

# NEW WORLD NEWS

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What is the most important time of the day? Breakfast? Nine to five? Coffee break, lunch hour and tea time? From rush hour through to fade-out?

Many have found that it is the silence before all these begin. They have found the fascination of rising early to take time in quiet, alone with God.

In this search for God's direction early in the morning and throughout the day lies the answer to the question, 'How does MRA work?' There is no pyramid of authority, no central office issuing directives. But cohesive action and courageous initiatives are possible as people, alone and together, seek and obey God's will.

In this issue we look at the practice and the fruits of silence, and the unexpected consequences of obedience.

## Silence at the centre of the gyroscope

**PETER HANNON, from Northern Ireland, works in South Africa.**

IN NORTHERN IRELAND recently I called on a doctor friend who, amid the 'troubles', has carried much civic and political leadership. As we sat and chatted he suddenly turned to me and said, 'You are so much less strained than you were.' Later he suggested a further evening to talk.

It made me think. How often the pressures have piled in and then been transmitted to others.

You will know the type. The only thing on his mind is what he is thinking, the next problem on his desk or outside his door. He exudes a sense of strain, of self-effort, of self-importance. His diary is full six months ahead.

For myself I now search, as a priority, for an inner core of tranquility, a pool of silence at the heart of my being; the place, or perhaps rather the experience, to which I can instinctively return in moments of stress or strain. 'Be still, and know that I am God.'

### Learning to read

It is not something that comes naturally, some mystical experience suddenly achieved. Brother Lawrence called it 'the practice of the presence of God'. It has to be worked at. The first hour of the day is decisive, when one takes—or rather makes—time, however early it must be, to be alone, to be quiet, to listen. I find now that I turn first to old-established verses or prayers. They help fix the compass for the day.

Routine is necessary. Those who have explored the field of spiritual discipline over the centuries all make the point of establishing a fixed order. It becomes a balanced centre around which the gyroscope of the day's activities can whirl. The object is not,

however, to achieve a self-centred peace. It is to get self out of the centre of the picture.

While self remains central, one's perception of what goes on in others is dulled—and an essential element of mature leadership is missed. To build any effective working relationship, we must learn to 'read' the other man, behind the smokescreen of what he says.

### First priority

I often think of the remark of an outspoken coloured leader here in Cape Town. Referring to his dealings with politicians and industrialists, he said, 'How can men have such ability and be so blind as to what goes on in others?'

I come to one conclusion: most of us, early in life, experience some hurt or we do something of which we are ashamed. We don't want anyone to know of it because it is painful, so we begin to build a wall to shut it off. As we grow, other things happen which we would prefer to forget. So, brick by brick, the wall gets higher, shutting off not only areas in our lives but, to the same degree, also shutting off sensitivity to what goes on in these hidden areas in others. To learn to 'read' others, we have first to 'read' ourselves—to look at ourselves in the objective mirror of Christ's requirements.

The family is the ideal proving ground for this. Do I reflect on why a son or daughter reacts as they do? What this or that particular mood means? Why husband is like this, or wife like that?

It extends to every sphere. That man who is proving so difficult—what hidden fear or frustration drives him? Perhaps it has nothing to do with the issue in dispute. Can I reach the need in him? Am I learning something in my own inner search which could help?

If I begin each day by looking in at my own

particular needs and then find peace and direction, I can begin next to look out with mature eyes at those with whom I will be in contact.

At university a friend asked me, 'What are you living for?' That simple, straight question made me decide. Was it to be career, comfort, reputation—or something beyond self?

Decision, of course, is one thing; implementation quite another. Any new road has a hundred diversionary sidetracks. One must keep returning to one's central aim, becoming increasingly aware as one does of the pulls of ambition, of the easy way, of self-driven busyness.

I have learnt that whatever I do is my own choice. If I am busy it is because I want to be. If I do not have time for others, if I am rushed from pillar to post, it is no one's fault but my own. I choose to live like that. My priorities get mixed. Perhaps I am trying to please someone, or to prove some point. Or maybe I simply prefer doing it my way.

So each morning, back to square one—What am I living for, today?

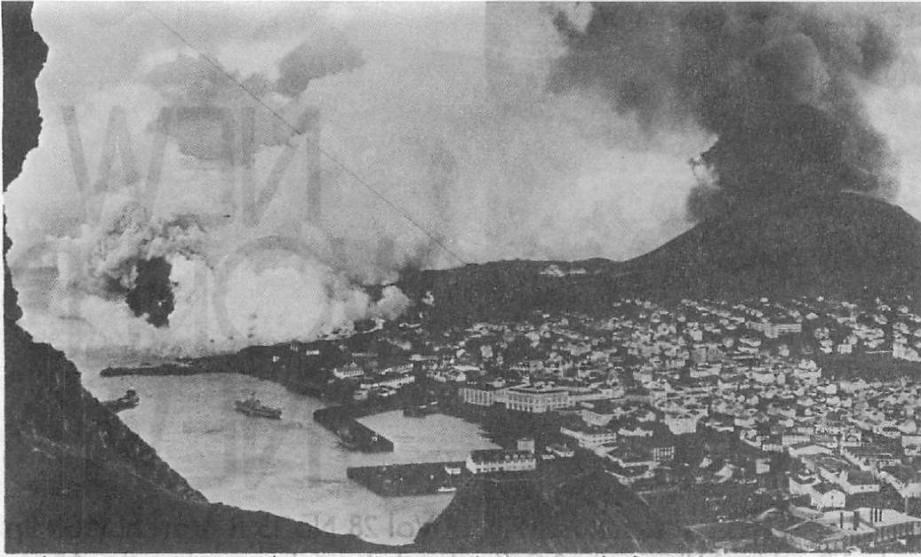
### Out of control

Perhaps we say that we believe in God, that we want to do His will; but when it comes to particulars we act as though we are convinced that we are more intelligent than Him; as though we think He might not, perhaps, have all the facts at His disposal. So we retain in our own hands the right of final decision as to what is right and what is wrong.

Will we hand over control? The implications are not just personal. They reach out into family life, into offices, industries and politics.

That first hour of the day is the test. It can provide the plus factor that we need.





Iceland Tourist Board

A volcanic eruption covers 400 houses on Heimaey in the Westman Islands in 1973.

## Volcanic idea

IN 1973 A VIOLENT VOLCANIC ERUPTION caused the evacuation of the Westman Islands, the busy fishing community off the south coast of Iceland. After the volcanic action subsided, most of the population prepared to return, although the buildings and other facilities had been damaged or destroyed.

Sveinbjorn Jonsson, the director of a firm making radiators, visited the islands at this time in response to an inner prompting.

When he reached the Westman Islands, he found that the eruption had produced a new promontory, a wall of solidified lava alongside the principal harbour. It was still hot, for it was insulated by a deep and dense layer of volcanic ash.

He experimented, and found that a grid of water-filled pipes could be laid on the hot rock to heat the rebuilt town. Calculations suggested that if the insulating deposit of ash was replaced, it would be possible to heat the whole settlement in this way for 20 years. The saving in imported oil resulting from this has been considerable.

## What the Speaker heard

LAST SUMMER the Chief Minister of one of the South African homelands attended the MRA assembly in Caux, Switzerland. With him went the Speaker of the homeland's parliament. They had been on opposite sides of a dispute that had divided the government, but at Caux they considered together what was right for the country and a moving reconciliation took place.

One thing troubled the Speaker. It was possible, he felt, to live in this spirit of unity in a place like Caux where all are equal and all are brothers. But what would happen when he got home and was harassed by petty officials? None the less he decided to be obedient to God's prompting in his heart.

When the Speaker returned home he ran into exactly the kind of situation he had envisaged. He was in a queue at a bank and the teller asked him to let a white man who was behind him go ahead. At first he objected, but then he thought, 'This man does not yet understand that we are equal. Let him go ahead if he wants to.' He let him pass, grumbling inwardly.

Then he had another idea—that he should tell the man he was sorry for his unwillingness. He did so. When he came out of the bank he found the white man there. He had been so amazed by what the Speaker had said that he had had to wait and talk to him. He asked if he might visit the Speaker in his home and the next morning he was there. They became firm friends.

The Speaker is also a Chief and is applying this approach to his dealings with his people.

## Soweto activist

AT THE END OF 1978 a conference took place in Hammanskraal, South Africa. It drew together conservative Afrikaners, black militants and moderates of all colours.

One of those who took part was a young Soweto activist who had been in detention. He found a faith and a new way to work for a just and caring society. His militant comrades heard of his new convictions and began to come to his house at night for discussions.

The security police noted these gatherings and surmised that he might be organising again. One night they swooped on the house to pick him up for interrogation. He was away, but when he heard they were looking for him he decided to leave the country.

He got as far as Mafeking, but he could not forget the comrades he had begun to interest in a new way of life. He felt that if he left the country he would be letting them down. So he returned to Soweto, but never slept at home, for fear of another raid.

One day he had the startling thought that he should get in touch with the security police, as he had nothing to hide. He went to see the man who had interrogated him when he was detained. For several hours the security man tried to shake his story that his friends came to his house to discuss Christianity. He called in two senior officers.

Eventually they accepted his story and asked why he had been so violent and bitter. He spoke of the wrongs in society which had caused this, but also about his home. 'When we fight at home I get mad at everyone and everything,' he said. One security man said, 'I understand. I have problems at home too.'

**'Do you hear the voice of God which consoles—the true promise and hope  
'It is not an easy matter....There are  
are in the midst of deafening noise.  
distinguish the voice of the Lord which  
Lord, in fact, does speak in grave and  
gentle. He speaks to those who want**

## Uncomforta

When KIM BEAZLEY, former Australian Minister for Education, was made an honorary Doctor of Law by the Australian National University, the citation stated that 'no-one has done more than Kim Beazley to bring about a change of attitude towards the Aborigines, recognising the injustices that have been done to them at a time when it was far from popular to do so.'

In a recent speech Dr Beazley told of the decisions which led him to undertake this:

I WAS ONE of ten delegates chosen to represent the Australian parliament at Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953. While in Europe I visited the MRA Centre at Caux. I learnt the idea of taking time in quiet.

The next morning I tried listening. I thought about the absolute moral standards my hosts had talked about—honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. I thought of lies I had told my wife, of impurity in my life, and I thought of my father. He had the problem of drink, and I had not given him my heart. I realised that I had treated some people in

## Bank on it

PETER GEORGE is head of internal audit in a major clearing bank.

IN 1973 I HAD A THOUGHT which has stayed with me ever since: 'Perhaps taking time in quiet is the most productive thing you can ever do—or lead anyone else to do. Why not explore fresh ways of introducing other people to doing just that? Why not let them know that you believe that God will guide, that He has a plan, and that you are prepared to live on that basis?'

Since then I have tried to live in the reality of God's plan, explored minute by minute, but especially in the early morning quiet time. This 30 to 60 minutes a day has brought me a new level of sanity and purpose as I cope with a demanding business life in the City of London.

New sanity, because in quiet God unravels the strands of my daily living, showing me

**'Prayer in question form is prayer  
seeking after God, His nature and His  
questions, and the listening for an answer  
seeks the mind of the Father. This is the  
Father—which is a travesty of prayer.'**

Donald C

inspires, orders, counsels, directs and of destiny that awaits us? thousand other voices around us. We Newspapers, television....how can we is not more resonant than the rest? The plemn terms, but His voice is mild and o listen.

Pope Paul VI

## ole politician

the Labour Party with that problem in the same way. All very uncomfortable thoughts. What should I do about them?

First I wrote to my wife and was honest with her. Then there came a clarification of the mind—that's all I can call it. Before I left Australia I had been given invitations for my visit from people who were later exposed in the Petrov spy affair. I realised who they were or what they were.

I couldn't speak to my father, because he had died. But I could speak to some of the people in my party to whom I had given the cold brush-off, and on my return I apologised for my attitude towards them.

At Caux I had the thought that if I did all I could to live a life of purity, God would use me to work for the dignity of the Aboriginal people. Purity, I saw, was the answer to the living for self-gratification which kills intelligent caring for others.

Still, from time to time, I write down those absolute moral standards and think about them. If we are to be free, a path for God to walk over, they are needed compass points.

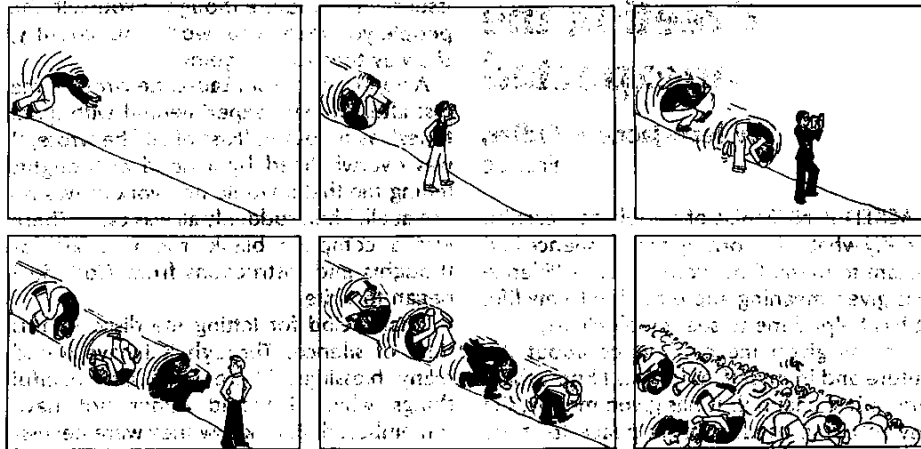
the varying importance of events, the selfishness of my hidden motives and of the fears that choke an open approach to people, restoring relationships and leading me to a way through many an impasse.

New purpose, because neither status nor salary nor security are adequate aims for anybody, and when we renounce them it is like walking into a wholly new world. But when these motives no longer apply, how can we find our way forward? By discovering the truth that the God revealed by Christ not only exists, but that He has a plan and a purpose for His world, including our daily lives, and that His Holy Spirit will prompt and guide us.

In the quiet of the early morning we are refuelled and set on course, reminded of our calling and our deeper responsibilities, enabled to pray and made to think for the needs of the whole world. Then we can get down to the detail of life without losing our bearings.

one of the best forms, for prayer is will. This is dialogue—the asking of ver. The child, ignorant and groping, e reverse of the child dictating to the

ggan, Archbishop of Canterbury 1974-1980



## Avalanche!

by Kenneth Belden

IT WAS TEA-TIME in Oxford. I ran out of Merton College and jumped onto my bike. I was due in fifteen minutes at a tea-time meeting of the Oxford Group (later MRA) at Stewart's restaurant in the Cornmarket. We had all been inviting our friends to this meeting, and I had particularly had one man in my own college in mind. His name was the same as mine—Ken—and I had hunted high and low for him for several days without success.

As I got onto my bike, however, a clear thought shot through my mind: 'Go by way of Teddy Hall' (my own college). This was in exactly the opposite direction, and it was late already. But new as I was to be guided by God, I knew where this thought came from. So I turned my bicycle round and pedalled off. As I swung in to the curb outside the college, out through the archway, with faultless timing, walked my friend. 'Hello, Ken,' I said, 'I've been looking for you all over the place to ask you to this tea that's starting in ten minutes.'

'I'd be glad to come,' he said. So we walked round together.

Afterwards he had a long talk with another student. They ended on their knees together, and Ken gave his life to God. (He is

now an Archdeacon in New Zealand.)

Next day Ken told an old school friend in another college what had happened to him. This friend was a sensitive, imaginative, able and rather unhappy man. At the end of his talk with Ken he too gave his life to God. (Later, he created the film production and distribution side of MRA's work.)

This man was transformed as a result of his decision. Indeed, he looked so different—so happy and outgoing in place of inturbed and despondent that the man living opposite to him asked, 'Peter, what in the world has happened to you? You look totally different.'

So Peter told him. As a result Reggie gave his life to God and set out on the same adventurous course.

Forty years later Reggie, in Canada, had the strong conviction to write a book about the life of Columba, the Irish prince who brought Christianity to Scotland and whose followers took it across Europe.

It was Reggie Hale's book, *The Magnificent Gael*, which inspired Juliet Boobbyer and Joanna Sciortino to write the musical play *Columba*, which toured Scotland last year and is about to set out again.

Thinking about this tale has sharpened again my own desire to live, as Frank Buchman used to say, 'so that God can talk to you at any hour of the day or night.' You never know what may happen as a result.

## Who needs the job?

by Pauline Johnston, Australia

AFTER TEN YEARS working as a dietician in government hospitals I decided I'd rather help people before they got ill. So I left my job and went to see a director of a community health centre. I suggested that there might be work I could do in the community helping people to give themselves and their families the right food.

At first he couldn't see the need for this work. But the job grew, and ultimately I was working half-time. Everyone was saying how marvellous I was. I was sure the job would soon be full-time, and when this didn't happen I became bitter.

I was afraid about the future, too—what if

I didn't marry, who would look after me when I got older? Another community health centre was advertising a half-time job, so I thought I'd do that job as well. Because I was the only dietician in South Australia with any experience in community health I knew I was certain to get it.

Unemployment is very high in the dietetic profession! As I was sitting waiting for my interview, trying to calm myself for the grand performance, I suddenly thought, 'Pauline, you don't need this job.'

I went into the interview. The panel was sitting there like the three wise monkeys. The first thing I said was, 'I don't need this job.' They all sat bolt upright. That interview—for a job I wasn't going to get—went on for an hour, and four people got jobs as a result of it, two of them recent graduates.



# Greeting the unexpected

by Jean-Jacques Odier,  
France

I ASKED A NUMBER of people to describe briefly what this morning time of silence had meant to them. One woman wrote, 'Silence has given meaning and direction to my life. It has helped me to see myself clearly.'

'It has given me confidence about the future and in myself, as long as I know that I am only a channel. It has given me joy, the joy of being used to bring peace to those around me. It has given me freedom in place of slavery to the fear of what people would think of me.'

'It has taught me to listen to people attentively, to try to understand and love them. It has freed me from the desire to be busy all the time so as to avoid thinking.'

'When my husband and I told each other the thoughts we had had in silence, it did more to deepen our love in a few days than anything in 20 years of happy married life.'

Far from being an extra chore, the daily time of silence is a chance to go out to greet the unseen and the unexpected. It is no use straining over some worry or concern. One must accept the unknown, the disconnected, the things one cannot explain, even the absurd.

Once you have laid yourself open to the inner voice, you are more ready to approach

issues which require thought—yourself, the people you meet, your work, your country, the way the world is going.

A young man from Lausanne wrote to me just after he had 'experimented with quiet times', as he put it. 'First of all,' he wrote, 'I was overwhelmed by a flood of thoughts telling me that it would not work or was no use at all. Then suddenly all was calm. There was a complete blank, room at last for thoughts and instructions from God. So I began to write.'

'Thank God for letting me discover this time of silence. Through it I have found many blessings. There were also painful things which I would rather not have remembered. But I know they were necessary to reach an honesty with myself and others.'

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**'If you are fighting for justice, you know that in the man facing you also there is a voice that fights for justice. So give that voice a chance to speak. It will do a better job than you.'**

French trade unionist

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And this experience is not limited to those who believe in God. Agnostics I have known have found in listening an anchor for their lives. Anyone can decide to submit his daily life to the ideal within him, the inner voice, the deeper self. Why should we Christians feel our listening is superior, just because we

believe we know the speaker's name?

There are many obstacles to listening. Each day is full of commitments, pressures, noise, comings and goings, all preventing us from going off alone. To decide to get up earlier—and that often means deciding to go to bed earlier—is often the most costly decision a person has to take, but also the most fruitful one. For those who have to leave home early, there is a certain heroism involved.

## Why write?

Sometimes people ask why it is important to write down the thoughts which come in silence. I have come to the conclusion that our resistance to putting them down on paper is in direct proportion to our pride. We are ready to present our logical conclusions, but find it far more difficult to write down the bidding of our hearts or a message which might have come from beyond ourselves. Some will say this is modesty. Perhaps, but there is also the reluctance to admit that we are receiving orders from a superior.

Writing helps in many other ways. It relieves the memory, which tends to select what it chooses to retain. It frees our mind for the next thought. It is a help to conciseness and clarity. I am often reminded of the advice of Father Graty who lived during the last century: 'Write so that you may listen better to the Word and keep what He says. Always assume that no man will see what is thus dictated to you.'

# Accountant thirsts

by John Rainbow

'HE WHO HAS DRUNK in the waters of Africa will remain for ever thirsty.' My wife and I found that this was true when we returned from a short visit to Kenya and South Africa in 1974. When we were invited last year to work with MRA in Southern Africa for a longer period, the way appeared open for our thirst to be quenched.

But how to take advantage of this opportunity? We felt a growing sense that it was right to go, as did the friends we consulted. But many enquired, 'How can you go? Who will do your work?' For over two decades I had been responsible for much of the work involved in MRA's finances in Britain—accounts, correspondence and communicating the needs.

Every Tuesday, the accountants working at the MRA centre meet to pray. That Tuesday I read out my letter of invitation and following some discussion we got on our knees. As he got up afterwards, one man said: 'During that prayer I had the clear thought that your replacement would come

from Southern Africa.'

There was one person from Southern Africa who might have been able to help us—a young chartered accountant from Zimbabwe-Rhodesia called Don Barnett. But Don had a job in Salisbury, was bringing up a young family and was engaged in a work of reconciliation much needed in that country. There didn't seem to be much hope of help from that quarter.

## Mafeking

But a few days later, I was talking about this to another friend. 'This is most interesting,' he said. 'I've just had a letter from Don to say that he and his wife have had the unexpected idea that they should come to Britain for a year to work with MRA.' The next two months saw this happen—with Don readily undertaking many of my responsibilities.

When we were in Mafeking last November a Bishop asked me, 'Do you believe in intercessory prayer?' I told him this story. He said, 'Thank you very much, that answers all my questions.'

Anyone feeling thirsty?

# Laughing in quiet

by Nada Bond

A BIG MUG of tea and time to think—I often need that more than anything. Each morning I make time for it.

I tell Jesus all my worries about life and about people and he gives me ideas on what may help.

When I'm in genuine distress He is more tender and compassionate than anyone on earth. He can heal heartache.

At other times I get a mental picture of Jesus laughing at me and saying, 'Come off it, you're just being selfish again.'

He reminds me to think widely and generously, for other people and places. The greatest stabilizer of all is that he reassures me that he loves me, needs me, and will take care of me.

## For further reading Foundations for Faith

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