consolations of Old Age
When Urgent Work Is Done
Money
The Lord is My Shepherd
Speaking Of God from the Heart
Communication With God
Birds Of Wah Yan
Letter to National Geographic Magazine

CANCER WARDS

Sean Coghlan S.J.

During the past few weeks I have been called several times to Queen Mary Hospital by the Catholic Pastoral Team to attend to some patients. As a result I have become quite familiar with the patients in two children's cancer wards. The children range from about three to twelve years in age. Many of them are going to die.

At times, of course I feel upset at seeing so many children in discomfort and pain, losing their hair and in some cases their hearing and their sight. However any sadness I feel is more than balanced by the extraordinary resilience of spirit that pervades the wards.

I think that at least some of the children know that they are very ill and that they may be dying. They seem to accept their illness and even their approaching deaths. Their serenity communicates itself to their parents. The wards are bright and cheery and there is a jolly atmosphere as the children play games, do puzzles and watch cartoons on T.V.

The love and dedication shown by the parents is very moving. Some stay from early morning to late at night with their children. They encourage one another and form a kind of community of mutual support. They are most grateful for any interest a visitor shows in their children. Their hearts must be breaking, but they appear cheerful, even joyful.

I am deeply impressed by the gentleness and warmth of the nurses, doctors and amahs. They run a relaxed regime. I am sure that they are being very much influenced by their young patients.

Most of the parents and children are not Christians, but the experience of sickness and approaching death seems to open them to religious values. One mother has just had her three year old daughter baptized. even though she herself is not a Catholic. The girl is dying. The mother was very struck by how calm and serene a boy of twelve became when he was baptised. She said, "I have done all I can for my child. Now I'm going to hand her over to Jesus."

I have got to know some children better than others. One is a girl of eleven called Ga Yi. She has lost all her hair because of her chemotherapy. She is blind due to a brain tumor. She will die soon. Sometimes she shivers with fever. She is a beautiful girl. She has an enchanting smile which lights up all around her. She has an infectious laugh and a great sense of humor.

Jonathan, aged 4½, is from Indonesia. He is a Catholic. He is undergoing Chemotherapy. His parents are with him all the time. He is grave and serious but shows flashes of a quick temper. There are often tears in his mother's eyes but she prays a lot. Jonathan has a good chance of getting better.

Tin Tin is a 12 years old. As I write he probably has only a few days to live. He is from a small village just across the border in China. Somehow or other his parents managed to get him into the Queen Mary. His father is a driver and can't come to Hong Kong. They have spent all their savings and Tin Tin is now being

supported by a Hong Kong newspaper. He has been in hospital for four months. He is in great pain and is on morphine. He was baptized two months ago and receives Holy Communion regularly and prays. He is extraordinarily mature. He tells his mother not to be sad. His mother has sat by his bed and slept by his bed for four months. She dries his perspiration and changes his pyjamas. He lies with his eyes closed, but sometimes opens them and his big eyes roll over to see than his mother is there. He is a gallant boy and she a gallant woman. Sometimes I hold his hand when it isn't too painful for him. Tin Tin's mother is not a Catholic but she tells Tin Tin to suffer with Jesus and says she will look for the Catholic church when she gets back home and become a Catholic.

When I leave the hospital I walk down to Victoria Road, to look out over the Lamma Channel, the ships coming up and down the channel and the islands stretching in a line into the South China Sea. I do so to reflect. Sometimes, I do so, to regain my balance and composure. More often, however, I walk in a certain peace, thanks to an experience of the goodness of human nature and the love of God reaching out through the Catholic Pastoral Team to people in crisis.

I have just read part of an essay written by a colleague on Post Modernism, an abstract and abstruse mode of thought popular nowadays in some intellectual circles. Its proponents virtually reject any possibility of reaching the truth. Post modernism seems empty of hope. Followed to its conclusion it would seem to lead to a world, dark, empty, meaningless and void of compassion. Logically nobody would have any reason to do anything for anybody. I wonder what extreme post modernists would say when confronted by the religious faith shown by some of the people in the Queen Mary, by the serenity and cheerfulness of the children and by the nobility of their parents who accept that they must stand by one another and the kids in their pain, in their weakness and in their dying.

CANCER WARDS (continued)

In the April issue of "The Messenger" I wrote in "Cancer Wards" about a boy of twelve from China called Tin Tin. At the time of writing he was dying of cancer. He had been baptised soon after he entered hospital in Hong Kong. His mother was very grateful to the Catholic Pastoral Team for their care of Tin Tin. She said that when she returned home she would find the Church and start instruction for baptism.

Tin Tin grew gradually weaker. The end came on a hot summer day in July 1999. Early that morning he was obviously dying. His father reached the hospital in the morning and his grandfather in the early afternoon. Two members of the pastoral team were present and I joined them just before the grandfather arrived. Tin Tin was lying in his mother's arms as he had been for most of the previous few days. We prayed for a while but soon fell into a kind of stupor, compounded, perhaps, of tiredness, grief and apprehension.

Tin Tin's heart beats were being monitored by a lead attached to the tip of one of his fingers. Tin Tin was pale and still, but we could notice no change. Suddenly, we were catapulted out of our stupor. The machine was telling us the story. Dramatically the counter began to unwind, spinning rapidly backwards,

speeding up as it went, just like the counter on a tape-recorder as the tape rewound. I watched in a kind of disbelief. Tin Tin was going. A human life was running down.

I tried to lead a prayer but failed miserably. Tin Tin's mother called his name in alarm, sharply and repeatedly. Someone rushed out. A doctor and nurse came immediately. The monitor reached zero. Nurse and doctor checked quietly and reverently and confirmed lie was gone. They told us gently we could stay as long as we liked.

Tin Tin's mother held him close. We all cried for a bit. Soon, however, and, almost as if by agreement, we began to go about the ordinary welcome tasks of such a moment, relieved, I think, that Tin Tin's long ordeal was over.

A few days later, before the cremation I held a simple ceremony in the grim hospital morgue. The night before they went home, Tin Tin's parents came to Ricci Hall to a Mass for Tin Tin. They were composed and grateful and invited us to visit them in their home village.

In May, Bernadette of the Pastoral Team arranged a visit to the area around Tin Tin's village. I was in the group and, naturally, Tin Tin's family was high on our visiting list. There were a few tears when we met but soon we were having a very happy, even jolly time together. We went to meet Tin Tin's great-grandparents. Great-grandfather is a sprightly eighty eight years of age, still riding his bicycle. Great-grandmother is not quite so active, but she can get around on her own. We had snacks and admired the chickens and the pigs and the rice growing almost to the door. We even saw the old family home built by Tin Tin's great-great-grandfather.

Next morning, Sunday morning, we went to Mass in the nearby town. Tin Tin' mother, father, sister, aunt and cousin were kneeling in the church when we arrived. All are now receiving instruction and hoping to be baptized next year. It should be said that the decision to be baptised must have been a difficult one for them. The church in that area is a church of the disregarded and unimportant. Its a simple church, a poor church. No power or "pull" there.

After Mass, in the narrow passage between Church and presbytery, we sat down to a breakfast provided by Tin Tin's family. The center-piece was a roast-pig from great-grandfather's farm. We were touched by the generosity of people who, through circumstances beyond their control, are going through a hard time financially.

We drove back to Hong Kong first through bright green rice fields and fish ponds, bordered by banana trees and then, unfortunately, through ugly, soulless factories, stretching for miles down to the border with Hong Kong.

We entered the New Territories of Hong Kong as the setting sun was lighting up the hills around Starling Inlet. It has been an unusually damp spring. The luxuriant vegetation, the trees, the hills, the placid sea were startlingly beautiful. I was entranced by the loveliness of a scene I had grown used to. But as our bus neared the city my thoughts returned to Tin Tin and his family. Surely he must be praying for them. They need his prayers and ours as they face a testing, perhaps lonely and isolated future.

TREASURING LIFE

Sean Coghlan S.J.

I was born in a homely, friendly community. When I was young, I lived in a small city, so it was safe to explore the city and the surrounding countryside on my bicycle. At home, in school and on holidays I developed interests and hobbies which now, nearly fifty years later, I still enjoy.

Although my father left school when he was fourteen, he was very keen on reading. One of his favourite books was "Tom Brown's Schooldays". He made it seem so attractive that I longed to read it. One of my teachers advised us to get a taste for reading. He warned us that we might end up in a village with nothing to do after work. If we didn't like books, we might turn to alcohol! In particular, I remember the principal of my primary school, Mother Breeda, she bribed us to take some extra classes on a Saturday morning. What bribes did she use? Sweets and books. She had a locked cupboard full of story books. If we worked hard, she would open the cupboard for us. For me the doors of the cupboard were magic doors, opening on a world of delight. The delight persists.

At the beginning of secondary school I was lucky enough to have had three very good Geography teachers in a row. From them I picked up a love of maps, of travel books and of "foreign" peoples. I used to go down to the harbour every day and go on to the ships. I'd talk to the dockers and to sailors from many different countries. They would show me the bridge, the chart room, the radio room and the hot, noisy, frightening engine room.

I have a small collection of maps from all over the world, and of course, from Hong Kong. I study them regularly. I have walked over most of Hong Kong. For many years I have been interested in safety at sea. I have kept files on shipping accidents and have written many letters to the papers about safety at sea. I believe they did some good. Hong Kong is a paradise for ship lovers.

As a foreigner in Hong Kong I feel happy and privileged to be able to get to know something of the Chinese people and their culture. All these blessings go back to my early luck in having such good Geography teachers.

Another blessing in my life is a love of Nature acquired in school, from my father and on holidays in the country or by the sea.

Our school had a natural history museum. I spent many hours gazing at the exhibits. I remember sitting with my father on the banks of the Mulcair watching the salmon leaping a small fall or on a cliff in Co. Clare, watching the seals scrambling out of the sea to flop onto a shelf of rock. Still vivid in my mind is a long, sloping field, slowly coming into view as the summer morning haze rolled away. Dotted all over the field were mares and foals cropping the lush grass. It was a sight of rare beauty.

Such beauties are to be found in Hong Kong too. Hong Kong is a very busy city but it is an excellent place for bird watching. Only fifteen minutes from the terminus of an urban bus service one can, with a little luck, see a White Bellied Sea Eagle soaring and circling over hills and sea against a blue, cloudless sky. One day in King's Park, just a few minutes from Nathan Road, one of the busiest streets in the world, I

watched in delight as a Long Tailed Tailor Bird fed her four young ones, perched in a row on a delicate bamboo, framed against the same blue cloudless sky.

When I was in school I collected match boxes. Some years ago I took up the hobby again. Hong Kong is an excellent place for collecting match boxes. Nearly every restaurant has its own box. Friends who travel abroad are happy to bring boxes back. There is much coming and going between Hong Kong and China. China produces some lovely sets. Collecting match boxes is a fascinating hobby and it costs very little!

Of course, I do not rely on hobbies and interests alone to make life a treasure to be cherished. My strongest reason for treasuring life is that it is a gift from God. Thanks to my parents, I came to know God as powerful and majestic, but also a one who is loving, trustworthy and the source of all that is good. I will always remember my parents kneeling together by their bed, praying. Then and now, I believe God will never let us down.

However, it is good to have some very tangible evidence that life is worthwhile. Hobbies and interests can support us in our dark moments. Of course, we all have to work. We all have obligations to others. We can and should, though, enjoy life. For that reason I believe it is important to build up a stock of hobbies and enthusiasms early in life. Some of them will fade; some will last. At all stages of our lives they will help us to conclude that life is worth living despite difficulties, failure and disappointments.

Come and See

Sean Coghlan S.J.

Mountains and streams are two of the commonest subjects in Chinese painting. On long scrolls mountains tower to the heavens. Waterfalls tumble down their sides through wisps of cloud, feathery clumps of bamboo or twisted pines to spread into placid streams at the base. And amid all that awe inspiring grandeur one almost always finds a tiny human figure, standing meditatively on a rock or on a sandy spit jutting into the stream or poling a boat or, rod in hand, fishing in the widening stream. A tiny human, figure, dwarfed by the majesty of mountain and falling water.

In a famous Chinese poem "Moored at Night by Maple Bridge" we find another lone human person.

"The moon sets, crows call, the air is sharp with frost.

River, maple, fishing lamps frame my face with sorrow crossed.

From Ho Shan outside Koo So City at midnight I hear float,

The sound of temple bell to me, lonely wanderer in my boat."

One of the best loved Chinese stories is "Monkey" or "Journey to the West", based, at least in part, on a journey made by a Buddhist monk to Sri Lanka to bring back to China some sacred writings. Some commentators believe that the four main characters represent four of the commonest human types. The monk represents the contemplative type, tending to withdraw from the world, shy, diffident and a little panicky. The second character is a pig, not surprisingly called "Piggy", who stands for the sensual, pleasure loving type. "Monkey", who is indeed a monkey, has been welcomed with delighted amusement by countless generations. He is "Mr. Fixit" himself, cocky, irrepressible, scheming, bursting with energy and ideas. Finally we have "Sandy", the ordinary man or woman, you or me, finding his way as best he can through this perplexing life of ours, very unsure at times, but hanging on with a certain kind of dogged courage, anxious to know what the future holds, eager for some clarity and peace of mind.

The tiny human figure, the lonely wanderer "Sandy" stand for you and me, at least in those hours, when we feel lost, puzzled and alone in this towering, overwhelming world of ours.

We may well have a very solid belief in God and his love for us. Often he may be as real to us as the line of hills we can see from the bedroom window, or as matter of fact as the bus that brings us to work in the morning. But, sometimes. He may seem very far away. We may not know what to do, what choices to make. We may not understand why. God allows certain things to happen or why He seems to leave us stewing, not knowing which way to turn.

Has God given us no guidelines at all? Yes, of course, has. He is at work in the world through the ten commandments which are, in some way or other instilled in the hearts of all. He is present in the advice of decent, honest men and women and in the customs and traditions of our people. We find Him in

healthy common sense and practical psychology. But we may need to meet God in a more intimate way when we are faced with seemingly contradictory demands, great trials or disappointments or when like the young man in the Gospel we feel we are being asked to do something more.

Then we must look into our hearts. We must follow the best instincts of our hearts - but, of course, not any kind of heart! It must be a heart made wise and compassionate, open and generous, by prayer. If God is at work in the world he must surely be at work in the hearts of believers too. He stirs up imagination and initiative, idealism and courage in our hearts.

If we can come to know God's majestic and compassionate ways, our hearts will become attuned to what is best in life. Without too much fuss or drama we will almost automatically know, sense, feel, and taste what is the right thing to do.

Very early in St. John's Gospel, John the Baptist points Jesus out to two of his disciples. They follow him. He turns and asks them what they want. Hardly knowing what, to say, they ask him "where do you live"? His answer was "Come and See". In John's Gospel "coming" and "seeing" lead to a practical faith in God and in Jesus. They are essential parts of a movement towards the person of Jesus and the understanding in faith of who he is.

Jesus invites us too to "come and see". As we watch and ponder him, our hearts are made like his. We assimilate what he prizes. As a result we may with a certain sureness of touch be able to find our way through the mazes and seemingly impenetrable thickets that, at times, threaten to turn us into wanderers, exiles, lost souls in a world that is just too much for us.

JOY

Sean Coghlan S.J.

In an article I read recently about joy, the writer started by saying that he had been listening to a radio discussion about a new book. One of the participants said that when he finished the book he had been left with a feeling of joy. The writer of the article confessed that he was startled by the reaction of the chairperson. When she heard the word "joy" she seemed to leap out of her seat. She yelled the word "joy" as if the speaker had used an obscene word. The reaction was so violent that the writer was left pondering. Is there something indecent about joy? Is it immature or escapist to feel joyful in our modern world?

Joy is deep pleasure, great gladness. How often do you feel joy? How often do I feel joy? Is it even possible to feel joy in our daily lives? What is the foundation for joy in life?

To the best of my belief, Jesus Christ is the deepest and most reliable source of our joy. At Christmas we sing "Joy to the world, the Lord is born". When John the Baptist saw Jesus near the Jordan, he said "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" Jesus takes away our sins and our fear of death and so gives us reason to be joyful. An old Russian saint, Serapion of Serof used to greet all he met with the words "Radost Moya. Christos Voskrese" "My Joy. Christ is Risen"

But back to the question if it is possible to feel joy in our day to day life. My experience tells me that it is.

One lovely summer evening when I was about twelve years old I went into a friend's house to ask him out to play. His mother was preparing her youngest daughter for bed. She was saying her night prayers with her. I stood, transfixed, listening to the mother's gentle voice and the little girl's sleepy voice stumbling along behind. It was a moment of great peace and lasting importance for me.

Once I was playing football. Yes, of all things football! I suppose I had the usual worries and anxieties most of us have, but, just for a moment, an odd, almost dreamy feeling came over, a quiet conviction that everything was going to be all right. Just that. Not perfect. All right.

Charles Ryder in "Brideshead Revisited" describes Julia the woman he loved. "That night and the night after and the night after, wherever she went in her own little circle of intimates, she brought a moment of joy, such as strikes deep to the heart on the river's bank when the kingfisher suddenly flares across the water". The words themselves bring me joy whenever I read them and, even here in this frenetic place called Hong Kong, I also have moments of joy when the kingfisher flares suddenly across the pool in the hills above Sai Kong.

Joy? A strong word. On reflection it seems to me that I have been describing a humbler emotion, a scaled down version of the real thing. Perhaps, however, it is enough to be graced from time to time with the calming conviction of the presence of the holy in our lives and that beauty in the most mundane situation balances the ugliness and boredom we experience there. Perhaps unexpected moments of calm convince us that, just as we are able to weather our daily storms, so too will we know the joy of arriving in our heavenly harbour. We may find rest in the thought that we can go along with

God's active presence in the processes of this world. We may experience something akin to satisfaction when we manage to extract some good from unpromising situations and when we succeed in enduring when things look unchangeably black.

I believe we can avoid charges of immaturity or escapism when we hope for joy in our lives. Joy is essential if we are to be men and women in a demanding world. At the end of his life, Jesus faced death with aversion and fear. I do not see how he could have said, "Thy will be done" if he had not enjoyed a deep seated awareness of the Father's love for him.

FROM FEAR TO AWE

Sean Coghlan S.J.

A few years ago I asked a woman why she had become a Catholic. She laughed and told me that as a young girl she was "afraid of everything". She was afraid of ghosts and of the dark. She was even afraid of walking down the street in the middle of the day. A school friend told her that she had better become a Catholic since Catholics are afraid of nothing! She became a Catholic and found that what her friend said was true.

Recently I read about an old village headman in New Guinea. He was very grateful for baptism. In the old days the villagers were paralysed by the fear of devils and evil spirits. "Now," he said "we don't fear anymore: We are free because we are God's children."

Most of us know fear. In an article "Angels at Easter" the editor of JIVAN, an Indian Jesuit magazine, referred to a "nameless dread that grows in the soul and cannot be unmasked". Such fear is irrational but when we suffer from it, it seems very real. More understandably we fear the future and sickness. We fear losing the people we love.

Fear can be good, useful and, even, necessary. Reasonable, justifiable fear is a painful emotion caused by impending danger or evil. A famous racing driver said, in answer to a question, that he did experience fear when he was driving. He added that, if he felt he was losing his sense of fear, he would retire, because fear warned him when he was reaching the limits of his ability.

Fear then can be good, but it can be bad and destructive too. Good or bad it has to be kept in control.

There is another kind of fear which can blight our lives. It isn't an irrational fear and so cannot be got rid of by reflection or counselling. This fear is very real and is imposed on us by unfortunate circumstances which are, at least temporarily, beyond our control. It is a fear inspired by a cruel, unjust arbitrary person who has some power or authority over us. Such a person may be a mad tyrant or dictator at the top of the scale or nearer the bottom a bullying, authoritarian parent, an abusive spouse or a cold, demanding boss. Such fear has no saving grace. The most we can hope for of this fear is to be able to bear it until we can rid ourselves of it as quickly, efficiently and ethically as possible.

As, Christians, though, we face a problem. We are told, and very rightly so, that we should fear God. Fear God! But! Suppose! As I said, there is a problem, but, rather than making all kinds of complicated distinctions about the fear we owe to God it might be more useful to introduce the word, awe. Awe is a kind of fear, inspired by reverence and respect in face of the fascinating beauty of something or someone good or helpful.

Maybe you have felt awe when you were deeply moved by a piece of music

and wondered how a presumably limited human being like yourself could produce something so nearly perfect. Perhaps you have walked in awe on a magical night, cloudless with the myriad stars all around you down to the very horizon. I did one sharp, frosty November not far from the Bog of Allen. once, too,

I took the "Maid of the Mist" up to the foot of Niagara Falls. The immense power of the water pouring over the falls filled me with a wild joy. And, yet, after some time I began to long for the boat to turn away from the falls lest the might of the falling river would rob me of my soul, of my personhood.

In "The Wind In The Willows" Kenneth Grahame relates how "Rat" and "Mole" had an experience of something like the divine as dawn broke over their beloved river. I don't know how Grahame managed to learn "rat-speak" or "mole-speak" so well and I'm not sure if his God is the God of the Bible. However his words are beautiful and we can use them in the good cause of describing what awe before God might be like.

"Rat!" he (Mole) found breath to whisper, shaking, "Are you afraid?" "Afraid?" murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. "Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet - and yet - O, Mole, I am afraid! "

Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.

When Jesus told Peter and his co-workers to throw their net into the sea after their night of fruitless labour, the net filled with fish. Peter dropped on his knees before Jesus saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" But his fear did not paralyse him. He followed Jesus, worked for him and died for him. Perhaps his fear had turned to awe.

The climax of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius is when I stand in the presence of God our Lord and of all his angels and saints who intercede for me. In gratitude for all I have received from him I offer myself totally to him so that in all things I may love and serve the Divine Majesty. This, after earlier in the Exercises I have stood in his presence, amazed that I had not been buried in hell for all my sins.

Awe is good, holy, true and helpful. It may make me feel small, but it fills me with hope, joy and strength. It has nothing to do with an inferiority complex or irrational guilt or slavish fear. It has everything to do with reality and optimism. By awe we are led upwards to love. "The more love possesses us, the less we fear, the more we grow in self-confidence, the more we give out vibrations of goodness - a nurturing healing, inspiring, protecting presence." So wrote the editor of JIVAN to finish "Angels at Easter".

Standing in awe before God, we ascend in one smooth, continuous movement to love. Is there any room at all for fear? Yes, indeed. Faced with such awesome goodness and loveliness, we could well fear the possibility of a disastrous shipwreck, the loss of that very goodness and loveliness through some mad and arrogant charting of our own life's passage.

Compassion

Sean Coghlan S.J.

"Lord Jesus, we pray that through our own troubles we may learn to feel the sufferings of others; help us to show them your compassion."

Divine office: Morning Prayer, Tuesday 2nd Week

One day, quite a few years ago, when I was studying in the University, was cycling through a forestry plantation with some fellow students. We met one of the foresters and we began to chat. He asked us if we knew Fr. William Stephenson. We did, of course, as he was a member of our community. We knew him by the affectionate name of "Springs", because, even at the age of ninety, he bounced along the corridor and up the stairs with a cheery word for everybody. The forester told us that, when he was studying in the forestry school, he and some of his friends used to go to Fr. Stephenson for confession. "He was a great man", he said. "We were very wild, but he had great compassion on us".

Another man with the gift of compassion was St. Martin of Tours. When he was dying the people around the bed began to weep. They begged him not to leave them. As the Divine Office reading for his feast says, "Martin was deeply moved by their tears which stirred the sympathy that flowed from the heart of God's mercy and he said 'Lord, if I am still needed by your people, I will not refuse the work. Your will be done'".

When Jesus brought the disciples across the lake to have a picnic in the hills, he found a great crowd of people waiting for him. When he saw them "he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark6:30). The picnic plans were put aside and he taught the people and fed them and healed their sick.

Compassion is a feeling of tenderness, aroused by a person's distress or suffering, inclining us to spare or help. The Greek word used in the Gospels for "compassion" is derived from the word for our intestines or bowels, the place where our deepest feelings were believed to reside. Nowadays, we are more inclined to see our hearts as the seat of our affections, of our tenderness and pity. So we pray "Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us!" We do so, conscious of the fact that devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was introduced into the Church in the 17th Century because it was feared that "the hearts of men had grown cold".

For a while recently I feared that maybe our modern hearts had grown cold too. My blood froze when I heard that after a crucial Euro 2000 soccer match which England lost, some of the fans vented their anger, and, probably their envy, on a favourite hate figure, David Beckham by yelling at him, "may your kid die of cancer!". How could hearts be so savagely lacking in compassion? Had those fans ever seen a child dying of cancer? Could they possibly have meant what they yelled?

However, our century, thank God, is indeed not lacking in compassion. In the 1980's Doctor Sheila Cassidy was arrested by the Chilean police for treating a wounded guerilla in her clinic. She was

tortured. When asked if she hated her torturers she said, "No. On the contrary, I felt a great pity for them. They were frightened men, frightened at the loss they imagined I was trying to inflict on them."

In a similar compassionate vein spoke a Ugandan woman I heard being interviewed on B.B.C. World Service. In the days of Idi Amin she was arbitrarily arrested and jailed. She was beaten every day. She feared at first that she would go mad or commit suicide. However, she forced herself to look and look and look at the men who were beating her. She began to see them as men with fears and problems. She found then that she could excuse and forgive them.

Here, with these women, we learn one way of becoming compassionate people. They turned the spotlight of their attention away from themselves. They replaced a concentration on themselves in their misery with deliberate concentration on another person. Compassion and concentration can be strands in a cord of love. Compassion can spring from the dearly bought ability to be totally present to the other. Concentration can become compassion if it is filtered through a sensitive and merciful heart.

In an article in "America" (October 14th, 2000) Fr. Robert E. Kennedy S.J. shared with his readers the Buddhist experience of wisdom and compassion. He believes this experience to be a gift of great value to the Church. He is a Zen Buddhist teacher. He says that when you study Zen you are doing nothing other than practicing a compassionate life. Zen is nothing other than "paying attention in a sustained way". Here are the significant words for our attempt to understand this natural foundation for compassion. "The teaching of Zen is really the act of paying exquisite attention to the person who is sitting right in front of you". To be able to do that, though, in all circumstances, to be able to overcome our preoccupation with tiredness, pain and anxiety is no easy task. We thank our Buddhist brothers and sisters for their insight and turn to our compassionate Lord for the strength and courage to act compassionately.

During his active life Jesus was compassionate to many. As he was dying he did not fail in compassion to those around him. He interceded for the men who were nailing him to the cross, asking the Father to forgive them, saying he believed they didn't really know what they were doing. As the afternoon wore on Jesus spoke to John through what must have been a haze of pain and exhaustion. He asked John to look after his mother, Mary, when he had gone. Finally, once more he wrenched his attention away from his own pain to focus it on another. We are thankful to the man on the cross beside Jews for this jewel-encrusted account of the ultimate personal encounter "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom. Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise".

St. Paul had to put up with many troubles himself, but, at the beginning of his second letter to the Corinthians he blessed "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in ally affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God".

Paul would have us join Fr. Stephenson, Martin of Tours, Dr. Cassidy, the Ugandan woman in their compassionate forgetfulness of themselves, as, in imitation of their compassionate Lord, they made themselves totally present to those who came before them.

Thank God for Books!

Sean Coghlan S.J.

God has been very good to me. He has been good to me in giving. He gave me good health, a good education and a stable family. He has shown to me the beauty of birds, the hills and the sea. In all of these I find joy and consolation.

God has been good, too, in caring for me. I have found a constant strand of His loving care running through my life. I am convinced that God cares for me in a special way by letting me find the books and articles I need just at the time I most need them. These books and articles encourage me, enlighten me and gently challenge me.

Normally I do not find that meetings, sermons, discussion groups, workshops and seminars help me very much. Sometimes they are too slow moving, sometimes they may be too threatening.

But reading! That's another matter. Over and over again the right articles and books have almost thrust themselves into my hands. I cannot now doubt that God loves me because, without fail, He leads me throughout the written word in the way that suits me best.

What I have read has changed me. Not all, by any means, of what I have read is directly spiritual or religious. But it has all, or nearly all, been "human", or better, "humane" reading.

Biographies, novels, essays, poems that open up the richness of our personalities, the wonders of the world; that come down on the side of life; that attempt to answer the anguished cries, "What is it all about?", "Why should I bother to keep on?"

For me reading has pointed out the road to holiness and wholeness. It has shown what can be done with God's grace to achieve that rather rare combination. I cannot plead ignorance for being so little advanced along that two-lane highway.

Reading forced me to re-examine some of the assumptions or "truths" that I had been living by. It has forced me slowly and reluctantly to give up habitual ways of doing things which may have made me feel more secure but which cut me off from a more practical, more exciting and more honest experience of life.

Reading has helped me to pray by giving me the necessary raw material for the essential business of forging links with God. I do not read during prayer. However, if I do not read long and often before and after prayer, I soon cease to pray, or indeed to find much meaning or relish in life.

It seems to me that reading has important advantages over the other media. It gives us time to think, to reflect and to argue in our minds. We can challenge the writer. Reading is a very intense medium. It engages only one sense -- sight. One is not distracted by sound or left behind by movement.

One has time to ask, "Is it true?", "Is it valuable?" One can put aside a piece of writing for months, or even years, and come back to find a truth that may be unpalatable and even a bit frightening, but which is, in the end, stimulating, consoling and strengthening.

Thank God again for the care He has shown me through the written words He has so tenderly slipped into my hands at important moments in my life.

MAKING FRIENDS FOR OURSELVES IN HEAVEN

Sean Coghlan S.J.

I often reflect on four or five years of grace in my life, the grace of knowing a poor man who slept on the streets of Hong Kong. He was a grace to me, a gift from God, presented to me by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. They were kind enough to allow me to accompany them on their twice weekly visits to the street sleepers of Yaumatei. As a result, I met a man I will call Wong Lam.

He was a character. He had been a seaman for twelve years. Unfortunately, while at sea, he began to drink heavily. He had sadnesses in his life and he experienced some plain bad luck. When I got to know him he had been sleeping on the street for about ten years. Because of his health and because of his drinking problem he found it very hard to get a job. He did, in fact, spend several quite long spells in the sisters' home or the brothers' home. He stopped drinking, cleaned up and even fattened up! He was an obliging and useful handyman, but couldn't keep up the effort for too long.

When he had money he shared it generously. He was a very charming and a very funny man. I often brought him to a clinic or a hospital when he was sick. He could make even the sternest nurse laugh as she tried to get him to take his medicine.

Where is he now? I don't know. One day he disappeared without warning and without a trace. He is probably dead. I am grateful to the sisters for introducing Wong Lam to me. Without them I would never have noticed him on the streets of Yaumatei. I would have passed him by. I would never have dared to talk to him or bring him to hospital without their encouragement. Now I have a friend for eternity. When my turn comes to die I hope Wong Lam will be waiting for me and that he will shout out my name and that he will slip me in through a gate, any gate, into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Luke's story about the rich man and Lazarus is a story about the right use of money. The rich man didn't use his money well. He didn't invest wisely by making Lazarus a friend for eternity. He didn't notice Lazarus at his gate. He just didn't see him. To him, Lazarus was a piece of the street scene. The rich man had everything he wanted. He was totally preoccupied with his business, his pleasures and his joys. He didn't have an effective belief in God and in a life after death. He didn't see beyond his riches. Luke does not accuse the rich man of having harmed Lazarus. The rich man didn't curse Lazarus or kick him or have him moved away from his gate. He just passed him by. He didn't notice Lazarus, despite his obvious pain and misery. As a result, he lost an influential friend who could have helped him a lot with eternal credit in heaven.

For Luke being rich, while not actually evil, is dangerous. He regards the rich as unhappy and he invites us to pity them. The broad road along which they journey is not the most direct way to the Kingdom of Heaven. Riches blind us and prevent us from seeing a great deal.

I look back with nostalgia on the days when I visited Wong Lam and his fellow street sleepers. I don't go now because I tell myself I am too busy to go. When I went to the men I didn't have money to give to

them, but I did have time, health and energy. Health and energy I still have, thank God. Time? I could make the time.

Without a doubt, Luke's story is addressed, first of all, to the financially rich. But it can also be considered as addressed to the "rich" in health, energy, time, education or experience, and by "rich" I don't mean super health or abundant energy or years and years of learning or experience or hours and hours of free time. I mean enough for oneself and something left over to share.

Certainly, many of us may not have much money to give to Lazarus, but most of us do have some energy, some time, some experience to share with him. Let's share and make friends for ourselves in heaven.

The starting point and the sticking point are the same. It is hard to see, to notice, to keep our eyes and our hearts open. It's hard not to be afraid of the Lazarus or the Wong Lam we meet. But we don't have to start an enormous, crushing programme to help every poor, sick or lonely person on our various ways. That's the stuff of nightmares. We can, however, sit with or walk with or talk to some of the Lazaruses we meet. We could even join an organisation that works for those in need. Our efforts unite with the efforts of the group and grow. They follow a momentum and logic of their own. We feel less frightened and become more confident.

Our fellowmen and women may need our presence to get them on their feet again or maybe, just to enable them to wait in patience for an improvement which may be long in coming. But we have to see them before we do anything.

Nobody -- not I, certainly -- can afford to talk about Lazarus without qualms or embarrassment. Most of us have failed and are failing to see. We will probably fail again in the future.

May God give us the grace to see what is obvious. May we notice one, a few, some, many who need our presence. May we make friends for heaven who, when our time to die comes, all shout out our names and kick up a fuss and put on pressure in the right quarters. May they slip us into the Kingdom not, perhaps, by the main door, but by a side door, any door, even the back door.

The Consolations of Old Age

Sean Coghlan S.J.

Quietly, during the past couple of years, almost without my conscious awareness, new ways of looking at life have been forming in my mind. Since these ways of looking at life seem to be leading in a good direction, I feel safe in assuming they come from God. I can only respond by being grateful and by trusting that He will guide me to a calmer, richer and more generous way of living.

I have recently embarked on the sixty fifth year of my life. It is statistically likely that at least three quarters of my days are behind me! By no means does death haunt every moment of my day, but it is beginning to take on the familiar face of someone one meets on the street and with whom one exchanges polite greetings. Death's non-threatening appearance over the horizon nudges one into considering how best to live the remaining hours or days or weeks or years.

A second realisation that has dawned on me with gentle force is that things are not always what they seem to be. I have been a baptised Catholic for sixty four years, a Jesuit for forty six years and a priest for thirty two years. Yet, I have to ruefully admit that the driving forces in my life may be as much habit, custom, compulsion, guilt feelings and restlessness as the love of God and my fellowmen and women. Perhaps I am being too hard on myself. However, I sometimes wonder if I have ever allowed myself to risk a real encounter with God or if I have ever responded to Him at a deep level. Am I the classic conventional believer? Do I believe that Christ died for me? If I am play acting and shadow boxing, will He be able to lead me to the real thing? I must trust and hope.

Recently, thanks to an article in the "New Yorker", a tenuously held belief has hardened into something approaching certainty. In an article on Princess Diana, Clive James explored the complexities and ambiguities of the human person. James was well aware of the Princess' failings but saw in a hurt person a certain spiritual beauty accompanying a great physical beauty. I am now more convinced than before that nothing can compare in value with the dignity and the potential beauty and goodness of even the most flawed human being. There is nothing more valuable we can do than to give our full attention to the people we meet as a tribute to whom they are. I imagine that, in so doing, life will become more exciting and enjoyable. In the light of such a belief I may grow in regrets for the people I have hurt, slighted, ignored or "scapegoated", especially those to whom I owe debts based on varying degrees of closeness and obligation.

Much anxiety has been lifted from my shoulders by the growing realisation that it is God who takes and sustains the initiative to "save the world". His love is active and universal. He takes the first step. It is a privilege and a relief to be able to follow in His footsteps as the junior partner in the enterprise. In that enterprise of love and service I can find at least some of the fulfilment I have been seeking for a long time.

Following on the fulfilment is a degree of freedom. I am freer than I used to be. I don't seem to need as many things as I once did. Now, in my relative old age and in my growing conviction that the love of God and of one's fellowmen and women is of ultimate importance, I do not feel the need to protect, shield

and safeguard myself so much. I am now a little more ready to give up a day in the hills because something important has cropped up. I can promise myself the hills in a few days' time. I can still have my plans to look at my match box collection or to learn a few Chinese characters or to try to translate a few simple Chinese poems into English. But I won't get too frustrated and angry if I can't look or learn or try just now.

I hesitated to put these words on paper lest I fall flat on my face before the ink is dry. Maybe at the first vague hint of a pain in the chest I would be reduced to craven fear. Maybe, when pushed that bit too far, I would lose my temper with the importunate. There is also a superstitious hesitancy to admit that things are going well in case the very next day one falls and breaks a leg on the stairs. But then I decided to risk giving a hostage to fortune and pay homage to God's goodness. I must trust that he won't let me look too much of a fool when the test comes for my welcome but, perhaps, frail euphoria.

WHEN URGENT WORK IS DONE

Sean Coghlan S.J.

It is said that confession is good for the soul so I'm going to make a confession. I am sitting at my desk and I don't know what to do with myself. I'm sitting here and I'm feeling a bit paralysed and guilty. There is nothing absolutely urgent that has to be done immediately or sooner. There are lots and lots of things I could do and should do. Believe it or not, there are even many things I want to do.

What's wrong with me? I have it. I'm suffering from withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawing from what? From work that has to be done immediately or sooner! When one is doing such "urgent" work, one feels that one's existence is justified. One forgets about other, more important values. One forgets about the ambiguities and uncertainties of life. One forgets, most of all, about the deep void in one's heart which cannot be filled by anything created, including work. It's there only for God.

A few days ago I went for a walk with a friend. We discussed such matters as we wound our way along the leafy and humid trails of Hong Kong island. My friend is a competent and successful business man. He has worked very hard. Yet, he knows that, due to objective circumstances, he has, by now, attained all that he can reasonably expect to attain in his profession. To achieve more would demand a severe boosting of effort and a major change of direction. Even if he worked very hard, it might be impossible to attain further success and it might be of no clear benefit to society. Where does he go and what does he do? Start to work even harder?

Do you want to be an addict? You do! Don't worry. There is plenty of scope for you to become one. Alcohol? No problem. Try the supermarkets. Cigarettes? Easy, same place. Drugs? I believe no problem. But don't ask me where. Work? Easiest of all. There is loads of it around. You'll even be praised for choosing work as your addiction. And yet work is an addiction and a dangerous one.

I am sure you will be able to find plenty of articles on work addiction. I have, however, a modest suggestion on how to overcome such an addiction. Face now a state of life that we will all have to face some time or other in the future. Granted the normal pattern of human life and no sad, sudden and surprise accident, we all come to the time when we have to "hand over" and "give up". We begin to realise that we cannot do as much as we used to and that we will soon enough be able to do even less. We slowly and rather unwillingly realise that the world will keep going without us. Others will come along to take over from us and do, perhaps, even better than we have done.

Since that stage is going to come, whether we like it or not, then we have to prepare for it. Of course, we should not give up too soon. But, does the thought of losing energy and not being busy and useful worry you? Face it now. Practice a little not being busy. If you don't do it now, you may not be able to do it later. I know some people who find it extremely difficult to accept that the active part of their lives are coming to an end. By dint of will power they force themselves to keep going, at the cost, though, of being painful to themselves and to others.

I suggest that we all need to look at our values, at what we consider to be important. When I cannot work as hard as I do now, how am I going to convince myself that I am still valuable and useful and that life is still worth living, even though I may not be making an obvious, measurable impression on the world around me?

Prepare now. Sit and do nothing for a while. Control that slight feeling of panic as you begin to shift uneasily on your chair. That's what I was trying to do just a short time ago. Was doing, notice! Now, I'm writing this article!

MONEY

Sean Coghlan S.J.

At the beginning of the fifth chapter of his epistle, James makes a fierce and sustained attack on a certain type of rich person. Shortly after I read the chapter I decided, for interest's sake to save up some of the reports on the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings which were just about to start in Hong Kong. The next day I stopped collecting! One reason was that there were so many of them. The second reason was that I could hardly understand a line of what was being reported.

However, I could see that an extraordinary event was happening. I fell to contemplating the amazing sight of so much money and power, so many influential people gathered in one small area. There was something almost beautiful in the financial energy present. I thought of all the good that could be done if so much money could be harnessed for the genuine service of the greatest number of us all, dwellers of this planet.

My contemplation was helped by a radio programme I heard and an article I read during the week. The radio programme was about a farming project on the slopes of Mount Elgon in Uganda. Some agricultural instructors introduced bee keeping and honey production methods to subsistence farmers in the area. The dedication of the instructors and a very modest financial investment in the project brought self-belief and dignity to the farmers. What a good use of the riches entrusted by God to the human family!

On the other hand I read an article in "The New Yorker" about Bosnia, a part of the former Yugoslavia. It was a chilling account of human brutality. Because of their savage greed some of the political leaders stirred up fear, suspicion and racial hatred among the Croats, Serbs and Muslims. As a result of murder, intimidation and "racial cleansing" houses and land fell vacant. Some people became rich beyond their most selfish dreams. So, riches can be double edged.

In general what have the Old and New Testament to tell us about riches?

They tell us somewhat cautiously and without too much emphasis, that riches and possessions are good and useful. They are from God, like the stars and the sea and our bodies and music and football. And then the warnings start!

There is an almost amusing warning from Jesus. It is very suitable for I.M.F./W.B week. He speaks like a good investment adviser. He tells us to invest our money wisely. We should invest in people. We should be shrewd enough to make influential friends who will do us a good turn when we need one. He is referring to the poor, widows, orphans and the sick. He warns us to make sure that we have eternal credit laid up in the Bank of Heaven.

Jesus also warns potential investors that no investment, no share, no cheque is absolutely and totally reliable. We cannot depend on money. He was not being interviewed for the local equivalent of "The Asia Wall Street Journal". In fact, even that journal in its field would have to agree with him -- and history would back it up. He was, in fact, talking about attempts to safeguard our whole human life,

material and spiritual, present and future. Nothing but the grace and help of God and a good conscience can guarantee us ultimate security.

Very clearly implied in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is that while riches are good, or, at least, neutral, they are dangerous, very dangerous. They are addictive. Nowadays health warnings are printed on all cigarette advertisements. Perhaps addiction warnings should be printed on all banknotes higher than, say, \$50.

Money can blind us to every value but itself. It can make us materialistic and hard-hearted. It can convince us that because we have lots of money, we can make our own rules, do anything we like, buy anybody we want. I heard of a rich young woman who asked a priest to help her leave home and find a room to live in. The priest asked her why she wanted to leave home. She said that she was being corrupted. Her father thought of nothing but money. The young woman said that she half-believed that when her father got to the gates of heaven and St. Peter showed some hesitation about letting him in, her father would laugh and say, "OK, OK; I understand. What kind of money are you talking about?"!

Once upon a time, Jesus told his disciples that it was impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. They were shocked and protested. In reply he said (my words) "Well, it's impossible for anyone to get into heaven by one's own efforts. But, with God's help, even a rich man can get into heaven".

Do you feel sad when you cannot cage the golden-red sun, setting behind Lantau Island and keep it forever? Do you feel angry when the Hwamei singing so gloriously from the bushes behind Big Wave Bay, flies away and leaves you bereft. Not too sad or too angry, I hope. You thank God that such loveliness should just be.

We thank God for the power and energy of money and for the goodness, joy, comfort and beauty it can bring with it. We thank God when we have some money ourselves, but we need to ask him to teach us to be content when we have enough and we need to trust him when we are in need. He will help us not to become addicted. I knew a man once. He was a good man, but even his family and friends would shake their heads in wonderment and say, "You know, he really loved money".

Did you ever hear about the gold prospector in the good old days in Alaska? He slaved for months in the bitter cold, in the mud and the darkness to fill his poke with gold. He came into town and lost the lot in fifteen minutes at cards. As he left the saloon he shrugged his shoulders and said philosophically, "Ah well! Just like my old granddad used to say 'Easy come, easy go'". We need to be somewhat similarly relaxed about money.

I would be almost embarrassed to recommend to you to trust in God when things are not going well for you financially. I find it hard to suggest that a young man or woman consider giving up everything and following Christ poor. Why do I hesitate? Perhaps, like the man in the Gospel, I do have faith, but not enough - yet. Maybe the most we can squeeze out of ourselves is a desire to want to want to be poor and depend on God.

Finally, let me tell you that I do know a woman in Hong Kong who does put herself in God's hands and gets by on what I would consider very little.

The Lord is My Shepherd

Sean Coghlan, S.J.

Recently I heard a story about an Australian doctor who was planning to retire. He had bought a piece of land and was beginning to grow a few things and to buy a few animals. One day he saw that a conference for sheep farmers was being held locally, so he went along out of interest.

Calling His Flock By Name

He was having a beer in the lobby of the hotel when a tall, rugged, sun-burnt character sat down beside him and ordered a drink. The newcomer asked the doctor where he was farming and how many sheep he had. "Three" said the farmer-to-be rather proudly. "Oh, I see" was the devastating reply, "and what names do you call your sheep?".

I suppose to a farmer who had 18,000 sheep spread over, perhaps, a couple of hundred square miles of 'outback' three sheep must have seemed a very small flock indeed. With three sheep he probably reckoned one could be on first name terms.

Jesus Our Shepherd

In the tenth chapter of John's Gospel we are told that Jesus calls his sheep by name. The situation presupposed in the Gospel is a walled enclosure sheltering several different flocks for the night. As each shepherd comes along in the morning, he calls his sheep and they come out to follow him for the day.

Jesus calls you by name. Imagine it! Yes, do. Do please imagine Jesus calling you by name. What name would you like him to call you by? What name do you like to be called by those you love? Let Jesus call you by that name and you will soon begin to believe in the great love God has for you through Jesus your shepherd.

But we have to remember that there is a stern side to Jesus' calling us by name. He calls us not just to peace and intimacy. He calls us to peace and intimacy through conversion and repentance.

As early as Mark 1:15, and, echoing John the Baptist, Jesus called out, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel".

Original Sin

We are sinful people needing to be saved. Sin is part and parcel of our very nature. We have to be turned upside down and inside out. We need a change of mind, heart, outlook and direction.

Recently I looked up the word 'Politics' in the 'Catechism of the Catholic Church'. It said very little about politics. But the paragraph is worth reading for what it says about sin, quoting Pope John Paul II: *"The doctrine of original sin, closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, provides lucid discernment of man's situation in the world. By our first parents' sin the devil has acquired a certain domination over man, even though man remains free."*

Original sin entails captivity under the power of him who thenceforth had the power of death, that is the devil. Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature, inclined to evil, gives rise to serious errors in the area of education, politics, social action and morals."

Education is not enough

Having been teaching and administering in schools for over twenty years, I am quite skeptical when I hear confident assertions that the solution to all our problems of juvenile delinquency, lack of respect and motivation on the part of our students is a better educational system. I am skeptical, at least, if by education we merely mean efficient communication of masses of information, mastery of the computer, teaching positive thinking.

Somehow God's grace must flow into any system, so that in a moment of honest despair we may not have to call out with St. Paul, "I do not the good I want, but the evil I do not want, is what I do". We need a change of heart before we act on the wonderful things we hear in the classroom. What hope for Israel and Palestine despite all the conferences and all the international pressure, unless God softens hearts, making hearts of flesh out of hearts of stone?

In his first letter, St. Peter tells us that Jesus is the shepherd and guardian of our souls. There is a slight danger in the name, 'shepherd' – it suggests a good shepherd in a stained glass window carrying a cuddly lamb on his shoulders. A shepherd has to be strong and courageous and has to have some persuasive power when his sheep stray.

The Shepherd's Demands

I felt very moved the first time I saw a Gospel-like shepherd leading his sheep. It was on a high, dry plain in Spain. I rushed excitedly to the roadside when I heard the bells. There, indeed, was the shepherd leading his flock. However, honestly makes it necessary to admit that behind the flock was a quite efficient looking dog who, with the odd warning bark and the occasional judicious nip brought the laggards and strayers back to the main flock.

Jesus is the shepherd and guardian of our souls. He loves us and died for us, but he can make demands on us. He wouldn't be much of a shepherd if he couldn't. Thanks to Him we can find our way through the mazes and thickets of the world to honest, joyful, generous and forceful living with God and our fellow men and women.

The name 'shepherd' had a long and honorable history in the Old Testament. The shepherd was the loving, caring king of the people. He was their protector and judge. The Loyalty to him was rewarded by overwhelming loyalty on his part to them. That loyalty was an essential element of his noble nature.

So the good shepherd is a strong, loving figure once we know who He really is, what He really asks of us and what He really promises. He wishes to win our glad obedience, not a grudging, sullen service or childish dependency.

In such an understanding of Jesus, we can, without embarrassment, pray,

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Speaking Of God From The Heart

Sean Coghlan S.J.

About thirty years ago a well-known English priest and theologian, Charles Davis, left the Church. It was a shock to many people. He wrote an article explaining why he left. It was a humble and moving piece of writing. Another writer summed up what he wrote in this way:

"After Vatican II I was enthusiastic about the prospects there were for Church renewal, for updating and changing structures. I would offer to packed audiences the wonderful new theology of Vatican II that contained such rich potential for aggiornamento and reform. But gradually, it dawned upon me that all those faces turned up towards me were not seeking a new theology; they were seeking God. They were not looking up to me as a theologian with a message, but as a priest, who might be able to offer them God. They were obviously hungry for God. Then I would look into myself and realize, with a sinking heart that I could not offer them God; I barely had him myself! There was a great void in my heart -- and the busier I was with things like Church reform and updating structure, even with the liturgical renewal and scripture studies and pastoral methods, the easier it was for me to escape from God, to escape from the void in my heart."

Charles Davis was not saying a new theology and updating were not necessary. What he was saying was that if we lack personal experience of God, then nobody will take our God-talk, our talk about theology and updating seriously.

I would like to share with you some very deep, warm and influential memories I have of Christmas. If the world doesn't take my God-talk seriously, it is my fault not His. When I was young He shared Himself very generously with me at Christmas. Any absence of God in my heart is due to my lack of attention to Him.

Every year when I was a child we had a Christmas crib at home. My father made a cave out of a wooden box covered with black paper crumpled to look like rocks. The roof and sides were covered with imitation frost. There was straw on the floor and a small red electric bulb in the roof. On the back wall of the cave was a picture of a Palestinian village street scene. In the cave were Jesus, Mary and Joseph with shepherds, wise men, sheep and a cow. There were even two robins perched on the rocks looking in.

A few days before Christmas my father and I went out to the country, sometimes in real frost, to collect ivy and moss to decorate the cave. I looked forward to that expedition for months.

The crib was in our living room, by the fire. I remember looking for hours in wonder at the cave, fascinated and deeply happy. I knew, of course, I was looking at something of religious significance. I was looking too, though, at a scene that was inextricably connected with the warmest human events -- Christmas cards and presents, holidays in crisp, biting frosty weather, and Christmas food, visits to and from friends and relatives.

I have never doubted the reality of Christ becoming a human person and entering my life. He entered my Christmases in a very real way, suited to a child. He was the essential feature of a happy Christmas holidays.

However, as I grew older, I realised Christ became a human person in an even more complete and thorough way. He didn't come just to make me happy at Christmas! He became a man and experienced a selection of all the experiences we have. He was born away from home and became a refugee. He learned a job. He lived a very ordinary life for many years. He met with success and even popularity. He also experienced fierce opposition and rejection. He had friends and enjoyed life. He spoke out the truth and suffered grievously for it. In His human experiences, recorded in the Gospels, we can experience God and fill the void in our hearts.

But even that might not be enough. The danger still might remain that we would experience Him as a great man, an influential leader an inspiration, fine and wonderful but, now, dead like so many heroes of the past. We can experience Him as alive and acting because he is alive and acting. Christ rose from the dead and is now sitting at the right hand of His Father, deeply interested in us and praying for us. He is alive and active in the Church, His "body" living in this enormous world of men and women. He is alive and influencing us in the sacraments. He is in each person we meet. He told us He would be. He is "built into" God's very plan for the developing, emerging world and universe in which we live.

If we are to have something of value to say to the world about God we must have something of Him in us to offer. We must in some way have come to know Him as He knows us, experience Him as He has experienced us.

There are many places we can choose as starting points to meet Him. For me, I think, that place was the Christmas crib. Where is your chosen meeting place with God?

COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

Sean Coghlan S.J.

There is a beautiful passage at the beginning of the letter to the Hebrews. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son". From these words and from other passages in the New and Old Testaments I take it that all communication between God and man begins with God. If he hadn't leaned down and spoken to us, we could never have spoken to Him. If he hadn't opened himself to us and told us of his love for us, we would forever have been unsure of his presence and care. I say "unsure" because in many men's and women's hearts there are suspicions, hopes, almost certainties that God exists and is interested in them. Many have longed in a semi instinctive way for a God who cares. From the beauties of nature, from the peace and quiet of the night after a day of worry and suffering, some have formed the imperceptibly growing hope that there is One who gives meaning to existence and rest to tired, anxious minds and bodies. But, not unnaturally, men and women are slow to dare to say with complete confidence and conviction, "God", "Father".

Christ came among us and showed us by his actions, by his kindness and by his humanity that there is one who cares and that the One is God our Father. Through him our Father speaks to us. He speaks to us in clear and concrete terms. He tells us that he is concerned for us and for our happiness. He tells us that the sign of our love for him is the fact that we love and serve others. He gives us the general principles by which we can live honest, chaste and just lives. God our Father speaks to us through the things that his Son did; curing the sick, listening to the unfortunate, consoling the hurt, forgiving sinners, eating, drinking and working like any of us, enjoying life, suffering, dying and rising from the dead.

God the Father speaks to us in the Church which his Son established and keeps alive. Through the Church he guides, encourages and occasionally admonishes us. He speaks to us in words and actions in the Sacraments, blessing and making holy all the important moments of our lives.

God our Father speaks to us in the things that happen to us in our lives and he speaks to us when we go away to a quiet place to be with him in formal "prayer". He speaks to us in silence in the depths of our hearts as he spoke to his Son and our Brother in the hills away from the noise of ordinary life.

God speaks and we listen. This is no ordinary conversation and so we need to listen more than we normally do. But we can and should speak too. God will listen. To encourage, to strengthen us, in fact, even to make it possible for us to speak to the Father, the Holy Spirit has been sent into our hearts. Without the Holy Spirit we would not understand and mean what we say when we say "Father".

When we speak to God we can say what we want. We can thank God and bless God and praise God. We can ask him for what we want and what our friends want and what the world wants. We can complain. The better we have listened to God, the more familiar and confident will our speaking to Him be. St. Teresa of Avila was a great friend of God. Her ears and heart were always open (after years of partial deafness!) to His least whisper. She worked hard to spread His Kingdom. One night the bottom of the cart in which she was travelling fell out. She found herself sitting in the middle of an icy mountain

stream. Tired, cross, very wet and very cold she was heard to say to her God: "If this is the way you treat your friends, I'm not surprised you haven't many of them". All that Jesus said about speaking to God our Father encourages us to be as confident and open and honest as Teresa was. We won't go too far. We won't become bitter and we won't become too impatient if we have been listening a lot.

God speaks to us. We speak to God. We listen to God. God listens to us. Communication has been established. The line is open!



B I R D S O F W A H Y A N

Written by Fr. Sean Coghlan S.J. for Starlet Magazine (May 1993)

A few years ago I wrote an article about the birds of Wah Yan College, Kowloon. In seventeen years I identified thirty seven different birds there. In this article I want to introduce to you the birds of Wah Yan College, Hong Kong. How many birds do you think can be identified without leaving the grounds of Wah Yan? More or less than in Wah Yan, Kowloon? Read on, if you wish to know!

At almost any time of the day, all you have to do is to look up and you will see, high above you, Black



Kites (麻鷹) circling, soaring and spiralling effortlessly on the warm air currents. (Note from the Webmaster: 10 years after Fr. Coghlan wrote this article, he was fortunate enough to have discovered an interesting Black Kites nest in the heart of the city. If you have broadband connection and Internet Explorer 7.0 or above, you are welcome to click [here](#) to view a streamed video of “A Secret Black Kites Nest”.)

Wherever there are some trees, you are likely to see the neat, grey forms of Spotted Doves (珠頸班鳩



) or hear the “Crack, Crack, Crack” of their wings if you startle them. Often there are three or four of them perched on the railings above my office. From there, with a few flaps of their wings, they launch themselves into a long, steep glide to the roof of St. Joseph’s Primary School.

If you stand near the fish pond and look down to the house on Wanchai Road you can



see Pigeons (白鴿) wheeling backwards and forwards around the roosts provide for them by some fanciers. Doves and Pigeons are close relatives.

One of the most characteristic Spring sounds of Wah Yan is the “Coo-EE-Oo” of



the Koel (噪鵲). The Koel is a member of the Cuckoo family. Like some other members of the family, the Koel lays its eggs in other birds’ nests. The male is jet black; the female a spotted brown. It is a shy bird, but if you are patient, you may see one in the big banyan tree opposite the main



entrance. I have often seen its cousin, the Greater Coucal (毛雞), walking around the upper car park or along the tops of the bushes below the fish pond. It is a very handsome black and chestnut bird, with a resounding “Boom, Boom, Boom” call.

Certainly the most unpleasant call of all is that of the Sulphur-Crested



Cockatoo (琉璃冠大鸚鵡). These birds are totally white, except for a prominent light yellow crest. They squawk raucously from the roof of the Gordon Wu Hall. They are probably descendants of birds released from cages before the Japanese invasion.



Rose-Ringed Parakeets (紅領綠鸚鵡) are also an introduced species. These birds are all green, except for a rose coloured ring around their necks. One can see them flying swiftly above Queen’s Road East, parallel to the main school building.

Until quite recently the trees and older buildings of Ruttonjee Hospital provided shelter for the Collared



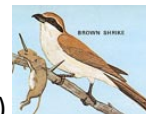
Scops Owl (領角貓頭鷹). I often heard its “Hoo-a, Hoo-a” late at night. A few times it called from the big banyan tree that overhangs the school roof. I got near it, but could not see it. From the roof too, I marvel on early summer evenings at the speed of the House



Swifts (小白腰雨燕) as they slash their way through the air. Often mingled with them are



their dreamier cousins the Swallows (燕子).



A very occasional passage visitor to Wah Yan is the Brown Shrike (紅尾伯勞).



Strangely I have only rarely seen Black Drongoes (黑捲尾) around the school. They confine themselves to the trees around the end of the Library. Drongoes are glossy black birds with peculiar, rather loose looking tails. They are abundant elsewhere, especially in Cheung Chau.



Black-Necked Starlings (黑領椋鳥) have recently extended their range from the New Territories to urban Hong Kong and Kowloon. They have a cheerful song which you can hear from time to time from the aerials on the roof of the Gordon Wu Hall. These black and white birds have an upright, perky way of half walking and half running. You can see them very clearly on the green turf of the Happy Valley and Sokonpo playing-pitches.



At almost any hour of the day, Sparrows (麻雀), Mynahs (八哥)



, Magpies (喜鵲), Crested Bulbuls (高雞冠) and Chinese Bulbuls (白頭翁) bring life, movement and chirping, chortling noise to Wah Yan. Bulbuls and Spotted Doves have nested successfully in our grounds. Where? That is classified information!

Much more difficult to spot are two members of the Warbler family. One of them, the White



Eyes (相思), is a very popular cage bird. The other is the Long-Tailed Tailor



Bird (裁縫鳥), a small brown bird with a long tail which is often cocked. It has a rust coloured streak on its fore-head. Like every good tailor, this bird can sew! It stitches two leaves together and makes its nest in the cup. I found a nest Ricci Hall. It was fascinating. You can know the Tailor Bird is around by its ceaseless “Chip, Chip, Chip” call.



The smallest bird inhabitant of Wah Yan is the White-Backed Munia (白腰文雀). Munais are mostly to be seen in the bushes near the pedestrian-crossing on the main avenue.



The Blackbird (烏鶇) visits us occasionally from Guangdong Province.



My favourite Wah Yan bird is the Violet Whistling Thrush (紫嘯鶇). Seen in the right light, it really is violet with white spangles. It gives a persistent, monotonous whistle and flicks out its tail into a fan every few seconds. These thrushes are most at home around rocky streams. In Wah Yan, they spend most of their time in the valley between the main school building and the Gordon Wu Hall. On one wet grey day, though, I saw one of them in the corridor just outside my office door and perched rather miserably in the grille outside Mr. Tam's office.



The Blue Magpie (藍喜鵲) is a very fine looking bird. It is blue with a black head and a red beak. It has a very long tail. Blue Magpies are aggressive, noisy birds and are inclined to eat other birds' eggs.

If you keep your ears open and have a good sense of direction, you will be able to pinpoint the



occasional pair of Jungle Crows (大咀烏鴉) as they wing their way from Black's Link to Wanchai Gap.

Coming to school in the morning, you cannot fail to see and hear parties of Black-Faced Laughing



Thrushes (七姊妹). I stress the work "parties". These birds are always in groups of three or four. They seem to spend all their time arguing and scolding one another.

Around the slope between the lower car-park and the access road you will hear, oftener than you will



see, one or two Hwameis (畫眉). This ochre coloured bird has a vivid chalky white streak over its eyes and a lovely song.

Wherever you look in Wah Yan your attention will almost certainly be caught by the cocky,



aggressive Magpie Robin (豬屎咋). It sings quite well and doesn't know the meaning of the word "shy". In colour it is like a miniature magpie, but is in no way related to that much bigger bird.



Normally Great Tits (白臉山雀) find their favourite food in pine trees. We do have some pine trees in Wah Yan but not enough to satisfy them. Therefore, they do not hesitate to make use of the banyans and bauhinias around the bridge between our two buildings. They are small lively birds with a greyish body, black cap and "See-See-Tse, See-See-Tse" call.



In winter we are visited by the White Wagtail (白鵲鷓). As you could guess, it wags its tail up and down without ceasing. It flies in undulating swoops. It is a visitor from Northern China.



Finally, to one of the almost hidden glories of Wah Yan, the Fork-Tailed Sunbird (叉尾太陽鳥) is not easy to spot. It is small and moves very quickly. It has a long deeply forked tail and a downward curving beak. Once it finds a flower it likes, it spends quite a good deal of time feeding at it. It has extraordinary, almost enamel like, blue-green, crimson and yellow colours. It has a sustained twittering song. These mornings very, very early I can hear it singing in the bushes outside my room.

I have, then, identified thirty one birds in Wah Yan College, Hong Kong. Two or three birds are still frustrating me, but I'll get them! In so far as my observations are correct, Wah Yan, Hong Kong has two birds which Wah Yan, Kowloon does not have. They are the Brown Shrike and the Fork Tailed Sunbird. Wah Yan Kowloon has, on the other hand eight birds that we do not seem to have. They are the following:



White-Breasted Kingfisher (白胸魚郎)



, Indian Cuckoo (四聲杜鵑)



, Kestrel (紅隼)



, Yellow-Browed Warbler (黃眉柳鶯)

, Cattle



Egret (牛背鷺)



Chinese Greenfinch (金翅雀)



Red-Flanked Bluetail (紅肋藍尾鵯)

, and, believe it or not, Ring-Necked Pheasant (環頸雉).

I can finish in no better a way than the way I finished my article on the birds of Wah Yan, Kowloon. I quote, "I went to Crescent College, Limerick, a Jesuit school, in 1942. In the Jesuit tradition of education we were, among other things, gently led to an appreciation of the beauty of the world around us. From my very first days in the Crescent, I was enthralled by a set of glass-cases full of birds in their "natural" habitats. The Students' Library had some very good books on birds. Since those early days of delight I have been deeply interested in birds. They have given me countless hours of joy and consolation."

"Here in Wah Yan, students are even luckier than I was in the Crescent. We have a living exhibition of birds all around us. My fond hope is that some of my readers will begin to explore the beauty of the bird life of Wah Yan. All you need is a sense of wonder and curiosity, a little persistence and a simple book on the birds of Hong Kong. Binoculars check lists and a visit to Antarctica or the Amazon can come later. I promise you loveliness all the days of you life."



As this article was going to press I heard a Yellow-Bellied Wren-Warbler (灰頭鷓鴣) volleying out its song from the bushes on the slope.



Letter to National Geographic Magazine

4th November 2009

Ms. Hannah Holmes

Mr. Charlie Hamilton-James

c/o Editor in Chief

National Geographic Magazine

Dear Ms. Holmes and Mr. Hamilton-James,

I have asked your editor to pass on this letter to you because I want you to know how much I enjoyed your "Flashy Kingfishers" I would like to share with you a quotation from "Brideshead Revisited" by Evelyn Waugh. It sprang to my mind as I read your text and looked at your photographs.

Waugh is describing how he felt the night he first saw his lover, Julia : "That night and the night after and the night after, wherever she went, always in her own little circle of intimates, she brought a moment of joy, such as strikes deep to the heart on the river's bank when the kingfisher flares suddenly across the water".

I, too, have felt that leap of the heart at the sight of the kingfisher in flight in places as far apart as the Clare Glens in Ireland and a valley near Sai Kung in Hong Kong. In gratitude for your article I share some precious memories with you.

Another kingfisher that has thrilled me in Hong Kong is the Pied Kingfisher. It isn't as spectacular as the Common Kingfisher but it has, however, an equal turn of speed. One day as I was watching an enormous container ship coming up Lamma Channel my attention was suddenly caught by a Pied Kingfisher speeding over the water of the harbour. Hong Kong is a place of contrasts.

A third kingfisher, the White Breasted Kingfisher, was a regular inhabitant of the football field in Wah Yan College, Kowloon where I taught for many years. It hunched on the crossbar between the goal posts and would suddenly shoot across the field to a hole in a bank beside Wylie Road. On the other side of Wylie Road are the railway tracks which daily carry dozens of trains to the towns of the New Territories and to China just twenty miles away.

Beside the football field and within yards of the playground and car park I had one of the biggest surprises of my life. There I trapped a real, true wild animal which you will be glad to hear I immediately released back into the wild. The animal was a civet cat. Its "wilderness" was a low scrub and tree covered ridge, crowned by Hong Kong's inevitable blocks of flats. This true wild animal lived within a six or seven minutes' walk of Nathan Road, arguably one of the busiest city streets in the world. You may well ask why I was using a trap. I was catching (with some success) stray dogs which had banded together and were becoming potential hazards to students and passers-by.

On the headlands of Hong Kong Island's east coast I have rejoiced in the sight of the White Bellied Sea Eagle circling watchfully over the waters of the Tathong Channel. Over the harbour Black

Eared Kites ride the thermals in graceful, relaxed circles. Out in the New Territories I have often chuckled at lemony - white Cattle Egrets standing long-legged on the backs of Brown Cows and Water Buffaloes, both parties perfectly content with the arrangement.

One morning I was unable to shoo an invading bird out of my office in Wah Yan College, Hong Kong. I had to catch it in order to release it through the open window. I gasped at the cloisonné like colours of that glorious little Fork-Tailed Sunbird.

On the western side of Hong Kong Island where I now live, one can regularly see and (unfortunately) hear the Sulphur-Crested Cockatoos whose ancestors were released by their owners during World War II. Their strident squawks are compensated for by the lovely song of the Hwamei and the rich, meditative, almost absent-minded notes of a Laughing Thush. Last night as I wrote this letter I heard the tiny Scops Owl cooing plaintively from the small, rough valley below us.

Since I don't know you personally I can't be sure if you would like to hear about a couple of the animals one can occasionally and fleetingly see in Hong Kong. I'll take a chance!

Just once in forty-five years I saw a flash of brown as a Barking Deer slipped through the undergrowth near the Taiipo Forestry Reserve. On the branches of the banyan tree which almost touch our dining room windows scamper squirrels attracted by the ripe fruit. And this only a couple of hundred yards from Pokfulam Road, a major artery, which funnels buses on twenty six routes down to Central and beyond.

Two final Hong Kong treasures I would like to share with you are the Bamboo Orchid and the Variegated Bauhinia. On the slopes of the Pat Sin (Eight Immortals) Range in the New Territories and on the bank of a stream in Tai Tam Reservoir I have found the tiny Bamboo Orchid. In many places all over Hong Kong the Variegated Bauhinia can be seen in parks and by the roadside. Looking up through its flowers on a summer day I often thought that I was looking through a cloud of pink and white snowflakes dancing in the air.

My delight in all the sights and sounds I have been telling you about must undoubtedly go back to the blackbirds, thrushes and curlews of my Irish childhood and to other privileged revelations of nature at its loveliest and most moving.

When I was in, primary school during World War II our classes were enlivened by the brisk clip clop of the hooves of four immaculately groomed horses and the cheerful toots of a long post horn. Lord Adare, a local landowner, did his bit to solve the petrol shortage by putting a stage coach on the road between Limerick city and Adare village.

Overhead dozens of swifts screamed as they swept through the air to dive into their nests set under the window-sills of the old Georgian houses in the Crescent. You can understand why my lessons may have been a bit distracted.

To this day I can still see in my mind's eye the Swedish grain ship just arrived in Limerick port. Surprisingly she was almost completely white. Even more unbelievably (for I know and love ships

too) the ship was festooned with hanging pots of red geraniums and cages of canaries and other brightly coloured birds. All the way from Buenos Aires she was. I thought of an Irish poem which begins: "There came a ship from Valparaiso" Same continent! Equally romantic.

Most of all, however, my thoughts go back to two scenes of my early boyhood soon after I learned how to ride a bicycle.

In a second I am back sitting on a bank of the Mulcair in Co. Limerick with my father. We are watching salmon, coiled into half circles, jumping a waterfall on the river. With equal speed I am standing one Spring morning on a winding country road near Patrickswell in that same county. The mist is slowly lifting to reveal in all their sleek elegance dozens of mares and foals dotted all over an enormous, sloping pasture of a bloodstock farm. Another magical moment.

I intend to circulate this letter to some friends, colleagues and students in Hong Kong and elsewhere. Once again I thank you for sharing with us your magical moments.

Yours sincerely,
Sean