

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER FROM THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS COMMUNITY,
8 CROFTWOOD GROVE, CHERRY ORCHARD, DUBLIN 10.

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December 2015

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Unconditional Love

Paul Hendrick

I stood at the kitchen window one morning last week and watched our daily visiting flock of sparrows enjoying their breakfast in the back garden. A cry of alarm must have gone out and suddenly the entire flock disappeared into the trees at the end of the garden. The entire flock, that is, bar one little chick which was too slow. A majestic sparrow hawk swooped and carried the off the hapless chick before my horrified eyes.

It got me thinking, inspired, no doubt, by the fact that I'd just been re-reading some of Gregory Boyle's ideas on Kinship and the power of boundless compassion¹.

It's hard not to love the young people who attend The Life Centre but it's not always easy. Joey and

Eddie were good mates. They had attended the Life Centre together and remained pals after they graduated. Two years ago on a cold, wet Sunday evening they met by arrangement in a public park to look for a gun that had been hidden in the bushes there. They didn't find it. On their way out of the park, as they crossed a pedestrian bridge, the real reason for the meeting became apparent. Joey took a gun out of his pocket and shot his friend. As Eddie lay in agony on the ground, Joey pulled the trigger twice more but the gun jammed.

¹*Tattoos on the Heart (The power of boundless compassion) by Gregory Boyle SJ.*

Unconditional Love
Paul Hendrick

Retreat Reflections
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Retreatants

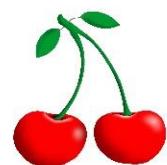
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Eddie lost an eye; Joey was sentenced to twenty years "to send a message to the powerful drug dealers" ² who had demanded that Joey carry out the shooting on their behalf as payment for a debt owed by Joey. Two lives ruined. It's hard when someone you love shoots someone you love!

Drug dealers do untold damage to countless lives. Young people are trapped into a life of addiction and suffering by the sheer greed of unscrupulous and violent drug barons.



Tommy had just celebrated his thirteenth birthday and was settling in to The Life Centre when he was arrested by an undercover Garda to whom he tried to sell five euro worth of hash. His remaining four deals, which were found during a body search, were confiscated. In the Children's Court, an understanding judge gave Tommy the benefit of the probation act. His supplier wasn't quite as understanding and insisted that Tommy pay the twenty euro which he owed for the confiscated

deals. Tommy knew that he would have to sell twenty more deals to be able to pay off his debt (his profit on each deal was one euro). Either that or, in all probability, get a severe hiding. He chose to do the deals. That was more than ten years ago. He's still dealing. How many lives has he wrecked, some of them past pupils of The Life Centre?

It's hard when someone you love wrecks the lives of people you love.

Peter was sentenced to 240 hours of community service or, failing that, six months in prison. For most of us this choice is a no-brainer. For Peter, the father of two young sons who adore their Daddy, it should have been even more of a no-brainer. For him it was - for some inexplicable reason he chose the six months in prison. Six months of struggle for his partner looking after two young children on her own with reduced income; six months of two little boys longing for their Daddy to play with them; six months of loneliness in an overcrowded cell.

It's hard when someone you love hurts the people they love most.

Unconditional love.

Nobody said it was going to be easy!

Retreat Reflections

Over the past few years, the Brothers in the Cherry Orchard Community have offered six-day, on-site retreats to Brothers and others.

The Following four reflections were penned by retreatants in May and July of this year and are reproduced here with their permission.

(For further information about the retreats please contact Seán, Martin or Paul).

Heart of Stone

Remove my heart of stone
O Lord, my heartfelt plea,
Restore my heart of flesh
As centre of my being.

When I meet you in the
gutter,
May I kneel and feel at peace.
The other is my brother,
And therefore is my Lord.

Donal Blake



²Words of the sentencing judge.



Reality Check

I spent so long staring at that space, wondering why it was so silent.

They told me You were there.

It never made much sense.

They told me I should bow to them and to You, but I knew You were bigger.

Slowly I stepped out of my comfort zone and heard you in the Wind.

Then I heard You in the birds and felt You in the earth under my feet.

It was in the Orchard I heard you crying in despair, in the shouts and bangs.

I also heard Your dreams in the silence of the vast expanse.

Then I saw the real You, in stories of turmoil, hidden away so no one could see, or they chose not to see.

Loneliness, abandonment, heartbreak -

the cross is sometimes too clear to see.

And yet, I refuse to stop dreaming about the Hopelandic.

I can still hear the February singing: "My Sweet Lord, I really want to see You!"

Jane Mellett

Walking with a Contemplative Eye

Bent bars in the park fence flaking paintwork

Crushed cans scattered now and again

Tidy homes speaking of dignity and pride

Casual rubbish on clean streets

Featureless expanses of green

Graffiti giving voice to the voiceless

Irritating the articulate peace and calm

Masking quite desperation

Punctuating chaos.

Denis Gleeson

The Searcher and the Finder

I'm searching, I'm searching.

I seem to hear me say.

I'm looking in, I'm looking out.

Forever and a day.

I'm finding, I'm finding.

The Creator calls, I've found.

My Beloved ones are walking.

All ground is Holy Ground.

The searcher and the finder wed
They dance the hallowed ground.

And energy, real life, erupts
And carries all around.

Anne Keating

In the summer of 2014 the community in Cherry Orchard appealed to the Brothers in the European Province for help with the setting up of a fund to assist with our outreach work in The North Wall and Cherry Orchard. We started off our new financial year in September 2015 with a balance of €1,678 in the Outreach Fund.

Since then we have received contributions totaling €1,800 for which we are extremely grateful.

The following is a summary of the expenses to date (Sept, Oct, Nov):

Assistance with funerals (1)	€100
Holidays in Wexford for Cherry Orchard ladies	€120
Prison Visits (18)	€360
Help with Groceries & Household	€200
Donations	€300
Bank charges	€ 9
Total	€1,089
Balance	€2,389

OUTREACH FUND

Contributions to the Outreach Fund are always welcome, especially as Christmas approaches



Scribbles Basecamp

In early April 2015 the Community in Cherry Orchard set up a facility on Basecamp and invited people to sign up if they wished to become involved. The aim of the Scribbles Basecamp initiative was to encourage, and provide a forum for, an exchange of ideas around issues similar to those being dealt with in the Scribbles from the Margins newsletter.

We wish to sincerely thank each contributor for their invaluable insights and responses.

The Basecamp facility is now seven months in existence and we are carrying out a review of its operation to help us to make an informed decision as to whether we should continue with it or not.

The facts, as we see them, are:

- The basic version of Basecamp which we are using costs \$20 per month. Given the current exchange rate and bank charges, this leaves little change from €250 per year.
- 62 people signed up for the site.
- 27 of these have posted a total of 113 contributions during the seven months,
- 51 of these contributions came from the Cherry Orchard Community.
- 35 members appear to be dormant. (Some may well be reading contributions but we have no way of knowing).

We're not sure where to go from here. Hopefully, this Basecamp site, with its shared wisdom, can help to unleash the power of a group of very committed activists. We'd love to hear your ideas on the following:

- Did you contribute to any of the discussions?
- If not why not?
- Did you initiate any discussions?
- If not why not?
- Are you a reader only?
- Is there any way in which we could alter our approach to the Basecamp site which would make you more inclined to contribute? (The mechanics of logging on – username and password – are fairly standard and are outside our control).
- How can you see this Basecamp forum being a better gathering for conversations among a scattered community of diverse people who try to live justly while engaging at the margins?
- Is there any way this forum can better serve you?
- Have you any other suggestions or ideas?

Comments and observations by 18th December please. (All three of us have access to: paul.hendrick8920@gmail.com)

Wicklow Way Mysticism

Martin Byrne

Being regularly busy with work and phone calls and jogging and e-mails and with catching up with friends, gives a semblance of meaning to my life and keeps loneliness at bay.

Annually however, to immerse myself in solitude and in aloneness and in God, I take five days to walk The Wicklow Way.

On the mountains I sense I'm not on this journey alone and it is no surprise that in our scripture, the mountain archetype suggests our place for engagement with mystery.

Jesus does not want tabernacles set up on the hills but calls on us to be blest and broken with struggling humanity in his tent.

The friends gathered around the eating mat in Jesus' tent are primarily the outcasts, the unlearned, the unclean and the people in distress.



Wicklow Way Mysticism



Annually the mountains invite me out of the city
Drawing me from the comforts of my temporary womb
To stride, tired among my own quick sands and illusions
Connecting anew with a pulsating web of path-finders

In the inner city the constantly unravelling trail
Is a path of sighs, joys, frustrations, delights and impotence ...
A harsh and beautiful pioneering track of transformation
Where mystery desperately searches for us.

Trudging delicately on the hills, as a hurting, blistered prophet
Through the bog land morass of rupturing religion
Hearing in the wind cheerleaders chanting empty, corporate chants
I stop to catch the breath of incomplete intimacy.

The unclear ecstasy of staying with the edgy, rocky path
Of presence, teaching and ordinary friendships, is demanding
Because at these dizzy lowly heights, hearts are stretched in inner city
rawness

And we are invited to face the abyss where life and death are daily on offer.

Trampling over mountains in the blowing rain, we gain perspective
As tiny, irritant ants we are trespassing on the orb of life.
We craft the promise, only when we shed tears with those impaled
And ache with unconditional love, to make sense of the shit.

Jesus was born as a rebel in the shed behind the pub in Glenmalure
And was crucified because of those he walked and ate and drank with.
Even in sunshine, few of the stages of the Wicklow Way are gentle strolls
But the very heather is haunted with suggestions for a just and
uncompromised world.

The 16 bus at Maraly Park brings me back to my friends in the city
Kin who help me not to live the lie of routinisation and success.
And here, back among the grey, ghetto landscapes are ravishing portals of
mystery
Which invite me to embrace the darkness of the Spirit's elusive guide book.

How does my Garden Grow?

Sean Beckett

We are lucky to have a back garden, a small, simple, colourful place of rest. It is a joy to sit there and have time to relax, day-dream, reflect or work and there have been many occasions when we breathe in deep, glorious heat!

A variety of birds come to feed; large numbers of sparrows, dunnocks and starlings have adopted us. Other visitors include four magpies, a blackbird, a robin or two, some pigeons, two doves, the odd appearance of a blue-tit and the recent privilege of seeing a wren checking us out. Generally, crows leave us alone and seagulls go elsewhere.



There are different sounds to be heard, apart from birdsong. There are sounds of dogs and horses, sounds of music, a boom-box, house alarms and the jingle of the ice-cream van, as well as sounds of conversations and sounds of play and laughter, sometimes accompanied with parental warnings. There are sounds of traffic with added screeches of quads and scooters with the possibility of an 'early in the day' arrival of a joyrider in transit. There can also be the sound and the appearance of the police helicopter hovering, observing, collecting data and attempting to respond to specific neighbourhood incidents.

This garden can be an oasis for us and others. Our retreatants and our

women's group have spent time here. We are proud of our garden and like to show it off to our families and friends.



It's important that our garden has a side gate entrance because our garden should lead us outwards. It would be tempting at times to remain 'still', to hide and withdraw, and satisfy our own need for relaxation and nourishment. It is important for us that we have neighbours on either side and 'an estate' just outside our door. We belong to a neighbourhood, a locality, a setting which draws us out of our self-absorption. We are enticed to connect with the life stories of people living here in the real world of struggle, pain, compassion and love.

Move from the warm comfort of the garden to the dangerous, exciting and bouncy trampoline of life, of relationship and of authentic engagement.

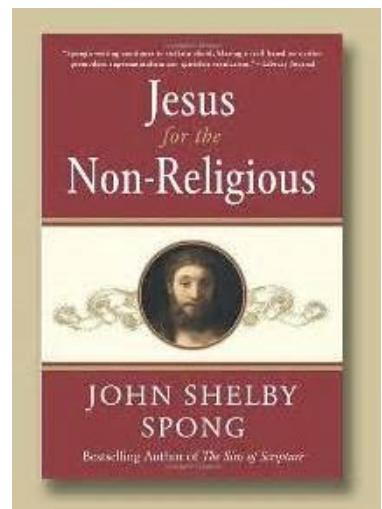
Unfortunately, many people live in gardens 'walled off' from the streets of interaction and life. They have most beautiful places to enjoy but these places are hidden, protected and even 'privatized' and for these people to walk outside their gate to greet and encounter someone is 'a stretch too far' up their driveway. It's too uncomfortable and unfamiliar for them.

Whether it is a physical garden or a 'garden in your heart', share its beauty, peace and riches with others. Be the 'Sower' and the 'Scatterer' and

the 'Gatherer'. Be the 'Sower' of your wisdom and experience. Be the 'Scatterer' of your gifts, compassion and empathy. Be the 'Gatherer' of those in pain, those in isolation, those misunderstood and those forgotten. Allow into your 'heart garden' a mix of wild garden seeds, those seeds that are different and strange, those seeds that are 'on the edge' and those seeds that feel unimportant, inferior and of no value.

Move from the warm comfort of the garden seat to the dangerous, exciting and bouncy trampoline of life, of relationship and of authentic engagement.

Suggested Reading



Jesus for the non-Religious

John Shelby Spong

I came late to what is probably John Shelby Spong's best book and maybe my appreciation of 'Jesus for the Non-Religious' is the better for having read several of his other books first. In this book, Spong tries to introduce us to the wonder and awe which Jesus' original followers must have experienced in his presence, the wonder and awe which completely converted Zacchaeus when he allowed

Jesus into his life.

In the first section of the book, Spong shows how the humanity of Jesus has been hidden for centuries under the emphasis on his divinity with disastrous results for the spread of the reign of God. He takes a critical look at, and sheds new light on, such things as the birth in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph, the twelve apostles, miracle stories and raising the dead. According to Spong, what most of us believed and were taught as we grew up would have been news to the early Christians and would not have been recognised by them as having anything to do with what Jesus was about.

The second section of the book tackles the question of why evangelists made Jesus look like the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy and/or a figure of importance like Moses or David. Spong points out that most modern scholars agree that the evangelists probably had the Old Testament scriptures available to them and crafted their Jesus story in the light of this material. A subtle distinction is made between Jesus being the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies and the Jesus story being written by the evangelists in the light of the earlier scriptures.

The third and final section of the book attempts to re-assemble the pieces and asks where can we go with this de-mythologized, human Jesus. We need to let go of our 'Atonement' theology, of any idea that God demanded the death of Jesus so that his blood could wash away our sins – original and otherwise. Like the original followers of Jesus, who lived as a leaven in the community, as an almost subversive group, we need to see something "God-like" in the way in which Jesus lived and died.

In many of his books, Spong argues that God can provisionally be described as "the source of love, the source of life and the ground of being". In this current book Spong argues that in Jesus we have a human being who loves wastefully, enhances being and exhorts us to live fully. What Jesus attempted to do was to change the culture of his listeners, to help people to be cured of their blindness and see reality as he saw it, with God's presence bursting forth in the whole of history. Seeing was what he wanted for people, so that they could have a new vision of God in the day-to-day reality of their lives.

The challenge for all of us is to separate Christianity from religion, to release Jesus from the golden boxes in our places of worship and to follow in Jesus' footsteps to create the world that we know God would want. We are called to confront injustice and to 'speak the truth to power'. This is the path of Jesus – the way, the truth and the life.

Jesus for the non-Religious, John Shelby Spong, Harper One, New York, 2009.

Paul Hendrick.

What is the point of being a Christian?

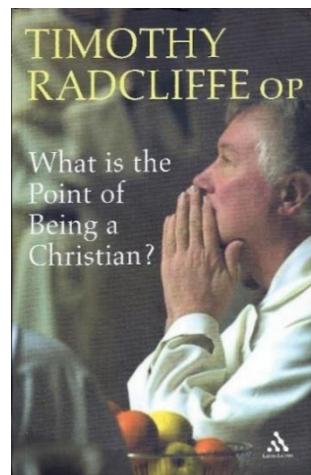
Timothy Radcliffe OP

First of all, the title of this book catches my attention. How many times have we asked ourselves the question; "what is the point of being a Christian"?

How many times could any of us answer the question sufficiently and meaningfully for ourselves?

How open are we to the world? How attentive are we to the stirrings of God and Spirit in our daily life? Are we

aware that God "is already in the lives of all human beings, even if unnamed and unrecognised"?



The author Timothy Radcliffe invites us to look at our lives, our relationships and our ministry. How do we 'walk with people'? Can we claim that we 'journey with' them as Jesus did? Radcliffe says that "we will have nothing to say to young people about our faith unless we are prepared to journey with them, literally sometimes, but also mentally".

Radcliffe tells us that Christianity does not offer us a roadmap to follow and by which to live our lives. He tells us that we are offered, instead a 'story'. It is not just any 'story', it is the story of the Last Supper. This Last Supper story is "our foundational story, the one in which we find the meaning of our lives".

We live this 'story' now, not at the end of our days or in the next life. We share God's life now. We live wherever and whenever we "overcome hatred with love". Our 'story' is to enable people to discover a future of happiness, freedom and hope.

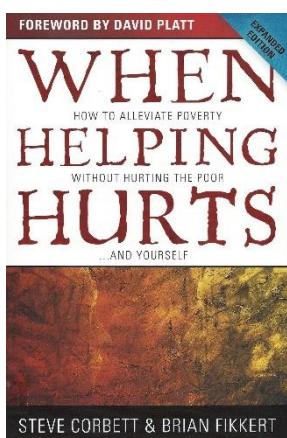
This is not an easy journey to undertake. There will be mistakes and misunderstandings. We will experience loss, suffering and pain. Do we dare to look into the eyes of

those in need and be touched by their hope and pain? If we share God's joy then we must also share "his sorrow at the suffering of the world". We need to work with each other in acceptance and understanding and discover new ways of being with our God. We offer openness, community and celebration to those in need.

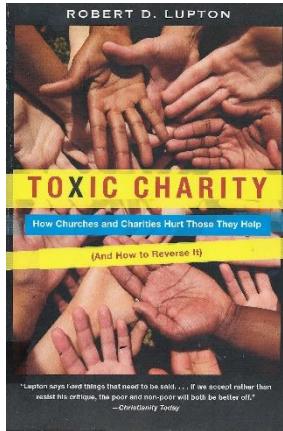
Radcliffe tells us that "we need to find new music that will express our hope".

What is the point of being a Christian? Timothy Radcliffe O.P., Burns & Oates, New York, 2006/07

Seán Beckett



When Helping Hurts
Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert



Toxic Charity
Robert D. Lupton

At each of the "Searching for Mystery in Marginal Community" retreats in Cherry Orchard we place a focus on constructing together a code of ethics while engaging with people who struggle. If we truly love people who are poor then we will need and we will want to educate ourselves on how best to serve. I am recommending two disturbing books, in the best sense of the word, as they suggest strongly that most charitable work is ineffective or actually harmful to those it is supposed to help. Both books are different in style and in approach but people involved on the front lines of pastoral ministry, albeit with gospel motivation, need to heed their wisdom. Lupton suggests, "Giving to those in need what they could be gaining from their own initiative may well be the kindest way to destroy people."

Resourced in Ireland with the charism of Edmund Rice and with a gospel vision, it might yet be difficult to argue, that as a corporation, the Christian Brothers have not managed to harm people down the years. Harshness in the classroom, leaving the difficult students to the local tech, closed-in nationalism, establishing projects we could not sustain, inserting communities at the edges for a short period of time, child abuse and not involving people who are poor in helping us to name, regulate and monitor outreach initiatives, etc. Unleashing and equipping people to effectively help poor people and struggling communities require repentance, a change of tack and the realisation of our own brokenness.

It has taken far too long for us as a corporation, that titles itself, 'Christian Brothers' to accept that the path forward is not through providing resources or training or projects or immersion experiences or prayers so that we can better help 'the poor', but instead it is by walking with and engaging with people made poor in respectful, humble kinship. If I was

back working in initial formation, I would be reluctant to mission a novice out on to apostolic experience, until he had reflected on both of these books and crafted his own personalised code of ethics. Too many people have been hurt.

These two books together show some of the issues involved in following Jesus in a genuine, mutually transforming love of neighbour, and they concern ministers and activists in all churches, sending agencies and congregations. Neither of these books stalls in theological or theoretical reflection. They draw the reader into the vital issue of the ethical application of the gospel to contemporary situations of acute poverty. We need the message of these books to transform the lives of poor people and to transform ourselves.

When Helping Hurts, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2012.

Toxic Charity, Robert D. Lupton HarperOne, New York, 2011.

Martin Byrne

A Final Note

With this fifth issue of 'Scribbles from the Margins' we are into our second year of publication. Many thanks for the encouragement and very positive response to our efforts.

May we take this opportunity to wish all our readers the joy and the hope that the Christmas story brings.

Let's leave the last word with Aidan Mathews:

"Christmas belongs, finally and fundamentally, to those who are excluded from its celebration".

Martin, Seán, Paul.