Church Alive!

Pilgrimages in Faith, 1956-2006

Greg Dening
A Poet’s Prayer

O God, who by the spirit in our hearts dost lead us to desire Thy perfection, to seek for truth, and to rejoice in beauty; illumine, we pray Thee, and inspire all thinkers, writers, artists and craftsmen; that in whatsoever is true and pure and lovely, Thy name may be hallowed and Thy kingdom come on earth.

Lord, hear us.

Direct and bless, we beseech Thee, O Lord, those who speak where many listen, and write what many read; that they may do their part in making the heart of the people wise, its mind sound, and its will righteous.

Lord, hear us.

Philip John Talbot Martin
Poet - Parishioner
28 March 1931 – 18 October 2005
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Prologue: The Spirit at Work

Living History
Triumph 1956
Hopefulness 1976
Breaking Bread
Word and Song
New Church, New Priest
The Christ and Women
The Prophetic Imagination
Epilogue: Pilgrim Parish

Acknowledgements
Notes
Bibliography
A Prefatory Note

Vatican Council II (1962-1965) brought an aggiornamento—a renewal—into the Catholic Church. This Living History of three Jesuit Parish Churches on the North Shore of Sydney Harbour is a story of the hope and pain in that renewal.

Church Alive! is a Living History because it is, on my part, an ethnographic description of religious experience in times of change, 1956-2006. But it is Living, too, in another way. Nothing’s said till it’s dreamed out in words/and nothing’s true that figures in words only, the poet Les Murray has written. You will find the hope and pain of the Church’s renewal dreamed out in words in the Word Pictures of many parishioners who describe their religious experiences as they are—not as they should be or as they are told they should be. As they are! Those Word Pictures are to be found as Mystery, Believing, Celebrating, Priestliness, Calling, Ministering.

There are living images as well as living words in Church Alive! Anne Kearney, a parishioner and an artist who has exhibited in oils, pastels, collage and ceramics for over twenty years, and who is also qualified in Systematic Theology, undertook to take an unmapped journey of considerable risk and insecurity by providing her own creations to introduce our essays on Sacred Space and Sacred Time and the Word Pictures.

I thank Anne and all the others for being willing to join me in writing a different sort of history, one informed by hope and love as much as science and art.

By agreement, the Word Pictures are individually unnamed. The names of their authors are to be found in the Acknowledgements.

Greg Dening

The Other Side

January 2006
A pilgrimage church (German: Wallfahrtskirche) is a church to which pilgrimages are regularly made, or a church along a pilgrimage route, like the Way of St. James, that is visited by pilgrims. Pilgrimage churches are often located by the graves of saints, or hold portraits to which miraculous properties are ascribed or saintly relics that are safeguarded by the church for their veneration. Such relics may include the bones, books or pieces of clothing of the saints, occasionally also fragments of the...