

The launching of  
“Releasing the Angel,  
Saluting All Who Strive to Teach”

Author: Father Christopher Gleeson SJ

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007



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Bishop Greg O'Kelly SJ,  
Auxiliary Bishop of Adelaide

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Chris Gleeson

The first book, *Releasing the Angel: saluting all who strive to teach*, is written by Fr Chris Gleeson. It is intended for teachers. As Chris writes in his Explanatory Note,

All teachers are springtime workers in trusting that the seeds they sow in their students will produce one day people who make a difference in the wider community. *Releasing the Angel* issues from a similar act of faith that it will prove to be a book that teachers and others might leave open on their tables and from which they might glean some occasional inspiration.

The title of the book is drawn from the story told of the man visiting Michelangelo in his studio as he worked with his chisel on a huge block of rough-hewn marble. A far from inspiring sight...dusty, messy, hard work. When the man asked Michelangelo what he was doing, he replied: 'I'm releasing the angel imprisoned in this marble.' Chris explains that "education, as the word implies, is that profession which seeks to free people – to give each individual the care, the wherewithal, to achieve their potential. Often we ourselves are blind to these gifts and talents and they can only be released for us, even chiselled out of us, by teachers who have a vision and a love to set them free.'

*Releasing the Angel* is an inspiring 'tool kit' for teachers. Under the chapter headings of:

Teaching and Accompanying  
Teaching and Listening  
Teaching and Storytelling  
Teaching and Freeing  
Teaching and Blessing  
Teaching and Community-Building  
Teaching is Heart Work

Chris has gathered together snippets and stories from a wide range of people and has moulded them into a coherent and valuable framework.

Chris is in a sound position to write such a book. He was ordained priest in 1975, taught English and History, and was Executive Assistant to the Jesuit Provincial for two years. He has an Honours History degree and DipEd from Melbourne University and a Bachelor of Divinity from the Melbourne College of Divinity. He was appointed Head of Xavier College, Melbourne in 1981, and after 11 years in his role, and a brief period as Chaplain of Newman College, he was appointed Head of St Ignatius College Riverview, Sydney, from 1993 to 2002.

Having been Head for a total of 21 years, he has known the joys, struggles of a great many teachers and supported them in their work of releasing many thousands of angels over the years. Beyond his own schools, Chris has supported Heads of schools across Australia through his establishment of the Social Issues Committee (of which I was proud to be the national convenor for the past two years). Chris's leadership as National Chair of the Association of Independent Schools from 1999-2001 was a significant time in the life of AHISA. It was marked by an overt focus on things of the spirit and student welfare in ways that I had not previously observed in that organisation. Chris has left a lasting legacy on AHISA which, in turn, impacts on the lives and learning of many thousands of young people, their teachers and their families across Australia.

After being assigned in September 2005 to the Jesuit Community of Toowong in Brisbane, he has become a member of the Jesuits' Loyola Institute team responsible for developing and providing Ignatian formation programs in Australia and overseas. In April, 2006, he was appointed Director of the new Faber Centre of Ignatian Spirituality in Brisbane. In other ways too, Chris continues to influence teachers and students, notably as a member of the inaugural Board of Edmund Rice Education Australia, which focuses on the management and administration of the Christian Brothers' school system in Australia.

- This is Chris' 3<sup>rd</sup> book:
- Striking a Balance: Teaching Values and Freedom (1994);

- A Canopy of Stars – some reflections for the Journey (2003);
- And now “Releasing the Angel” Saluting all who Strive to Teach”.
- Chris’ books have provided material for probably countless headmaster’s assemblies and Speech Days.
- My own philosophy:-
  - Praise, reverence and serve;
  - Artist always painting himself;
  - Heart of Education is the education of the heart;
  - No school can rise above its Common Room.
- Chris feeds all these four areas:-
  - he starts with the Angel;
  - he quotes Margaret Wheatley: *“We don’t decide what our vocation is, we receive it”*.

His favourites are here:

- dance floor and the balcony;
- Joan Chittister;
- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks;
- Saint Exupery.
- Plethora of Sage Utterances:
  - *You defend a country by armies; but you defend a civilisation by schools;*
  - St Francis – preach constantly ...
  - Saint Exupery: *“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye”*.
  - St Augustine: *“If the times are bad, then let us be better; then the times will be better, for we are the times”*.
  - Pilgrim’s Prayer p56: *“Prayer for the Journey”*

*“O God, be for us  
A companion in walking,  
A guide at the crossroads,  
A defence against dangers,  
Shelter on the road,  
Shade in the heat,  
Light in the darkness,  
Courage in dismay  
And firmness in our uncertainty  
So that, following you  
We may arrive safely at the end of the journey”*

○ Jean de Brebeuf, p53.

Let me offer here a rather unusual, yet splendid example of this ministry of accompaniment. In 1637, that giant amongst those we later called the North American Jesuit martyrs, Jean De Brebeuf, wrote the following list of instructions for his Jesuit missionaries working with the Huron Indians:

*You must love these Hurons, ransomed by the blood of the Son of God, as brothers; you must never keep the Indians waiting at the time of embarking; carry a tinder-box or a piece of burning-glass, or both to make fire for them during the day for smoking, and in the evening when it is necessary to camp, as these little services win their hearts; try to eat the food they offer you, and eat all you can, for you may not eat again for hours; eat as soon as the day breaks, for Indians, when on the road, eat only at the rising and setting of the sun; be prompt in embarking and disembarking and do not carry any water or sand into the canoe; be the least troublesome to the Indians; do not ask questions: silence is golden; bear with their imperfections, and you must try always to be and appear cheerful; share little gifts with them; always carry something during the portages; do not be ceremonious with the Indians; do not paddle unless you intend always to paddle; the Indians*

*will keep later that opinion of you which they have formed during the trip; always show any other Indians you meet on the way a cheerful face and show that you readily accept the fatigues of the journey”.*

- Written with Chris’ usual clarity:
  - Quotes some 213 authors;
  - Index .. I appear at p150, 151 (Roots and Branches p44).
  
- Paul VI: *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “Students will listen to witnesses ...”

Thank you.

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*Bishop G. J. O’Kelly, SJ*  
Auxiliary Bishop of Adelaide

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