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SINGAPORE PASTORAL INSTITUTE

*Dear Friends,*

June. Overseas holidays. Break from school. Okay, maybe no break from school.

In any case, 2008 is half over and now is a good time as any to rest with God and take stock of life. Our busyness and many preoccupations make our life whiz by at breakneck speed. There is always too little time and too many things left undone, sometimes we feel like our schedule owns us instead of the other way round.

STOP.

Seize your timetable by the collar and sit it down with a hot beverage: it is time to ask the existential question that justifies all our activities. It just so happens that this is also the question that SPI has been exploring in its activities over the month.

What makes us human? Is it our ability to love, especially evidenced in the great outpouring of compassion for those who suffer the natural tragedies in China and Myanmar? Or is it our power of reason that enables us to seek for truth and technological progress? Or maybe it is our soul that sets us apart from other living things, giving us the mysterious ability to relate with the transcendent?

Asking the question of humanity explores the deeper meaning of what my being a person is about. I believe that each one of us already has an answer to the question; just that not many are aware that they have made it! Our answer conditions the way we behave, how we spend our time, the choices that we make, the occupations we

adopt – our answer determines our entire life schedule. However our answer is not final, we are constantly developing our understanding of what it means to be a person.

Our June issue of the Pastoral Institute eNews dips a toe into the waters of identity – in our feminist theological reflection course we inquired what it means to be a woman person; in Fr. Renckens' philosophy course we looked at the human being as a meaning-making person; and in the ministry of Christian initiation we ask ourselves what constitutes a Christian person.

What makes you human? Jump right in, the water's nice and warm. Happy reading!

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*Welcome on board....*

The Pastoral Institute is grateful to God for providing us three wonderful individuals to develop the fields of pastoral ministry and catechesis!

**Christi Disher,**



who hails from the state of Louisiana in the US, is an experienced hand in the area of catechesis. Recognized as a Master Catechist by her diocese, she has served her church as a leader in faith formation and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in religious education. Christi is a parishioner of St. Ignatius Church. As Coordinator for Catechesis for the secondary level, Christi will work closely with those involved in the ministry to support and improve catechesis in the parishes.

**Sr. Leticia Lopez**



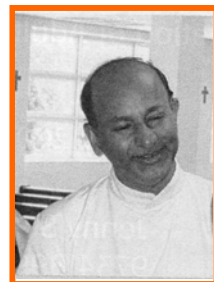
belongs to the congregation of Verbum Dei Missionaries. Recently back from Taiwan after learning the Mandarin language, Sr. Leticia will lend her expertise as pastoral associate. Alongside our coordinator Daphne Leong, she will support existing research and programs at the Institute while focusing her work on the Small Christian Communities (SCC) of the Archdiocese. Sr. Leticia is a native of Guadalajara, Mexico.

SCCs as diocesan director of SCCs. He is currently assistant priest in the parish of St. Stephen and

chaplain to the Malayalam Catholic Community. Fr Joseph will lend a hand to the Integrated Pastoral Approach team in nurturing the Small Christian Communities here in Singapore.

We extend our warmest welcome to them, and look forward to drawing from their excellent company and wisdom!

**Fr. Joseph Kanappilly**



comes to us from the Indian subcontinent. A priest of the Diocese of Vijayapuram, Kottayam, Fr. Joseph has many years of experience in forming

# Feminist Theological Reflection

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This serious sounding topic was introduced by Arthur Goh and Vera Handojo as the subject of informal and lively conversation over two sessions at the Catholic Social and Community Council. Facilitated by the husband-and-wife team, participants learnt that the feminist movement has tended to be conveyed by media as antagonistic to men; however, that representation of feminism is far from complete.

At its broadest, feminist action is a response to women's collective experience of being excluded from the shaping of society and culture. Feminists assert that women are people too: having voice and dignity.

The various ways women choose to act from this experience gives rise to different 'feminisms.' More popularly known groups of feminists see little hope in men. Their attempts to either separate themselves from the male-dominated world or to overpower men at their own game often make the news. However, the larger majority of feminist thinkers believe in renewing society together with men – they offer their

contributions to change old ways of thinking and being in the hope of building a more humanizing society.

Accepting the more positive offerings of feminism opens up our awareness and gives us new ways of building better communities rooted in fairness. This is a fundamental step towards the Christian vision of God's reign. Women practice *theou-logos*, or making meaning with God, out of their own unique experience, using women's ways of reason, reading scripture as women, and entering into dialogue with our Catholic tradition. Feminist theology aims to identify biases in the way we make meaning with God, in order to arrive at a fuller sense of what it means to be human; to be in right relationship with the self, with others, and with God.

"We've never had anything like this before." observed Vu Tien Vy, one of the few males who



attended this short course. Christina Kheng, another participant, agreed that it is timely to broach this subject and adds "this is only the tip of the iceberg!"

As we continue to celebrate Catholic women this year, keep a look out for the next two events in the "Feminine Genius" series: Women's Spirituality and Women in the Old Testament.

*"Women In Old Testament Part 2" by Sr Susan Thomas, FMM. Beginning 26 Jun, 5 Thursdays, 9.30am–11.30am, CAEC, 2 Highland Road. Call 6858 3100 to register.*

# RCIA: The Rite of Dismissal of Catechumens and Sharing of the Word of God

“Those who are newly brought forward to hear the Word shall first be brought before the teachers at the house, before all the people enter. Then they will be questioned concerning the reason that they have come forward to the faith. Those who bring them will bear witness concerning them as to whether they are able to hear...”

– Ch. 15 of The Apostolic Tradition, ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome (circa 215)

Apparently, the Christians of third century Rome took the Word of God seriously enough to demand some kind of proper disposition before one was permitted to hear it. The Apostolic Tradition goes on to list the motivations and occupations that prohibited a person from being able to hear the word together with the Christian community. Only after a purification of intention or a renunciation of a sinful occupation had taken place could a person be admitted to ‘hear’ as a catechumen.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) expresses the same understanding of the role of the word of God in the process of making new Catholics. We believe that at the liturgy of the word, we truly encounter the presence of our Lord Jesus. Catechumens

learn to draw spiritual nourishment from the table of the word before they can appreciate the nourishment provided at the table of the Eucharist.

At the Rite of Acceptance newcomers, brought to the parish community by their sponsors, testify publicly that they have heard the Good News of Jesus and are ready to follow Christ as ‘trainee’ Catholics. This promise enables them to be joined to the worshipping community of believers: they are ‘accepted’ or recognized by the entire congregation as official hearers of the word of God proclaimed at Sunday worship.

Gradually the catechumens hear the great story of salvation and learn to love the word of God – spoken in the liturgy, shared between one another, and put to life-giving use in daily experience. With eager anticipation, they look forward to the day they can

offer sacrifice as fully initiated Catholic Christians in the liturgy of the Eucharist.

“The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites...at Mass catechumens may also take part with the faithful in the liturgy of the word, thus better preparing themselves for their eventual participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist...when they are present in the assembly of the faithful they should be kindly dismissed before the liturgy of the Eucharist begins. For they must await their baptism, which will join them to God’s priestly people and empower them to participate in Christ’s new worship.”

– No. 75.3 of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults



# A Brief History of Western Philosophy - Part One

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How do we understand and explain the concept of 'God'? Why do we think the way we do about ourselves and about our religion? These are some questions posed by longtime lecturer of philosophy at the Major Seminary Fr. Albert Renckens, SSCC, to participants at his course on Western Philosophy. Conducted at St. Ignatius parish, this formation event was intended for the lay people to develop 'better thinkers.'

"An Introduction to Western Philosophy" was held from 24 March to 12 May and attracted a crowd of about thirty. Over eight weeks, Fr Renckens introduced different philosophers who influenced western thinking, such as Heraclitus, Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and Thomas Aquinas. Through them, Fr Renckens showed how

western philosophy influenced the philosophy of the Christian religion.

Some students found the material difficult to grapple with. With the new awareness that church thinking did not drop out of the sky, but evolved and developed through history. Current church understandings of God, the universe, and the human person were all strongly influenced by the ideas of the Western philosophers. Some of the more enthusiastic students even asked Fr. Renckens for an extra session so that they could engage in further discussion to clarify and deepen their understanding of what was presented. "I'm no salesman but in my opinion the part two of this course, when we look at philosophers closer to our time, will be more interesting." Fr. Renckens told the participants.

For those interested to find out more, the second part of this course: "Modern & Contemporary Philosophy" will begin on 10 August, 8.00pm to 9.30pm at St. Ignatius Church. Call 6858 3011 or email [spi@catholic.org.sg](mailto:spi@catholic.org.sg) to register.



## Modern & Contemporary Philosophy

10 Mondays

18 & 25 Aug, 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29 Sep, 6, 13 & 20 Oct

8.00pm—9.30pm

Church of St Ignatius

Contribution : love offering.

## Coming up...

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### Understanding Dementia Pastoral Care of the Elderly

By Dr Philip Yap  
5 July (Sat)  
9.30am—12.30pm  
CSCC, Solomon's Room  
55 Waterloo Street 9th floor  
(Take lift to 8th floor)  
Contribution: love offering.



### Women's Spirituality

By Edwina Yeow, Sr Christine Santhou and Sr Elizabeth Lim  
11, 18 & 25 July (3 Fridays)  
8.00pm—10.00pm  
Church of the Holy Spirit, Attic  
Contribution: love offering

### Pastoral Workshop on Media Awareness

By Augustine Anthuvan  
19 July (Sat)  
2.00pm—5.00pm  
CAEC, 2 Highland Road  
Contribution: love offering

For all three courses:  
Call 6858 3011 or email  
[spi@catholic.org.sg](mailto:spi@catholic.org.sg) to register.