

## Editorial

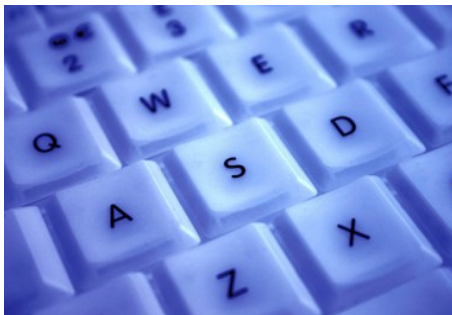


### Technology and Prayer – caught between two clashing rocks?

By Dr Peter Mudge

Dear Friends

Welcome to the August 2011 issue of the *Mission and Spirituality eNewsletter*. Since we sent you a “bumper June issue” some time ago, we opted to skip the July issue and put all articles in a double-theme August issue. Therefore, this volume is devoted to the twin, related themes of Technology – a New Pentecost; and Prayer and the Call to Holiness and Mission. I have arranged the articles slightly differently from previous issues. I have placed two articles on technology in the feature topic section at the beginning, with a thematic link to Ron Rolheiser’s web article and to David Ranson’s final Pentecost article. I have then threaded articles on prayer, holiness and mission throughout the rest of the issue in the Mission and Ministry section and elsewhere.



These twin themes can be viewed as a type of overlapping Venn Diagram – technology can facilitate and lead into prayer while prayer can be nurtured by technology. Both of course can also compromise and obfuscate the other. Hence my title that refers to two clashing rocks that can dash to pieces a ship embarked on a spiritual journey. This image not only references the clashing rocks episode in the story of Jason and the Argonauts – the voyagers must pass

through a strait with two huge clashing cliffs in order to retrieve the Golden Fleece; they are rescued by Neptune who rises from the ocean and holds the clashing rocks apart so that the ship may pass.

The image is also drawn from an article by Brendan Hyde which I read recently. Hyde refers to Jerome Berryman’s comment that ‘one must steer carefully between two ancient and deceptive rocks that guard the narrow passage into the open sea that lies beyond ordinary experience’.<sup>1</sup> If you negotiate and pass through these clashing rocks it will give you momentum to continue on the spiritual journey. And what is the ‘open sea’ like? The articles in this issue help us to describe it.

Both the Technology and Prayer themes involve practice and determination. So, before introducing the pieces in this issue, I offer you a story that captures the spirit of why we need a regular discipline of spiritual practices in our life:

A young monk asked his abbot, “How can I be sure that I am in the presence of God?”  
The abbot replied, “You have as much control over that as you have the power to make the sun rise.”

In exasperation, the young monk exclaimed, “Then what use are all of our spiritual exercises?”

To which the abbot replied, “You need your discipline of spiritual practices to make sure that you are paying attention when the sun does rise.”

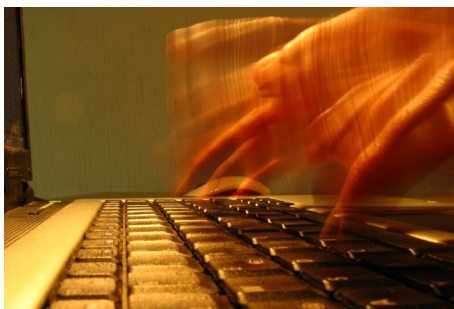
We need some physical actions that intentionally focus our awareness of God loving us and addressing us, and we need intentional expressions of our loving God. Spiritual practices do that.<sup>2</sup>

All of which raises the foundational question – what is the relationship between prayer, holiness, mission and spiritual practices in relation to technology and other contemporary challenges?



The contributions in this issue help answer this and other questions from their own unique perspectives. While Margaret Ghosn explores links between technology, the Word and Generations Y and Z, Gerard Moore reminds us of the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of technology and its links with worship – ‘Technology is not only understood as an aid in removing the drudgery that is involved in human activities, but also as necessary for human happiness, and as the solution to intractable problems’.

The issue then moves to the Mission and Ministry section. Here, in the second and final part of their article, Jim and Therese D’Orsa focus on – education as a vehicle for mission, contemporary paradigms of mission, and how these and other topics relate to Catholic teachers and schools. The four concluding articles in this section explore a range of themes. Richard Leonard’s article entitled “Where the hell is God?” is a moving and challenging account of how he, his family, and others responded to the involvement of his sister Tracey in a freakish car accident, as a result of which she became a quadriplegic (and has been so for the last 23 years).



Jim Quillinan takes a different though compelling slant with his meditation on the adage that “All our life is a work in progress – we never ‘arrive’, as it were’. Greg Smith then completes Part Two of his article on the recently deceased Raimundo Panikkar’s ‘radiant events’ framework, in which Smith presents a reading of poet Les Murray’s ‘An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow’. Smith concludes that such manifestations of ‘radiant events’ diarised by Murray and others often ‘catch us out by their sheer ordinariness. To see, feel and benefit from them, we need open minds, open to new possibilities, new to inbreaks of the divine’ [refer also to the Raimundo Panikkar website below]. The section then concludes with the third and final part of the editor’s reflections on the relationship between art and spirituality. In this instalment I reflect on Australian artist Sidney Nolan’s capacity both to fuse art, spirituality and transformation, and at the same time to call us towards an experience of the transcendent or ‘the beyond’.

This issue concludes with the standard sections included in all issues – with one exception, a new section on Poetry and Prose. The final section commences with a recent address by Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day, where he focuses on the relationship between truth, proclamation and authenticity of life in the digital age. The Pope reflects: ‘In the final analysis, the truth of Christ is the full and authentic response to that human desire for relationship, communion and meaning which is reflected in the immense popularity of social networks’. Heather Lang reviews three interesting recent titles including one on technology. Sister Catherine Thom RSJ has submitted a fascinating review of the book *Traveller to Freedom*, the story of Fr Roger Pryke. The aforementioned inaugural poetry section includes offerings from Kevin Martin and a more ancient text from the Hindu *Atharva Veda*.



You will also find a plethora of ideas and information in the form of events, and web sites. I will leave you as the reader to discern the links between the themes of technology, prayer and mission and the remaining sections on – Pace & Bene, and the Sister Act assisting Australian Disaster Relief Recovery. There also exist some wonderful links between the foregoing themes and the featured web sites, including Ron Rolheiser’s reflection on ‘Straining for Sabbath’, a celebration of the life of Professor Raimon Panikkar (see Greg Smith’s article above), Domus Australia, a North Sydney ecological web site, and the rich resource that is Pray-as-you-go.

In the final article, David Ranson reflects on ways in which the recent feast of Pentecost invites us to ‘dance with the Spirit’. Why is William dancing during Mass and what is the connection with Pentecost? You will need to read the article to find out. This completes a nice flow throughout the newsletter which has taken us from the two clashing rocks of technology and prayer to some suggested practices which can reveal the deeper meanings of both areas.

Once again, I hope that you enjoy this August offering of *Mission and Spirituality eNews* and I look forward to bringing you future issues that will once again inform, challenge, inspire and delight you. May this post-Pentecost season be one that fills you continually with the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. For “the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8, RSV).

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<sup>1</sup> . Jerome Berryman. (1985). Children’s spirituality and religious language. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 7(2), 127 [full reference = pp.120-127]; cited in Brendan Hyde. (2011). Steering a Path Along a Treacherous Course: Children’s Voices, Colonization and Religious Education. *Journal of Religious Education* 59(2), 35-43. Jerome Berryman is the renowned author of, among other books, *Godly play: How to mentor the spiritual development of children*. Denver, CO: Morehouse Education Resources, 2009.

Dr. Brendan Hyde is a Senior Lecturer in the National School of Religious Education at the Australian Catholic University, Melbourne Campus.

<sup>2</sup> . Richard M. Gula. (2011). *The Way of Goodness and Holiness, A Spirituality for Pastoral Ministers*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, pp. 20-21.