

why bother?

The writer gives us a lively apologia for what she calls "the Catholic stuff" and what it means in her life, following Augustine's dictum that our hearts are restless until they find rest in God.

Lyn Smith

I am often asked "Why bother with all that 'Catholic stuff'?" After being involved in Catholic Education for nearly 30 years you would think the question wouldn't faze me, but it still does. Not because I can't answer it but because how I answer always depends upon who is asking the question.

How I responded to a teenager in inner city Salford in the 1980s, to the stranger next to me on the flight home in the 1990s, to my friends today is very different. Although they are all asking the same question, what they are really wanting to know can be very different.

two background stories

The teenager, whilst I was on teaching practice (in the equivalent of a decile 1 school in NZ), was in a class where we were sharing our experiences about the unending love and fidelity of God. She just couldn't equate that concept of God with the family situation in which she found herself. How could all this "Catholic stuff" about God's unconditional love be right for a child who went home to a father who beat and abused her? How could God love someone who did that; and where was God's love for her whilst it was happening to her.

The stranger on the flight home was with a group of fellow rugby players on his way to Thailand for a "fun" week and was surprised when I challenged him with the "Catholic stuff" about treating people, especially the young women he was expecting to have 'fun' with as people made in the image and likeness of God. The 15 hour flight gave us an opportunity to discuss what human dignity was about, how we treat others, why people felt it was okay to 'buy' others and how social justice should have an impact on our everyday lives. I am not sure if what we talked about had any effect upon his behaviour whilst in Thailand but hopefully it

made him think a little more about the type of 'fun' he was going to have and whether it would be acceptable for a Thai man to go to England to have the same 'fun' with his daughter.

My friends are in the majority of the people who do not have a strong faith connection and find it a little strange that I am often late for gatherings on Saturday nights because I am at Church (I am actively involved in the 5pm Mass at my parish). They also know that when we sit and discuss issues of the day I will have certain responses if the discussion is about abortion or the death penalty, because of the "Catholic stuff" I believe in.



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where does believing come from?

So why do I bother believing in all of the "Catholic stuff"? It's not that I have no views of my own; I am a typical Yorkshire woman forthright and opinionated. I bother because I know it is right. The knowing hasn't just come from study but mainly from within. I know that because quite simply I have been made in the image and likeness of God and so know that I matter, that God has unconditional love for me and that is what I should witness to those I encounter. It doesn't mean I don't question "Catholic stuff"; I do, as I have always followed Aquinas who says that faith and reason go hand in hand. I do, however, know that I was fortunate to have been born into a family which considered faith an integral part of who we were as human beings.

God is not someone or thing I need to search for because God is with me as my parents and siblings are. I have felt God's love during my times of jubilation and celebration and the times of sorrow and pain.

So for me the "Catholic stuff" is what I have grown up with and lived for all of my life. I live in a secular country but have always been within the system: Catholic primary and secondary schools, universities with the De La Salles and at ACU, then straight into teaching Religious Education at Catholic secondary schools before taking up my present position in 2004, working with teachers of RE. Apart from part-time jobs in

school and university holidays I have never worked in an environment that isn't Catholic. For me the "Catholic stuff" is just part of who I am and the values and beliefs that give my life meaning.

finding identity

So "why do I bother?" It's quite simple because without the "Catholic stuff" my life is not complete. It gives me a sense of belonging to a family that loves me no matter what I do. Being loved by God is not something I think about a great deal, not because I don't experience it, but simply because I have always experienced it. I have always felt loved by God through the people I encounter and the life I have lived. God is not someone or thing I need to search for because God is with me as my parents and siblings are. I have felt God's love during my times of jubilation and celebration and the times of sorrow and pain. In each experience God has clothed me with love. I find God's presence in the work I do as an RE teacher, through the poetry I write, the music I listen to and the people I encounter.

The "Catholic stuff" is for me what quells the restlessness I have when I am asking the question "why bother?" and so the answer is easy, no matter who has asked the question. I would say the "Catholic stuff" is about being loved by God as a way of life for me. It is as Augustine suggests, that without God I am restless and with God I am fulfilled. In other words, it is because that's what God has made me to do, to bother about the "Catholic stuff"! ■

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Lightening the Load

The first thing we have to do is to notice
that we've loaded down this camel
with so much baggage
we'll never get through the desert alive.
Something has to go.

Then we can begin to dump
the thousand things
we've brought along
until even the camel has to go
and we're walking barefoot
on the desert sand.

There's no telling what will
happen then.
But I've heard that someone,
walking in this way,
has seen a burning bush.

— Francis Dorff, O Praem

