

Australian Network for Spiritual Direction Inc.

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for people engaged in Godly listening

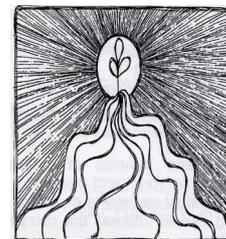
President's Report

- Jack Stuart

Australia owes a great debt to ABC broadcaster, journalist, and commentator Phillip Adams for bringing us stories that go to the heart of the human journey. He is no respecter of humbug and continually brings us interviews with people who are prepared 'to have a go.' One of his most memorable interviews was with Palestinian doctor, Dr Izzeldin Abuelaish in February last year. On January 16 2009, Izzeldin lost three of his six daughters and a niece when Israeli warplanes bombed his family home in Gaza. Only three months earlier, his wife had died of cancer. His response to all this tragedy was to write a book called "I Shall Not Hate." In his book and in the interview with Phillip Adams he expresses the deepest hope that his daughters will be "the last sacrifice on the road to peace between Palestinians and Israelis."

At our conference in Melbourne last year, we were privileged to have Alexander Shaia lead us deeper into exploring what

the Gospels reveal about the human journey .And how at the heart of our tradition the Gospels show that transformation is not only possible but within reach. Pivotal in Alexander's coming to a deeper understanding of the transformational nature of the spiritual practices presented in the Gospels is an experience of the love and wisdom of his grandmother. Alexander is of Lebanese background. His family arrived in Birmingham, Alabama in the early part of the 20th Century. When he was seven years old the Klu Klux Klan burned down his grandmother's house. They particularly targeted minorities and the Lebanese Maronite Catholic community was a minority amongst minorities. After the fear had lifted that his grandmother may have died in the fire and when the family met five days later for the Sunday dinner, all waited for her to speak. Alexander says, "Finally she spoke. Her voice was soft, and she said only two



In this issue:

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| President's Report | 1 |
| Walking within the Fire | 3 |
| St. Teresa of Jesus | 4 |
| 2013 Conference | 7 |

continued page 2

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Your contributions are very welcome.

President's Report continued

words, though she repeated them until she was sure we understood and accepted them: **'No Hate. No Hate...'** And I felt the burden lift from the heart of my family." Alexander acknowledges that this incident in his early life set him on his spiritual path. He came to write his book "The Hidden Power of the Gospels" as a result of the transformative nature of his Grandmother's presence and wisdom about the presence of God even in such a terrible event.

The similarity between Izzeldin's response as a Muslim and response of another Semitic wisdom figure who is a Christian is remarkable. The message is loud and clear; hate has no place in the hearts of those who want peace. It is only love that transforms. Richard Rohr eloquently says that if our negative stances to life are not transformed they will be transmitted, i.e if our pain, vulnerability, our woundedness is not transformed we will transmit all this onto others. As we know, our ministry of spiritual direction is all about this transformation.

We only have to look closely and deeply enough to see such examples in events and people all around us. It is important to realize that this quality revealed by the above examples is not just Christian. It is human and all religious traditions attempt to enshrine this in their spiritual practices.

I believe that what happened at our conference last year was very significant for the mission of ANSD and for the whole spiritual direction community. We had sought to make our time together a contemplative one and one that enabled us to further depth what it means to offer spiritual direction in a contemporary world. Alexander gave us quality input and allowed the time we needed to reflect on what we had heard and make it our own. Alexander's work flows out of 150 years of scripture scholarship and many people are finding it a fresh approach to discovering the riches of the living presence of Jesus the Christ in our lives today.

We are all aware of the work of Henri Nouwen and his phrase **'the wounded healer.'** This is the title of his 1979 book. It has helped many of us to see that indeed, we are all wounded healers and that if we neglect our own wounds we cannot work effectively in any work of service. Nouwen tells that the inspiration for his book came from a Hebrew story concerning a Rabbi who came across the prophet Elijah.

"Tell me –when will the Messiah come?"

Elijah replied, "Go and ask him yourself."

"Where is he?" said the Rabbi.

"He's sitting at the gates of the city," said Elijah.

"But how will I know which one is he?"

The Prophet said, "He is sitting among the poor, covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and bind them up again, he unbinds only one at a time and binds them up again, saying to himself, "Perhaps I shall be needed; if so, I must be ready so as not to delay for a moment."

Henri Nouwen adds, "What I find impressive in this story are these two things: first, the faithful tending of one's own woundedness and second, the willingness to move to the aid of other people and to make the fruits of our own woundedness available to others."

Izzeldin and Alexander's Grandmother give living testimony to Nouwen and Rohr's insights.

Alexander posits that there is only one Gospel with four chapters. Each chapter was written for a specific community in order to help them develop spiritual practices and disciplines around a specific question that was pressing on them at the time. The four questions are

Matthew "How do we attend to change?"

Mark "How do we endure suffering?"

John "How do we receive joy/grace?"

Luke "How do we mature in service?"

These questions are universal and they are cyclical. Furthermore, they are questions that are at the heart of how we deal with our woundedness. The issue of hate is one we are all too familiar with. As change sweeps over us and we deal with the suffering it brings we can so often succumb to blame and destructive anger. The first two chapters reveal that deep within us we have everything we need to attend to change creatively and to endure suffering with courage. The communities that Matthew and Mark were writing to were learning to experience the power of the Living Christ among them. They were coming to see that what Jesus offered, 'back then,' was alive within them now. As the early communities became aware of their Christian identity, John and Luke address the issues of how the Living Christ is among them showing that joy and grace are the fruits of coming through change and suffering and that the road to maturity is the royal road that the Emmaus story contains. What Alexander has offered is a fresh approach in looking at the spiritual practices inherent in dealing with these common human themes.

In the last year ANSD, through its conference and its regional groups and by its presence in the AECSD has continued to offer support and encouragement to its members and to the wider spiritual direction community. Networking has also been an important aspect of our work in the last year. We worked with the New Zealand spiritual direction community in sharing the airfare costs so that Alexander could present at both our conferences. Another aspect of networking has seen ANSD be a catalyst for Alexander to work with other groups and people. This has meant the formation of people outside of the spiritual direction community and at the same time helped promote the ministry of spiritual direction.

We also conducted a workshop for members before the conference. We had not offered such an opportunity for a while. Phillip Carter, a former President of ANSD and Director of the Julian Centre in Adelaide (1997-2009) ran a workshop entitled **"A Wise Heart: Spiritual Direction as a transformative way of being with others."**

President's Report (Continued)

This was well attended with 30 people participating. Phillip's presentation was very well received.

Where to for ANSD? I believe we are in a good place because we have competent and capable people in our ranks. The success of last year's conference is a testimony to what we have to offer. We will always need new people to come forward to take on the tasks of keeping ANSD alive and well and an effective voice for the S D community. I believe we have something that is unique. Our members are from the ranks of spiritual directors and from those who are interested in the ministry of spiritual direction. This enables us to invite a wider network to our meetings and conferences and so be enriched by them.

We also need to acknowledge a very important person. Jo Windeyer has been the editor of our newsletter for a number of years. She has done this with great dedication and we are deeply grateful to her. Jo has new commitments and is unable to continue. Jo, thank you so much. We also take this opportunity to farewell three members from the executive. Thanks to Di Bradley, Cath Connelly and Pirriall Clift. Di and Cath have served for five years and Pirriall for two years. Their contribution has been exceptional. We thank Di and Cath for the work they did in running the conferences in Adelaide and Melbourne. We are fortunate to have such skilled and committed people in our ranks.

Walking Within the Fire

An image of a family sheltering under a jetty in Dunally (Tas) as they sheltered from the fire-storm that descended on this tiny coastal community has transfixed me. My friend Peter sent me an email asking us all to pray – for Bonnie. She had gone to a funeral in Hobart, leaving her 5 children with her parents. Her husband is bushwalking and cannot be contacted. She has made it to Peter's house at Midway Point, and can see the smoke from his window. She knows her house is burning down and there is nothing she can do, no way she can know if her parents and her children are alive or dead. "Pray they made it out" it reads, "pray they find a place to shelter." Then the photo – taken by a Dad who needs to let his daughter know her children are alive. "pray for clear air for them to breathe", "pray they can hold on", "pray that the children will stay calm", "pray for a boat to take them out of there"... pray...

I don't know how to pray all these things. Part of me believes that God will intervene, but another, deeper, more primal part of me does not expect God to do this. I pray what they ask me to pray but my deeper prayer is "Lord I believe... help my unbelief".

Another fiery summer ignites this wide brown land. Even down here in this southern, green place the air itself seems to be burning. I step outside one morning and I can smell the smoke. The sky is that eerie orange colour that signals



Incarnate Word in Whom
all nature lives
Cast flame upon the earth;
raise up contemplatives
Among us, those who walk
within the fire
Of ceaseless prayer,
impetuous desire,
Set pools of silence in
this thirsty land.
(James McCauley)

from A Letter To John Dryden, in Collected Poems 1936-1970

somewhere is burning. And the familiar feeling of dread sits in my stomach. There are no words in me that can express this fear, so no words to bring before my God in prayer. So I walk – at times like this I let my feet pray for me.

As I follow my well-trodden path I breathe in the hot dry air and breathe out my prayer. I close my eyes and pay attention to the acrid, woody scent of the smoke and let my prayer rise in the smoke, I open my eyes and feel them smart from smoke and let tears become my prayer.

And life goes on. Another day passes. The threats of fire ignite and are contained, over and over again, all around this land we love. I try to hold my smoky prayer inside me, and each time I smell the smoke, or see images of the fires, or read my sister's Facebook to get an update on her bushfire alert level, I feel the smoke leave my body and rise up to the heavens. And I wonder, is this what it means to be 'on fire for God'?

Denise Stephenson

Denise is the ANSD Regional Representative for Tasmania. She lives on the NW Coast in Devonport and loves nothing more than putting on her boots and going for a very long walk.

Teresa of Jesus or as we also know her Teresa of Avila was the third child of Beatriz and Alonso. She was born in Avila, Spain in 1515 and died in 1582 at 67 years. This 16th century woman was the first woman to be made a doctor of the Roman Catholic Church and we celebrate her in the church calendar on the 15th of October each year.

Like Hildegard of Bingen and her Scivias and Julian of Norwich and her Revelations of Divine Love, Teresa wrote her Vida [her life story], an autobiography and the Interior Castle. Also like Hildegard who was bedridden for some years, and Julian who nearly died from illness and fever, Teresa had a life of extreme illness.

All three women were women of their era, with the social and economic constraints of their times and the lack of life choices. All became powerful and influential through their lives as mystics and visionaries, as leaders of women and with great impact of their religious orders and the church. All are beloved and followed by many in the 21st century.

The reason I have chosen to write about St Teresa of Avila is because as a mystic and visionary she can provide us through her practice of mental prayer with an understanding of our internal spiritual world.

Teresa's life was one of determination, of vision, insight and focus. It was also a life of suffering, guilt and chronic illness. Her relationship with God included a strong thread of self-punishment. She believed she deserved her suffering and kept her 'disciplina' with her at all times and flogged herself, even when travelling. She wore her cilicio [hair shirt like St Thomas More] and tied nettles to her wrists.

St Teresa of Jesus is important in the church as one who drove the reform of the Carmelites, initially in the women's monasteries and latterly with St John of the Cross, in the men's monasteries. The Carmelites were a 12th century order which was established after the third crusade when a group of hermits began practicing their Christianity on Mount Carmel, near Jerusalem, and following the ways of the Prophet Elijah.

Teresa is important also because of her profound belief in and practice of mental prayer, a practice which shaped her life and the Carmelites as enclosed contemplatives. Teresa travelled widely throughout Spain.

How it was that Teresa of Jesus, a beautiful young woman from a wealthy and genteel family became a nun is an interesting story. She was influenced by her family background, by the society of 16th century Spain and by the politics of the church.

Teresa's paternal grandfather Juan converted from Judaism to Christianity in the late 15th century, to protect his family. However during the reign of Ferdinand and

Isabella of Spain and under the influence of the Inquisition, Juan and his family including Teresa's father Alonso, were punished for continuing Jewish practices. They were forced to parade in robes of shame, a yellow sambenito (a garment) marked with a large green cross and tongues of fire. Soon after, Teresa's grandfather relocated the family to Avila and joined a family business in silks and woollens. This fortunate move enabled Teresa's father Alonso and subsequently Teresa's family to become wealthy.

The shame of the public punishment affected Alonso and may well have carried through to Teresa. Teresa's mother, Beatriz was the 14-year-old cousin of Alonso's first wife who had died. Beatriz herself died in her late 20's after having 9 children. Teresa was 12 years old at the time and suffered deeply from her mother's death. All these human events were against a background of church and state volatility in Spain.

It is likely that this family background of cultural and religious variety, strength and ability to adapt, gave Teresa her resilience and determination to pursue her quest for a personal faith and vision for the reform of the Carmelites. She was clever and an independent thinker, aware of the restrictions on women including the limits marriage placed on women, even noble women in Spain.

As a mature nun, she saw women of noble families as slaves to luxury and that she herself had sidestepped this by choosing the strangely liberating confinement of monastic life. She wrote giving us an insight into the social life in 16th century Spain:

"I saw that she was a woman and as subject to passions and weaknesses as I was, and I understood how little nobility mattered, because the more nobility people could claim, the greater were their troubles and trials. I saw how careful they had to be about behaving in accordance with rank, which hardly gave them the freedom to live. They can't eat their meals at the right time or in the right order, because everything has to be done according to their rank, and not their physical requirements. Even what they eat often has more to do with their position than their appetites." 1

The beautiful and very flirtatious 16-year-old Teresa was, like many young women of her era, placed in an Augustinian nunnery for 12 months. It was the like a finishing school for the young women where they were taught refined domestic duties in preparation to run a household after an arranged marriage.

Against the wishes of her father who had arranged a marriage for her, Teresa made a choice to become a nun. This was after 19 months in the convent, a visit to her uncle and the reading of St Jerome's letters, and an illness which left her with a terrible fear that if she died right then "I would have gone to hell." 2

Saint Teresa of Jesus (cont.)

Teresa's decision to continue her monastic life was challenged by her father, by society, the church and even herself. She wrote:

“Even though I couldn't make myself want to become a nun, I saw that that was the best and safest thing to do, and so little by little I decided to bully myself into doing it” 3

Teresa was haunted throughout her life by guilt and a feeling of unworthiness. I have wondered about this. In the same way that we as women and men are products of our age and are subject to the protocols and societal rules of western 21st century, so too was Teresa whose choices were limited by the rules of the church and society.

I wonder whether her deep-seated guilt was a hangover from her father, Alonso's shame with the punishment his family suffered when they were paraded as Christianised Jews through their town. Or did Teresa have an affair before entering the nunnery at 16, or even did she have a child.

Teresa wrote in her *Vida*, life story, about her life before entering the nunnery:

“I began to wear fancy things since I wanted to be attractive, and to fuss with my hands and my hair...I used perfumes and all the silly baubles I could get hold of...” and there was a hint in the *Vida* that she “almost lost her honour.” 4

A friend of mine, who studied Teresa along with other saints like Catherine of Siena and Therese of Lisieux in the context of contemporary young women and eating disorders, wondered whether Teresa might have been Lesbian. Or was it simply that she saw many women, including her mother, die young from childbirth. Fortunately these would not be an issue or less of an issue for women in western society now, but they were then and of course still are in many parts of the world.

Whatever the reason for Teresa, her guilt drove her behaviour and her extreme self-discipline and the harsh and austere life that the enclosed reformed Carmelites lived. The reform of the church in 16th century Europe was influenced by Luther who wrote and railed against the luxuries and corruption of the Roman Church. Luther's life and religious war against Rome coincided with Teresa's life.

Teresa's journey over the decades from living in the convent of the Incarnation near Avila as a young woman to the seeding of reformed Carmelite monasteries throughout Spain was one which included many travels across the country, submissions and conversations with the church leaders and bishops, assistance by family

members and many episodes of illness. Her illnesses included swooning, pain, fevers, heart pain, and cataleptic episodes. She was so ill at one time that her community thought she had died and her body was placed in a coffin and only her father prevented burial by his insistence “This daughter is not for burying.” 5 She recovered.

Teresa's reform of the Carmelite monasteries was from places of openness to society, visitors, luxury, refinement and patronage by the wealthy to small discalced convents where sisters could be enclosed without luxury devoting all their energies to God. In August 1562 on St Bartholomew's Day, after overcoming many obstacles, the bell was first rung and the mass first celebrated at a convent at San Jose, near Avila. A small group of Discalced nuns wearing coarse brown sack cloth and living a reformed model of the ancient rule of the Carmelites began their enclosed lives.

Discalced Carmelites followed Teresa's reforms whereas the Calced followed the ancient Carmelites. Discalced literally means “shoeless.” The rules of Teresa's Nuns included, silence (though not absolute); no red meat except for the ill; poultry once a week; bread, cheese, fruit, fish and eggs as the main diet; self flagellation to be public and with the prioresses' permission to prevent self indulgence; and mandatory recreation including singing, poetry and dancing.

The convents were places where poor nuns and those from the aristocracy were equal. The idea was both holy and revolutionary like the foundational ideas of Jesus. They were based on the original Carmelites of the 12th century, who lived as hermits in a community, with silent and community liturgical prayer.

The core of Teresa's faith was her prayer life and mental prayer. A practice of which coincides with our modern openness to the meditation practices of the East together with a desire for a more contemplative life. Meditation in the church has its origins in the desert fathers, the Benedictine, the Carmelites, Meister Eckhart and the modern influences of John Main, Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths.

Teresa was deeply influenced as a young nun by the “Third Spiritual Alphabet” by a Franciscan mystical writer Francisco de Osuna and by Erasmus who wrote on mental prayer. Both were contemporaries of Teresa. Mental prayer became the centre of her life and the core of her relationship with God. It represented a relationship between the soul and God.

Teresa experienced ecstasies as even reported to levitate. She was part of the *iluminisimo* or interior enlightenment which not unknown in Spain but was increasingly seen as a threat to the established church and therefore came under the review of the Inquisition. Teresa herself was under suspicion and requested at the age of 45 by the Dominicans who were leading the Inquisition to write her life story, which she did in the form of the *Vida*.

Saint Teresa of Jesus (cont.)

Teresa had always been careful to follow Osuna's advice to seek guidance from more experienced confessors. One of her confessors who worked at the Incarnation convent was St John of the Cross, who was imprisoned at one stage during the period of the Inquisition.

The Vida was Teresa's account of her conscience and a description of her spiritual life. She later wrote the Interior Castle, a detailed description of seven chambers of deep prayer leading to the "I am".

Teresa's life was one of the ministry of prayer, listening to people and giving spiritual guidance. She wrote in her autobiography:

"If people have Jesus Christ with them as Friend and loving Guide, they can put up with anything. For Christ helps and strengthens us, he never abandons us, and is a sincere and true Friend." 6

There is a Discalced Carmelite monastery in Goonellabah, where the nuns live enclosed lives. On their website they write:

"We want to help all those who are seeking God, and those who are not, to find Him in a peace that will last forever." 7

As St Teresa of Jesus wrote:

Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten
Those who seek God shall never go wanting
Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten
God alone fills us. 8

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which is to look
out

Christ's compassion to the world;

yours are the feet with which he is to go
about doing good;

yours are the hands with which he is to bless
us now.

- Saint Teresa of Jesus

1. Terese of Avila: the progress of a soul" by Cathleen Medwick. Doubleday, NY, 1999 p. 77
2. op. cit. p. 22
3. op. cit. p. 21.22
4. op cit. p. 17.
5. op cit. p. 31.
6. From the Autobiography by St Teresa of Avila as quoted in the Benedictine Dailey Prayer: a short breviary, p. 2162
7. <http://www.flowerofcarmel.com/>
8. Together in Song: Australian Hymn Book II : harmony edition, Hymn 739, music by Jacques Berthier and words by St Teresa of Jesus.



for people engaged in Godly listening



The Australian Network for Spiritual Direction, an ecumenical endeavour, is committed to fostering spiritual direction and to the training of spiritual directors in the Christian Community.

We believe spiritual direction to be a vital ministry in the continuing transformation of all people. It is one of many ministries by which people are set free to take their share in God's ongoing work. It is a ministry of guidance taking many forms, and is exercised by women and men, lay and ordained.

The challenges and benefits of spiritual direction are both personal and corporate in nature. This historical ministry is an effective tool for helping people address the complex issues of our time.

The Network is committed to:

- encouraging spiritual directors in their work
- offering opportunities for care and nurture through regular gatherings and communications
- supporting national, regional and local training programs

We welcome to membership and involvement in the Australian Network for Spiritual Direction all who desire to support this work.

This Statement was adopted by the original committee in Canberra in 1989

ANSD Conference 2013

13th–15th September 2013

The Ibis Styles Hotel
Nurrabundah, ACT

more details in the next newsletter



Jack Stuart & Cath Connelly
'Sharing the Gifts' at the AECSD
Conference in Melbourne,
September 2012