

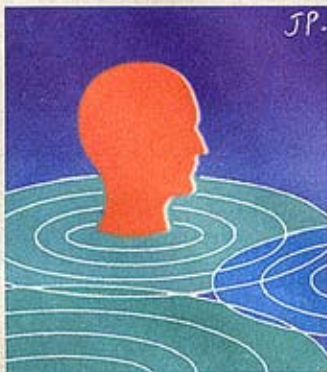
**L**AST week, I visited the Holy Transfiguration Monastery at Breakwater, in Geelong. Breakwater is a romantic-sounding name, but the community is embedded in an industrial area with freeway extensions threatening their practice of silence.

Waiting at the front gate for us, in his rope-waisted robe and Blundstones, was Brother Stephen. I thought he was standing at the gate because we were slightly late, but as the others leapt to greet us I registered their delight at our arrival.

I had come for a meeting and was surprised to be among honoured guests; the truth slowly dawning that all who came were honoured guests.

After morning tea, Brother Graeme led us around. Standing at the entrance to the building dedicated as the baptistery, I experienced that visceral shift, where distractions drop away and your attention is fully present. Brother Graeme's voice had a steady resonance, rising and falling like waves on a beach, but with unpredictable crests that carried you, like a surprised bodysurfer, into shore or way out to sea.

The baptistery was a large room mostly of bare bluestone with wooden benches.



Elemental, really; things of stone and wood, plus beautiful etched glass windows letting in the light. It was a Wednesday morning in August; I did not expect to be admiring a baptismal pool, brick and bluestone steps plunging below floor level, candlelight flickering and reflecting off wooden canopies. I did not expect to yearn for a tradition associated in my youth with unattractive architecture and stilted ritual.

Brother Graeme described the practice

where the adult candidates for baptism stand with their sponsors at the gated doorway that marks the entrance to the baptistery from the foyer. Inside, sitting on the floor and around the edges of the room, dressed in their white, baptismal robes, wait the gathered community of believers.

As Brother Graeme outlined the ceremony, the call and response between the community and the candidate, the wash of the water, the splash of immersion, I felt myself shaken, shivering almost, like a new candidate. I was only listening but I was also soaked to the skin, immersed for the moment in that powerful flash of insight where the religious construct you have carefully built suddenly collapses.

I felt like the prodigal returning home. I felt claimed again by my own faith tradition. I had forgotten how good the party could be, where people and water called to each other, where God claimed you with a big 'Yes' and a wash of water. Standing on the stone floor, I knew that I was seen and known, that this was my tribe and that the word Christian had a whole new resonance.

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