



Parish of the Nativity of the Lord

Book + Circle – October 2025

## **The Full Catastrophe by Tracey Leonard**

### **About the Book**

*The Full Catastrophe* is Tracey Leonard's candid and inspiring memoir about a life transformed by service, adventure, and tragedy. In her very early twenties, Leonard travels from Australia to Calcutta to work with Mother Teresa, and later to a remote Aboriginal community, where she finds purpose and belonging. Her journey takes a devastating turn when a car accident leaves her quadriplegic, forcing her to rebuild her life and identity. Blending humour, honesty, and faith, Leonard reflects on resilience, meaning, and the courage to live fully amid profound change. This is an exceptional memoir.

### **How did the book make us feel?**

This book had great impact on all of us, it was a page turner. We were all struck by this book in a variety of ways. The journey Tracey had been on during her twenties was quite astonishing. She lived her life to the full and we found it interesting how her 'day job' caring for the sick and dying in India contrasted dramatically with her social life in the 'ex pat' community. Some readers thought there was a 'disconnect' in this, but others felt it showed a lively, strong character with a 'joie de vivre'. To an extent one reader felt all those extreme experiences, were instrumental in enabling Tracey to deal with her own dire circumstances after the accident.

Some of us had come to this book and knowledge of Tracey's accident via Richard Leonard's book 'Where the Hell is God?' Richard was her brother, and a Jesuit priest, he gave the reader a different view of Tracey, with more focus on the car accident and its impact on Tracey, so it was very interesting to read her own account of her life.

A few of us thought the title of the book implied Tracey would be writing more about her life after the accident but this was only mentioned towards the end, and one reader felt this was reflective of Tracey's character - showing both immense courage and much humility and humour through the difficulties of coming to terms with her condition. She did not focus on self, but on others. As one Book+circle member said having read the book – "The world is a better place for Tracey having been in it".

### **What did the group think were the Book's main strengths?**

The memoir was so well written, very well structured and easy to read.

She wrote so well about the different characters in her life, we were there with them eg. Sr Luke waiting patiently in the hope that Tracey would be converted and join the order of nuns.

The book gave a practical insight into the work of Mother Teresa and just how hard it was dealing daily with very sick and dying people and having to keep moving them on to allow more to come in and be cared for. We were interested to note that several volunteers did come and want to join the order, even though Tracey wasn't keen.

We were all impressed by the level of recall Tracey had in writing this book a couple of years after the accident – she included a few photos and perhaps these helped to trigger the memories and the fact that when writing this book, she was so limited physically perhaps helped her concentration on her past.

### **What did we think were the Book's main weaknesses?**

There were very few thoughts about this book having weaknesses. The only comment was around the title implying we might expect more details on Tracey's life after her accident.

Some of us also would have been interested to learn more about Tracey's spiritual thinking and what she saw as her main motivation for caring for others.

### **Would we recommend this book to others?**

Yes, this is a book we felt anyone could read and get a lot from it. We did think it might be helpful to share this book alongside Tracey's brother book – "Where the Hell is God?" by Richard Leonard SJ.

### **What happened to Tracey?**

From researching online there are various 'eulogies' that show Tracey died aged 56, in 2017 having been cared for by her mother, Joan, at home for almost 30 years. Two links below:

<https://jesuit.ie/news/heartbroken-saying-goodbye/>

<https://jesuit.org.au/a-family-burial/>

### **Next Book+Circle – Meeting Room at St Joseph's**

**Thursday 11 December 8.00pm**

Chosen book – **God is not Angry by Ian Pettit**

The first meeting in 2026 (TBA) we will read: **What are we waiting for – Fr Richard Leonard** (finding meaning in Advent and Christmas)

And we will add to the reading list Pope Leo's first Apostolic Exhortation – *Delexi te* (I have loved you)