

# Spiritual Direction Is 'Listening Ministry'

By Kevin Foy

When was the last time you listened to God?

Many people speak to God through prayers of thanksgiving, praise and petition, yet never allow God the opportunity to talk back. Perhaps they do not realize that they can enter into a dialogue with God. They think that prayer is just a one-way street.

These people need some form of spiritual direction and now they have the opportunity.

The primary ministry of the recently-formed Spiritual Integration Center is to provide spiritual direction. The center, which is coordinated by James Dombeck and operates out of St. Monica's Rectory, grew from the ideas of a group of friends who have worked together for many years. "We had a working respect for each other and

hoped for an ongoing relationship," Dombeck said.

This ongoing relationship uncovered a common interest in spiritual direction as the friends began to realize and appreciate each other's gifts and competences. Dombeck himself said that he gained a competence for listening through his own experiences as a lawyer and there grew an awareness of a possible call to ministry.

Spiritual direction is a "listening" ministry. Dombeck stressed that a spiritual director guides by listening — "a spiritual director does not discern or make decisions for people."

According to Dombeck, the job of a spiritual director is to ask, "What do you want?" He continued, "A spiritual director helps people to discover themselves by helping them notice what already exists in their lives." He believes that a director helps the person

enter into a dialogue with God by simply developing an awareness or consciousness of what that person already has through spiritual formation. "The director learns to listen to God and then discovers more about himself," Dombeck said.

Dombeck said that the center supports its ministry of spiritual direction by going to places and offering retreats, workshops and other programs. He also said the center does not charge any fee for spiritual direction; it operates entirely on donations.

The center has been busy, but Dombeck says, "We want to avoid notions of success by numbers, but we have not lacked things to do. The variety (of retreats and programs) has been interesting."

One important aspect of spiritual direction that Dombeck and the other

Center members have in common is a concern for furthering their education. "We have a respect for learning and we try to go as a group to continuing education workshops at least twice a year," he said. The members also try to go to retreats and workshops individually whenever they have the opportunity. Dombeck stressed that formal learning "keeps us open to new dimensions of ministry."

In looking toward the future, Dombeck said that he and the other members of the team are looking for a wider application to the ministry. "Although all of our members presently are Roman Catholic, and that is our orientation, we hope to have a broader outreach to the larger Christian community," Dombeck said. In response to this, they have already done programs for the Episcopal diocese, Genesee Ecumenical

Ministries, and Colgate-Rochester Divinity School. Dombeck said that the team definitely wants to do more of the work that is called for and be open to the gifts of others.

Although they feel that an important part of their ministry is going to places to direct and present retreats and workshops, the members also hope to have a larger facility some day. "We would like, over the course of time, for the center to become a place of spiritual learning. However, we're

still in the formation stage, and we, as a group, are open to the ways we are being led," Dombeck said.

Spirituality is important to all people who want to develop a good prayer life and thus be able to listen to God. Dombeck believes that good spirituality can be attained. "The notion of spirituality is here, not in heaven. We were created to be human."

## TELEVISION

### 'Thorn Birds' Fly in for Holy Week

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — Colleen McCullough's "The Thorn Birds," transformed into a massive 10-hour "novel for television," will be aired by ABC, with breathtakingly bad timing, for four nights during Holy Week: Sunday, March 27, 8-11 p.m.; Monday, March 28, 9-11 p.m.; Tuesday, March 29, 9-11 p.m.; and Wednesday, March 30, 8-11 p.m.

"The Thorn Birds" is an Australian domestic saga, the story of the Cleary family and more particularly the story of the illicit love between Meggie Cleary and handsome, ambitious Father Ralph de Braccart, later an archbishop and cardinal.

The television version, skipping the book's New Zealand opening, begins in 1920, when rich, imperious Mary Carson (Barbara Stanwyck) summons her poor but hard-working younger brother, Paddy (Richard Kiley), to Australia so that he can manage and perhaps inherit Drogheda, her vast sheep ranch.

The parish priest, Father Ralph (Richard Chamberlain), is immediately taken with the youngest Cleary, 11-year-old Meggie (Sydney Penny), the only daughter of Paddy and his wife, Fiona (Jean Simmons).

The growing attachment between priest and girl doesn't escape the baleful eye of Mary. Though old enough to be Ralph's grandmother, Mary had designs on him herself, and it was only after he laughingly kept her at a distance for years — despite her dangling the glittering prize of Drogheda before him — that she finally made her grand gesture toward Paddy and his family.

About the time that Meggie blossoms into a beautiful young woman (played by Rachel Ward), Mary, nursing her grievances and giving up on Ralph's body, concocts a plan to snare his soul. Her stratagem involves a secret

will, leaving Drogheda to the Church, and a mocking challenge from beyond the grave that will force Ralph to choose between his love for Meggie and his hope for advancement. Ralph succumbs, giving Mary the last laugh, even if she gets it posthumously, and failing Meggie — for the first time but not for the last.

As Ralph's career rapidly advances, Meggie drifts into a loveless marriage and leaves Drogheda for tropical Queensland where she suffers much. Ralph comes back to Australia from Rome as apostolic delegate just in time to be at her side when she gives birth to a daughter. Sometime later, the inevitable occurs. Ralph, who has been fighting against his love and desire for years, gives in at last, and they spend an idyllic few days together before Ralph, after some agonizing, goes back to Rome.

Meggie leaves her husband and returns to Drogheda, where a few months later she gives birth to Dane, Ralph's son. Now Meggie has what she wants at last, but the one she has always thought of as her antagonist, God, turns out to have other ideas. Dane (Philip Anglim), the fruit of illicit love grown to manhood, aspires to the priesthood with a purity and fervor that his father never had.

Subtlety was not the strong point of the book, and it's even less evident in the television version. All the main characters are walking obsessions, with Ralph, the complicated one, distinguished by having two instead of one.

Filed in Hawaii and California, the production features picture-postcard beautiful scenery, but the only authentically Australian note seems to be the five or six kangaroos rented to gallop by in the distance a couple of times in the early portions.

A still more serious blow to authenticity are the

accents. Plain old American seems to predominate, which is going to make the more unsophisticated viewers wonder why Meggie's feckless husband (the excellent Australian actor Bryan Brown) talks so funny.

Though the Church figures so prominently in things, Miss McCullough seems to know precious little about it. Thus the vaulting ambition that is one of Ralph's obsessions remains quite unspecific. He becomes a Vatican bureaucrat, and he seems to spend all of his time strolling in gardens or sipping tea or sherry in an ornate room, always in full regalia. (No cleric ever, anywhere, anytime, in "The Thorn Birds" would think of wearing a plain old black suit.)

the production is a solid performance by Richard Chamberlain. A bit facile at the beginning, Chamberlain summons up a passion and intensity in the later sections that make us less mindful of the melodrama, the shallowness of characterization, the lack of wit and the often stilted dialogue.

In moral terms, as well as aesthetic, "The Thorn Birds" falls short principally because it attempts to deal with a serious subject without having the resources to do it justice.

"The Thorn Birds" is strictly adult fare, suitable only for those mature enough to deal with its inadequacies. The very few scenes involving sex are relatively restrained in comparison to what is shown in feature films, but they're graphic for network television.

The only major virtue of

#### THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



EDWIN SULEWSKI

#### What is grief?

Grief is a process of feelings and behaviors which follows the loss of someone or something that we love. The entire process of grieving helps us to come to terms with the changes that have taken place in our lives and begin adjustment to them. This is not always easy and often lasts for a year or more. Some of the feelings that accompany grief are anger, guilt, anxiety, shock, jealousy and depression. It is not uncommon to be confused, restless, to have difficulty sleeping or to have a change in appetite. It takes time to accept the reality that someone we love is deceased. It takes longer to recreate a life that can make us happy.

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