



SELF-APPRECIATION

THE HUMAN PERSON, the self, is a beautiful creation, ‘the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake’ (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24). Created in the image and likeness of God and for communion with God, the human person has a fundamental goodness and an inalienable dignity. Loved in Jesus Christ, the human person is the supreme concern of God, of Jesus Christ, and therefore of the Church.

The Church’s mission is to people, to us human persons, ensuring that our dignity and rights are respected and that we are enabled to become the human beings we have been created and called to be.

The thread that links the articles that follow is *the human person*. We are invited to reflect upon the massive effort to provide a suitable Catholic education so that we do our utmost to enable our young people to be the persons God created them to be (Quillinan). We remember that we must continue our efforts to discover those in our midst who have a calling to service in the church community and to support them in their preparation and in their future ministry for people (Darragh). We acknowledge the historical significance of the family, which is described in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (no. 211) as the ‘divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person...’ (McCabe). We acknowledge the importance of supporting married people and their families, enabling them to give their witness and teaching about how God loves people (Pirolas). The dignity of the human person is attested by the respect accorded to conscience and its free decisions (Lewis). And Mary is a model for us of true and authentic personhood (Farrell).

The story of the prodigal son—or, since we are focusing our attention on the father,

‘the story of the prodigal father’—tells us how much our God longs to welcome us home from ‘a far country’ (O’Donnell). Our life, if lived in response to the grace of God and assisted and sustained by a faith community, is a journey to authenticity. It is a journey of conversion as we turn from what is not the *real me*—ways of thinking, acting, relating that are not honest and truthful—to discover and allow to emerge the real me with all the dignity and goodness and beauty that the Creator has given me and has fostered in me.

People are not valued so highly in the society in which we live. Other concerns take priority: possessions, power, influence, reputation, enjoyment, luxury, productivity, a healthy economy. In the pursuit of objectives such as these, often people suffer.

Often, too, the human person is not appreciated for its intrinsic dignity and worth by human persons themselves. People have a low opinion of themselves—they suffer from ‘low self-esteem’. They have heeded messages from media and public opinion and other sources that set unrealistic standards concerning body image, intelligence, temperament, character and ‘perfection’, and they can be chronically unhappy with themselves.

Some people take a still darker view of the human person. They judge humanity as a whole to be pathetic—a poor, sad crowd without prospects.

I seemed to detect something of this latter sentiment—or existential judgment—in the description of the ‘self’ given by a guest on Kerry O’Brien’s *7.30 Report* on the ABC at the end of February. The guest was Rupert Everett, the actor who, I am told, would be remembered by anyone who saw the film *My Best Friend’s Wedding*, in which he is reported to have stolen the show. Not, therefore, a person lacking in brilliance or fame nor, as he



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demonstrated in the course of the interview with Kerry O'Brien, is he at all inarticulate. But he gave an appalling description of the 'self'. Kerry O'Brien asked him to explain a statement he had written, *viz.*:

...lost from my own life and, looking back, that was my endless quest; not acting, not fame, not love, just losing myself.

He answered:

I think the self, really, our self is an exhausting, anxious, conflicted, aggressive, angry, frightened thing. And we drag along all this baggage from the past everywhere and we're always anxious about what's going to happen next, how are we going to keep going, how are we going to pay this bill, how are we going to keep our children in school whatever it is.

The Gospel, Christian faith, Church teaching and Catholic theology tell us that if we have any view of ourselves that resonates with any negative descriptions of the self such as this, then we are mistaken. We are not attending to our true selves, but concentrating our attention on some distorted and inauthentic state of mind and spirit that constitutes an aliena-

tion from our true selves. The *real me* is beautiful, sublime, 'God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it' (Eph. 2.10).

Our parish has an outdoor sign that faces down the road, and we put short sentences on it for the benefit of our neighbours and of motorists stopped at the pedestrian lights. For much of Lent our sign read: *Lent. A Time To Be Myself*. A rather enigmatic message, but hopefully it would at least have puzzled people as to its meaning. Lent is/was a time to let my real self be freed by grace from all that hides, defaces and mars its beauty. In the terms of the story of the prodigal son, it is a time to 'come home' from a distant country, and to be embraced with joy and delight by God.

Conversion, needless to say, is not just for the time of lent—the fig tree was given the whole year long to begin to bear fruit, and so are we called to continue on our journey through all the seasons of the year.

—**Barry Brundell MSc, Editor**

A future challenge for our nation is to maintain national unity, social cohesion and above all our egalitarian spirit. The challenge is to find innovative ways to break the vicious cycles of poor parenting, low levels of education, unemployment and health problems that can afflict some individuals and communities.

We must reinforce the virtuous cycles of caring families, strong learning environments, good jobs and healthy lifestyles that allow others to succeed in a competitive world. Australia must find ways of restoring order to zones of chaos in some homes and communities, which has the potential of destroying young Australian lives.

—**Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, on his tenth anniversary in office (as quoted by Frank Quinlan at the launch of the report *Dropping off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*).**



WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL?

JAMES QUILLINAN

IN A RECENT interview, Pope Benedict urged Catholics:

...to witness to God in a world that has problems finding Him...and to make God visible in the human face of Jesus Christ, to offer people access to the source without which our morale becomes sterile and loses its point of reference, to give joy as well because we are not alone in this world (Benedict XVI, 2006).

The Catholic school is one of the chief means the Australian Church uses to witness in this way. Like other Church institutions, however, Catholic schools are facing new challenges, arguably as important and as far reaching as those facing our schools in the late 1860s. Once again, the Church is being called on to articulate its vision for Catholic schools. Achieving some shared understanding of the challenges let alone attaining such a shared vision will not be easy.

In Australia, many families are finding the cost of enrolling their children in Catholic schools to be prohibitive. At the same time there is an increase in the enrolment of students who are not Catholic. There is a growing question for Catholic schools as to how best to engage other religious traditions while being authentic to proclaiming the Catholic tradition. There is a decline in religious commitment as we have traditionally understood that to be, particularly it would seem, in parish adherence. There are fewer clergy and religious. There is certainly a loss of autonomy, and government funding is increasingly being tied to specified outcomes, some of which challenge our tradition practice and, I suggest, our beliefs and values. The recent Plain English Reporting requirements are certainly a

case in point. There is a problem, shared with all schools across the nation, in recruiting and appropriately training new teachers equipped to teach in a Catholic school. Teaching itself has become much more stressful and fewer people are putting their hands up for senior leadership positions. The ongoing challenges of adequate financial resources are becoming more acute.

Yet our Catholic schools are not in crisis—facing new challenges, certainly, but not in crisis. By far the toughest challenge is discovering and articulating an ‘operative educational philosophy’ (Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) 1988, par. 22) which addresses the expectations of today’s church and indeed, for the world in which we live. Catholic schools are not immune from the societal effects of ‘the growing marginalization of the Christian faith as a reference point and a source of light’ (CCE 1997, par. 1). Articulating the vision is perhaps the most challenging work for schools. On the one hand they suffer from criticism and entrenched opposition from those who appear firmly fixed on the belief that Catholic schools still operate in a predominantly Christian society and that they still exist in a milieu where there is an operative Catholic culture as a clear point of reference. At the other end of the spectrum some others who choose the Catholic school appear to be ‘indifferent and non-practicing, with a profound apathy where ethical and religious formation is concerned’ (CCE 1997, par. 6).

The massive movement of peoples across the world, particularly since the Second World War has increased the number and nature of multi-cultural societies. This movement of



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peoples has certainly enriched Australia but has brought with it new challenges. New cultures and new peoples have also brought different religious beliefs and traditions. Prosperity has also brought with it the rise of what is called 'secularism' and even indifference to religious truth and values. We now live in a 'pluralist' society. Thus the Churches represent but one feature of this pluralistic society, and in fact, compete with different religious and political viewpoints. Quite a diverse array lifestyles and attitudes co-exist and compete with each other.

Thus the current context for the Catholic school is one of an increasing divergence between Christianity and modern culture. The reality of a predominantly 'Christian' culture is disappearing. In addition, the culture in which students coming to Catholic schools operate is one of 'pluralism' where elements of a multiplicity of belief systems are evident. Students are familiar with Islamic, Buddhist beliefs and cultures etc. Many of their parents acknowledge what has become known as 'something-ism' (*I believe in 'something' but I'm not sure what it is*). For many students, the Christian story is now merged with other narratives. In addition, the Catholic school today is also subject to the influences of the major challenges of secularization, postmodernism, religious pluralism, globalization, multi-culturalism, inculturation, reconciliation and inter-religious dialogue.

In this environment, Catholic schools endeavour to promote particular views of the nature and purpose of the human person, of knowledge itself, and of the vision of the reign of God for our world. They endeavour to enable students to meet Jesus Christ and to enter into a relationship with God. They are called to present Christ 'in a way well adapted to the younger generation and the rapidly changing culture in which they live' (John Paul II 2001, no. 14).

In order to do this effectively, Catholic schools and their communities need to firstly understand and appreciate the major develop-



Jim Quillinan works in the area of spirituality and faith formation. He has given seminars on Catholic identity in various states of Australia and overseas.

ments in the Church's understanding of her mission today and her relationships to these social realities. In turn, Catholic schools should articulate their own mission within that context.

Since Vatican II the Church's understanding of herself in terms of her nature, mission and relationship with the world have undergone a fundamental change. The difference centres around the perception of the relationship between the reign of God and the church. In the pre-Vatican II theology of mission the church was equated with the kingdom, and hence mission was very much concerned with bringing people into the church. This understanding of mission was reflected in the purpose of the school which could be summarised as:

- Saving immortal souls;
- Teaching knowledge and understanding;
- Increasing sacramental participation;
- Building up the Church by promoting the Kingdom of God.

Today, however, there is a new sense of mission. Mission is understood first and foremost as the work of the Holy Spirit calling forth all of creation. As the late Pope John Paul II wrote:

The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history (John Paul II 1991, no. 28).

Mission is no longer regarded as the work of the Church alone. It is no longer regarded



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as being exercised and directed solely through the powers and structures of the Church. In the words of Pope John Paul: ‘The Spirit is mysteriously present in the heart of every person, Christian or otherwise’ (Address to the Roman Curia 24.1.2002).

The decree of the Church in the Modern World and more recently and perhaps more cogently, Pope Paul VI’s ‘On Evangelization In The Modern World’ (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Rome 1975) calls us as the community of believers in Jesus the Christ to be Good News in the world today and for our world today. But to whom and for what? If the mission of the Church and its agencies is not for ‘saving souls’ or building up the church then what is it? What should the Catholic school do?

Theologian Peter Phan argues that prior to Vatican II, the theology of mission within the Church was characterised by four priorities, namely: Church, proclamation, mission and the reign of God (Phan n.d.: ‘Proclamation of the Reign of God as the Mission of the Church: What for, to Whom. By Whom, With Whom, and How?’). The Mission in that era was the product of an institutional model of Church, regarding itself as unique, somewhat exclusive and superior to other churches—certainly definitive, normative and absolute (‘Outside the Church there is no salvation’). The Second Vatican Council and subsequent Church documents have described the Church using very different images and have described its role as being called to live out and proclaim God’s reign. Other Christian traditions have also expanded on this understanding of mission and reign in more depth. This change in orientation saw a theology of mission emerge that, according to Phan now names the same priorities but in a different order and with differing emphases. The order is now the reign of God, mission, proclamation and Church. Such a view seems to be in accord with John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*, no.13 in which the pope states that the proclamation and establishment of God’s kingdom are the purposes of Jesus’ mission. So how should Catholic

schools respond?

The following questions posed by Phan provide a good framework for Catholic schools to consider and articulate a vision which addresses their circumstances and the current theology of the Church.

· For what is their mission? If the Catholic school has an ecclesial identity, it should reflect the priorities that the Church articulates as her own mission. Today that is articulated as bearing witness to the reign of God made known in Jesus. It is true that Catholic schools exist to ‘build up the Church’ as it were, but they are to do more than that. If we accept that the mission of the Church is to proclaim God’s reign, it is important to recognise that we proclaim in word and in action. This includes providing a living experience of the reign of God as well as proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Within such a pluralistic world, according to Cardinal Kasper (Kasper 2003, p.19), the role of the Church can best be described as ‘diaconal and dialogical’. Firstly, diaconal does not mean adopting a merely pastoral and therapeutic approach.

The church can never merely be a social emergency organisation. Its priority pastoral task is witnessing and proclaiming the truth. This as true service: no other institution can offer the truth of love, of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of mercy which is the most intrinsic message of the Gospel. The Church is called to a specific service to humanity. Especially in our troubled times this message of absolute love and mercy is needed. (Kasper, *op. cit.* p. 19)

Catholic schools, along with other Church agencies want to teach and give witness to what we believe is the truth. The way to do that today is by dialogue. The way that we promote or provoke that dialogue is by service—not simply providing good pastoral care, but such service that provokes basic questions such as these:

Why are they like this?

Why do they live in this way?



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What or who is it that inspires them?

Why are they in our midst? (Paul VI 1975, no. 21)

The aim of every Catholic school is to enable others to meet Jesus Christ by, among other things, imitating the way Jesus bore witness to the truth—he came like a servant, he did not come to rule but to give his life for many. Our credibility in this pluralistic world comes in the way that, like Jesus, we are of service. Jesus was compassion itself but he challenged, he questioned, he criticized, he offered a vision of hope, he offered a vision and an experience of what God's reign might look like. Catholic schools are called to do likewise.

In being of such service, Catholic schools are called to proclaim the Good News by creating a community experience, an experience of the reign of God. Christian faith, in fact, is born and grows inside community (cf. CCE 1988, par. 53).

Faith grows only in a community—it is where we get our meaning in life, it is where we endeavour to enable our students to experience the reality and challenges of the reign of God. Such a community is where our students come to know that God loves them because they experience that love in the community of the school. It is where students experience the justice of God because they are treated fairly and with compassion. It is where they come to know that they have a God-given mission in life because they have been able to discover their uniqueness, because their talents and abilities have been affirmed and enhanced. It is where they can test out their values and beliefs—give them a trial—and where we can experience and get meaning from the beliefs and living values of that community.

This genuine community of faith seeks to address questions such as the following:

- Do we seek to celebrate life as a gift from God and do we rejoice in the gifts of the Spirit in each person?
- Do we believe that God is present in our working and praying and being together?

- Is there a tangible belief that each person is capable of great things, of reaching the full potential with which God has endowed them?
- Is there teamwork and collaboration among all those involved (parents, students, teachers, administrators, clergy)?
- Do I feel welcome here? Do I feel safe? Is my own search for meaning in life recognized, affirmed, supported?
- What opportunities do I have to learn, to share, to celebrate, to seek greater understanding?
- Do parents feel that they are welcome here, that they are valued as the first educators of their children?
- Do our students have input into what sort of community we are trying to create here?
- Does this educating community share a common vision about the sort of community we want our school to be, the sort of community experience we want our students to have?
- Is our school essentially characterised by an underlying belief in the goodness of each person, in the potential of each person who is deeply loved by God?
- Is there a basic optimism about those we teach and about what we are teaching them?
- Is there a passionate belief that each person is capable of reconciliation, that no student is 'beyond redemption'?

To Whom?

The Catholic School participates in the evangelising mission of the Church (CCE 1997, par. 11). In addition, 'a distinguishing feature of Catholic education is that it is open to all, especially to the poor and weakest in society (John Paul II 2001, no. 33). That distinguishing feature poses challenges in regard to enrolments, policies and practices, whom we welcome into our communities and how we respond. For the Catholic school to be such an agent of evangelization, it needs to be com-



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fortable with a generous, open and inclusive enrolment policy. It is true that Catholic schools are called to teach a specifically Catholic theology, a specifically Catholic way of looking at humans, human destiny and dignity, but the mission of the Church has always been and remains to enable *all* people to meet Jesus Christ. Mission is outward looking—it is not for Christians only, it is not only about saving souls or building up the church, but it is also about the transformation of society, it is also about recognising where the Spirit may be working in other people, in other faith traditions, in other ways in our world. Cardinal Kasper, for example, advocates an approach in which the Church is seen to embrace and defend plurality, but also seeks to be in solidarity with all those who search for truth. The Church today is, in his view, provided with an opportunity to:

...radically realize her fundamental nature as a community of believers in a more original, and authentic way—to become a sign for the world. (Kasper 2003, p.39.)

With Whom?

Proclaiming the Good News, promoting the reign of God is the duty of all Christians. The scandal of Christian disunity, whether that be among the various faith traditions or even within a particular faith tradition, is at its most poignant in this area. All Christians are called to witness to God in a world that has problems finding Him, to make God visible in the human face of Jesus Christ. Christian unity requires all Christians to work together to give common witness to the Good News. Such working together is also important in Catholic schools—it is imperative that Catholic school communities work to achieve some understanding of the history of each Christian tradition, the various points of contact and division and provide opportunities to work together to proclaim and promote the Reign of God.

By Whom?

In the words of Pope John Paul II, the Holy

Spirit is the principal agent of mission. The Holy Spirit is said ‘to direct the mission of the church,’ to make ‘the whole church missionary,’ and to be ‘present and active in every time and place’ (John Paul II 1991, no. 28).

If Catholic schools as agents of the Church are to respond appropriately, then Christian mission has to find a new priority. Mission and evangelisation can no longer be regarded as it once was: a one-way proclamation of a message of salvation to a ‘pagan world’. Rather, mission first of all is ‘a search for and recognition of the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit among the peoples to be evangelized, and in this humble and attentive process of listening, the evangelizers become the evangelized, and the evangelized become the evangelizers’ (Phan, *loc. cit.* p. 8). Once again, such an understanding challenges traditional practices in our schools.

How?

It is perhaps in this area that we are confronted with a fundamental shift in approach. The Church has been consistent over many years in its call to dialogue. Pope John Paul issued the challenge to all Christians to enter firstly into dialogue with Jesus and then to embrace the world dialogically as his followers’ (John Paul II 1991, no. 10). He was echoing the words of his predecessor Pope Paul VI:

Dialogue calls us, like God, to take the initiative, to be inspired by love, to set no limits, to apply no coercive pressure, to reach out to all, to be accessible to all, to be persevering and ready to seize the appropriate moment. (Paul VI 1964, no.71)

Pope John Paul II argued that given the complexity of our world ‘the method of dialogue is becoming the way to bring the Lord’s comforting message of salvation everywhere’. Cardinal Kasper further elaborated:

The attitude of the Church today is to be one of dialogue. As human beings we do not only carry on dialogue, we *are* dialogue, we are by nature dialogical beings. This is even more true for our Christian existence, for biblical Revelation is



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God's dialogue with human beings (Kasper, *op. cit.* p5).

For Catholic schools the personal relationships between student and teacher 'assume an enormous responsibility and are not limited to giving and taking' (CCE 1997, par.19) but 'a personal relationship is always a dialogue rather than a monologue, and the teacher must be convinced that the enrichment in the relationship is mutual' (CCE 1982, par. 38).

So what is meant by dialogue? Firstly it is a recognition and a living acknowledgement of the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit in every time and place. Purnell (1985, p 15) expresses it well when he writes:

I believe that God is present in the whole of creation; deep down in every human being God is there not simply keeping each one in existence but lovingly at work helping each reach that fullness of being which is God's destiny for her/him. When, there, I venture to share my faith with another, I have to realize that God is already present in the other in ways, perhaps, which may be foreign to my own understanding of God. I came then to realize that faith-sharing required first of all discernment, a sensitivity to the divine. My task was not to give God to anybody but to help people discover God within themselves as the life-giving and love-giving source of their existence.

Secondly, dialogue is between people who are on a genuine search for truth. Being in dialogue does not mean that we are indifferent—neither is the person we dialogue with. In the words of Cardinal Kasper, two indistinct fogbanks cannot have an encounter, they become blurred in each other. (Kasper, p.17). In our search for truth students in Catholic schools need to be engaged in a challenging and relevant study of Religious Education. In addition, however, Phan refers to four activities associated with genuine dialogue which were originally outlined by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (1991, no.42; Phan, *op. cit.* p.9).

Firstly, there is the dialogue of life which involves the sharing of joys and sorrows. The search for truth and meaning cannot be dissociated from the realities of life—a purely

academic study of religion serves a limited purpose. The challenge to make God visible in the human face of Jesus calls those engaged in dialogue to actively look for the signs of God's presence, so that, like Jesus we can enable people to recognize 'God's amazing plans and to be amazed by God's activity' (John Paul II 1991, no. 48). It draws its inspiration from how repeatedly in the gospels we see Jesus opening the conversation with a request or a question (Jn 4:7, Mk 8:23). It also draws on the Church's continuing call for us to be able to read the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel - that is the signs of God's active presence and purpose in the world.

Secondly, the dialogue of action which calls on us to collaborate in furthering liberation and human development. Being 'diaconal', or of service, is also about enabling our students to come to know their dignity as human beings, their eternal value, their mission. Service also means that we are at the service of the society in which we live. That is a profound challenge!

Spiritual leadership has something to do with critiquing the present, envisioning a better future and asking the right questions as we go (Chittister 2001). We are not simply preparing our students to be able to function in this world—the gospel calls on us to enable our students to critique this world and to proclaim a better way!

Thirdly, there is the dialogue of theological exchange which seeks a deeper understanding of the religious heritages of others and a better appreciation of their spiritual values. It is imperative in such a pluralistic environment to develop some understanding and appreciation of others' beliefs and practices. Cardinal Kasper urges a relationship with other religions in which Christianity acknowledges and respects their giftedness, prophetically criticizes, and invites to encounter with Jesus Christ. (Kasper, *op. cit.* p. 12). John Paul lists the following qualities as 'authentic' in dialogue:

- listening to one another,
- respect,



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- refraining from hasty judgements, and
- the ability to avoid subordinating the faith which unites to the opinions, fashions and ideological choices which divide (John Paul II 1984, nos. 25.4; 25.8).

Finally, dialogue of religious experience or the sharing of spiritual riches through common prayer and other religious practices is another source of dialogue and encounter (Phan, *loc. cit. par. 8*). Genuine faith communities have prayer and worship at their core. Being in awe and wonder of the Creator and the created is at the heart of our faith. Obviously such dialogue can facilitate a clearer understanding and appreciation of each other's beliefs and traditions but it can also enable a much greater understanding of who I am and what I believe and value. Common worship and prayer is perhaps the deepest form of dialogue if it emerges from profound respect for each other and it is indeed a very potent means of witnessing to God in a world that has problems finding Him, giving joy as well because we are not alone in this world (Benedict XVI 9.09.2006).

Conclusion

Catholic schools find themselves in a new situation. They not only exist in such a pluralistic

world but are called on to discern the signs of the times in this new environment and engage with all its positive influences. And there are many. But the great challenge for the Catholic school today is to present the Christian message in an appropriate and convincing way. But Catholic schools are agencies of the local church. Catholic schools cannot be left on their own—local churches wherever they may be are called and challenged in the same way. They too are called to answer the Church's challenge to develop ways to become 'an effective instrument of Jesus Christ who now wants to meet the people of Oceania in new ways' (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, no. 4). But in discovering these new ways there are also hopes and possibilities. The Church's mission is to proclaim Jesus as the Living Truth—to do that effectively Catholic schools need to engage with today's world, to discover the ways in which God is already present, to engage with the Spirit who inspires the hearts of Christians and non-Christians alike. Articulating a vision is never easy, particularly where differing beliefs, values and priorities are involved. If Catholic schools are to witness to the human face of Christ, the starting point is to discover in our culture what we share—our common ground—and to enter into dialogue to discover what is and what is not of Christ.

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POPE BENEDICT'S PRAYER

O Father, raise up among Christians
abundant and holy vocations to the priesthood,
who keep the faith alive
and guard the blessed memory of your Son Jesus
through the preaching of his word
and the administration of the Sacraments,
with which you continually renew your faithful.
Grant us holy ministers of your altar,
who are careful and fervent guardians of the Eucharist,
the sacrament of the supreme gift of Christ
for the redemption of the world.
Call ministers of your mercy,
who, through the sacrament of Reconciliation,
spread the joy of your forgiveness.
Grant, O Father, that the Church may welcome with joy
the numerous inspirations of the Spirit of your Son
and, docile to His teachings,
may she care for vocations to the ministerial priesthood
and to the consecrated life.
Sustain the Bishops, priests and deacons,
consecrated men and women, and all the baptized in Christ,
so that they may faithfully fulfil their mission
at the service of the Gospel.
This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.
Mary, Queen of Apostles, pray for us.



THE VOCATIONS PROJECT IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

NEIL DARRAGH

A DISCUSSION OF religious vocations in Australia and New Zealand (and similar societies) takes place under the shadow of decreased vocations to religious life and priesthood as we have traditionally understood them. The increase in these vocations in other parts of the world does not relieve us of the need to shape the future of the church here. Discussion of vocations as a 'project' means we focus not so much on past causes but on how we should plan for the future. But prior to the more practical questions of vocations promotion, discernment and education lie our attitudes to vocations as a whole. Are some vocations better or holier than others as is often implied in vocational promotion? And if not, why bother with them at all? Is a vocation an equal choice between religious life, priesthood, married life, and the single state as seems to be assumed in some discussions? Is the church moving to a new situation in which the traditional vocations will be replaced by quite new ones? That we have to ask these questions at all indicates a need to seek clarity not so much about one or other particular vocation but about the diversity and interrelatedness of a range of vocations in the contemporary church.

The Multiple Contemporary Senses of 'Vocation'

Discussion about Christian vocation takes place within a larger perspective that sees human *life* as vocation. Understanding human life as vocation is a perspective that regards life as a human response to divine invitation rather than

alternative views such as the view that one's status in life is inevitable, or the philosophy of choice with its focus on self-promotion, or the pragmatic approach of just getting on with the busyness of daily living.

Within this general perspective on life as vocation we enter the more specific *Christian* perspective on vocation. And within this Christian discussion I suggest that we pay particular attention to six important senses of 'vocation' (cf. the related but somewhat different typology in Dewar 2000, 2-3):

a) *The sense in which being Christian is itself a vocation:* Becoming a Christian is itself a response to a call. We do not know whether everyone has this call, but those who do have it need to respond to it or it comes to nothing. This is the sense in which the term 'vocation' or 'call' (*klesis*) is normally used in the New Testament. (e.g. 2 Thess. 1:11; 1 Cor. 1:26; Eph. 4:1). Since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century it has become common to use the term 'vocation' for someone's occupation including marriage and parenting (Placher 2005, 6-9). For the purpose of this paper I have adopted the position that such 'vocations' (marriage, parenting, and a rather long list of occupational, professional and care-giving services) are best regarded as implementations of the *Christian* vocation in a variety of already existing social roles and institutions rather than distinct and specific vocations on their own. This is a discussion that would be worth pursuing in another context.

b) *The unique vocation of each individual person:* Each individual has a personal vocation



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that expresses the person's unique call from God and their opening out to social responsibility (Alphonso 1990). For Christians this will be a particular and personalized call within the more general Christian vocation. It may well be this sense of a personal vocation that impels a person into a particular occupation or provides the motivation for a dedication or service to others.

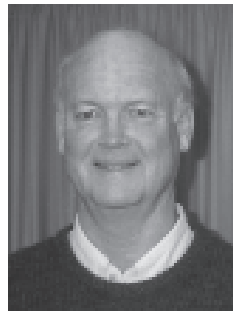
c) *The vocation to a particular lifestyle not necessarily tied to a ministry:* This is a call to a lifestyle, either as a single person or in community, which is more to do with being than with doing. It is a way of living, such as the contemplative life or a dedication to living simply or adopting the spirituality of a religious founder, rather than an active ministry.

These kinds of vocation are important in the contemporary church. They also set the background and interact with the three remaining kinds of vocation which will be my particular focus for the rest of this paper:

- d) *the vocation of vowed religious,*
- e) *the vocation of priests, and*
- f) *the vocation to an 'ecclesial' ministry.*

Each of us will attach more urgency to clarifying some rather than others of these vocations. My own standpoint is that of a secular priest, and from this standpoint it is the latter three vocations that have become the most troubled in the contemporary church and in this sense command more attention.

I make the assumption in this paper that none of these vocations can claim to be in itself better or holier than the others—as has sometimes been done in the past. I am not interested here, then, in the ways these vocations can be ranked but in the ways they are complementary, supplementary or interrelated. I am interested in the question: What are the features of each of these three kinds of vocation that make it special, *i.e.* different from the general vocation of all Christians and different from the other two kinds of vocation that are the focus of our attention here? In asking this question I pursue the quest for clarity about the diversity and interrelatedness of vocations in the contemporary



Neil Darragh lectures in theology at the University of Auckland, and at the Catholic Institute of Theology, Auckland. He is parish priest of Glen Innes, a suburban parish also in Auckland, New Zealand.

church (cf. the similar discussion in a North American context in Hahnenberg 2003).

The Vocation of Vowed Religious: the Three Vows

The most interesting and substantial discussion that I am aware of about the contemporary interpretation of Religious Life since Vatican II places the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in response to the conditions of contemporary society characterised by economic inequalities and institutionalised selfishness. This is consistent with the contemporary focus on mission and moves away somewhat from the earlier focus on the personal holiness of the vowed religious themselves. Vowed religious try to live out, both individually and institutionally, an unselfish lifestyle in relation to material goods and ownership (poverty), sexuality and relationships (chastity), and freedom and power (obedience) (cf. Neal 1990; Philibert 1999; Radcliffe 1999).

The proposal that Religious Life in the contemporary world is an altruistic and counter-cultural response to the contemporary social agenda of selfishness and injustice is a powerful and impressive one, especially when we are aware of vowed religious who have seriously lived out this commitment. Yet a commitment to poverty, chastity and obedience is not the sole or distinctive preserve of vowed religious. These 'evangelical counsels' are a summary of the *Christian* vocation, a brief summary of the way of the disciple of Christ. They set out a way of life for all of us



not just for vowed religious. A focus on the three vows of Religious Life as a response to an unjust society serves to clarify for vowed religious themselves the new priorities in their mission, priorities that have shifted over the last few decades.

But this articulation does not yet clarify just in what way the vocation to Religious Life is distinct from the vocation of the rest of us within the church. Or again, this articulation tells us how vowed religious are, or intend to be, different from the rich and powerful, but again does not say how they are different from the rest of us, most of whom are not rich, not powerful, and don't subscribe to an ideology of self-interest and competitiveness.

The description of Religious Life that makes clear its distinction from other vocations in the church sees the central dedication of vowed religious as including two key elements. One is that the religious vow of chastity takes the particular form of *consecrated celibacy*. The second is that the vow of obedience takes the particular form of a *commitment to a particular company of people* with a particular charism. The promise of consecrated celibacy commits the person to Christ in a way that allows the construction of a particular type of community in which poverty and obedience are creative possibilities. This particular type of community living commits a person to a community of equal, free adults without spouses or children, who practice together a vigorous discernment of the voice of God amid the confusing voices of the contemporary world and the contemporary church (Schneiders 2001 and 2004).

These two elements of a celibate community within an existing real tradition committed to free, adult discernment of God's voice appear as the key features of the vocation of vowed religious. This special lifestyle and mission within the church is frequently subverted from both within and without, but these seem to me to be the elements that make the vocation of vowed religious different from and complementary to that of the rest of us.

The Vocation of Priests: Local Church Leadership

In this paper I restrict my use of the term 'priest' to refer to presbyters only (not bishops or deacons) and to secular priests rather than priests who are also vowed religious. I shall leave it to the latter to deal with the overlap between the two vocations.

We usually talk of 'decreasing numbers' of vowed religious, but we talk more commonly of a 'shortage' of priests. 'Shortage' presumably means that there are fewer than we think there should be. But there are several uncomfortable realities that lie beneath this talk of shortages. The first is that if there is a shortage of priests then its causes should be attributed to where it most obviously arises—not from a lack of generosity in people today, nor a lack of vocations promotion, nor a failure in the witness of current priests, nor the result of historical or cultural forces beyond our control, nor an oversight of the Holy Spirit. It is primarily the result of a decision by church authorities of the Roman Rite to retain the requirements of celibacy and maleness for priests. In principle, a shortage of priest should never be more than a transitional situation caused by unusual and unexpected circumstances. When we look for candidates for priesthood, we are not short of people who could fulfil the priest's role well given adequate preparation and training, but we are short of mature, celibate males.

The second uncomfortable reality is a structural pathology within the institutional church itself. I do not refer here to priestly failures in morality however publicly unacceptable and discouraging to other priests that may be (Cozzens 2000). I refer rather to the situation that a) the priest's vocation is confined within the gender discrimination of the institutional church that excludes women not just from ministerial priesthood but from decision-making in the church hierarchy; and b) the priest lives within a hierarchy of decision-making that borrows more from the Roman empire than from any of the more participatory forms of civil



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government whether traditional or contemporary. These structural pathologies insinuate themselves into everything we might want to say or do to promote priestly vocations. What kind of person would be attracted to serve in this kind of organization?

Acknowledging these problems within the vocation of priests, we still need to pursue the central question of this paper which is to ask what is special about the vocation of priests as we have it that marks it as different in its inter-relationship with other vocations in the church.

The vocation of priests (presbyters) has changed considerably over the centuries: from a group of elders, to advisers to a single bishop in a city community, to pastors of rural and suburban communities, to many different combinations of priest and community service. The common element through all this is the vocation to local church leadership, a leadership that has liturgical, pastoral, and missionary dimensions. There does not appear to be much dispute about the local leadership role as defining the vocation of the priest. What is problematic nowadays, though, is the *style* of this leadership. Fundamentally, is it meant to be hierarchical or collegial?

The vocation of the priest is vulnerable to an interpretation of priesthood that has a very high respect for the vocation of the priest, but rather little respect for the vocation of anyone else. There are new signals today of a restorationist and retro-cult movement that seeks to change backwards to what it sees as the 'true' meaning of Vatican II, i.e. before things went too far. These are the signals of a return to a more hierarchical, even autocratic, style of leadership. By contrast, a collegial style of priestly vocation would include rather a) a strong sense of the church's mission on issues of justice and compassion; b) an appreciation of cultural differences and vocational differences within the Christian church; c) an ability to work collaboratively rather than paternalistically with other vocations.

We seem now to be at a cross-road in our understanding of the vocation of priests. In one

direction is a more hierarchical style of priesthood and in the other a more collegial style. Which of these styles will prevail depends largely on how clear the expectations of the rest of the church are for collaborative ministry and a collegial leadership style (cf. Saffiotti 2005; Sofield 2006).

The Vocation to 'Ecclesial' Ministry: the New Energies

I use the term 'ecclesial ministry' here to refer to official or semi-official ministries in the church that do not involve Ordination or Religious Profession. This term is not entirely satisfactory but it still seems preferable to the common alternatives 'lay' ministry or 'non-ordained' ministry. This is a call to ministry within the church that may be part-time or full-time, formal or semi-formal, waged or voluntary, married or single that is mediated through church organization. It includes the many forms of liturgical, administrative, care, and outreach ministries that have become common in the contemporary church. As distinct from the vocation of vowed religious and priests these ecclesial vocations are:

- temporary, long-term, or permanent (not just permanent)
- single, married, celibate, or widowed (not just celibate)
- local (not transportable throughout in the world)
- part-time, full-time, salaried, volunteer.

How many ecclesial vocations do we think there are, or how many do we think there should be? Catholic Directories give a rough indication of the numbers of people involved. My own count in the current New Zealand National Catholic Directory—readers might like to check their own states or their own dioceses—shows almost half (46%) of the names recorded there with contact addresses and telephone numbers as neither vowed religious nor priests. They are in some sense ecclesial ministers. A National Directory is an inaccurate measure but it does give a rough representation of the people con-



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sidered to occupy a position in the church such that they need to be contacted or consulted on church matters. In addition, there are many other people not recorded in a National Directory who are involved in ecclesial ministries at a more local level, in chaplaincies, social service organizations, and parishes. The New Zealand National Catholic Directory records only two names from my own parish—the parish priest and the school principal. But my local parish Directory of its own ministries with names and contact numbers contains 386 entries (there is some overlap here where one person has more than one ministry). The point I am attempting to illustrate here, counter to an institutional tendency to trivialise these ministries, is that they are too numerous to be treated lightly and their impact on the contemporary church is substantial.

Ecclesial ministries vary greatly in their required commitment of time and energy. But many of them are indeed vocations in their sense of call and response. They normally have some initial and continuing training, a public liturgical commissioning, and an acceptance that they work under some community supervision. An ecclesial vocation as I use the term here is not just a personal or private initiative. It requires public liturgical recognition that this person exercises a role approved and supported by the local church community.

The Vocations Project

If we consider the promotion of vocations to be a project worth supporting, then this project is not primarily about how each of us understands and promotes our own special vocation. It is not primarily about the survival of traditional forms of Religious Life or a traditional style of church leadership, but about how we understand and encourage the complementarity among the diverse vocations in the contemporary church.

This will require, especially for the established religious and priestly vocations, some deliberate policies that promote education for the new ecclesial vocations and that respect the unique personal vocation of each individual. Vowed religious and priests are the current power-brokers, the freight-carriers, of the contemporary church. Where they position themselves in relation to the general vocation of all Christians, the unique vocations of each individual person, and the large contemporary growth in the new ecclesial vocations will shape the church of the future.

I want to suggest in conclusion that the decisive element of a vocations project for a future church will not be a narrow focus on increasing vocations to priesthood and religious life but the broader pursuit of collaborative diversity: recognition of the diversity of vocations in the contemporary church, appreciation of their varied contributions, and the careful creation of supportive yet discerning interrelationships.

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THE FAMILY IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

Christianity's Contribution to Understanding the Family and its Role

HELEN McCABE

I AM NEITHER an historian, nor a theologian. So, I shall be speaking today from the experience of a life lived under the influence of an Irish Catholic family, a Roman Catholic Church, the nursing profession with its ethical foundations in the Christian notion of vocation, and the transition from a pre- to a post-Vatican II Catholic worldview (or, that is, a Catholic version of the Reformation). It is also a life currently immersed in the study of health care ethics which includes the study of developments in medical science and public health policy the implications of which often go to the heart of Catholicism, particularly in relation to Catholic conceptions of both human life and the family.

As a Catholic Christian, born in the mid-1950s and nurtured within one of those large, Irish Catholic families that have attracted the attention of comedians and the *incredulity* of our more reproductively-temperate Protestant neighbours, my actual experience of growing up in a family is very different from what is usually the case today. I recall, for instance, our kindly neighbours exclaiming: 'Oh! You are having *another* baby, Mrs McCabe! However do you manage?' and other such well-meaning comments uttered at the sight of my mother in her well-worn maternity wardrobe. My mother was seen wearing maternity dresses during twelve pregnancies in all, a matter which was a great source of pride to her older children, especially myself who had accepted the idea, imparted by both my mother and the

nuns who taught me, that the Holy Spirit must have been suitably impressed with the kind of family we were to have given us so many babies! As the second eldest, I recall being fascinated by the new babies, each of which was also a source of joy to us all; indeed, we children would have been baffled, had we entertained the thought at all, by the desire of some to limit the size of their families. But we were only children after all.

For the most part, we were schooled and socialised with other Catholic children from big families: my best friend was the seventh of fourteen children, and other close friends boasted six, eight and nine siblings. I expect that, at the time, many Catholic parents sometimes wished that the Holy Spirit had not been quite so generous. Nonetheless, prior to the late 1960s, Catholics were famous for raising large families. (Writing about her Catholic upbringing, the Irish journalist and author, Nuala O'Faillon, once wrote that the Irish reproduced as if they were an endangered species!). Those were, of course, materially, and in other ways, simpler times.

Following Vatican II, the newfound availability of the contraceptive pill and, importantly, rising affluence along with greater material expectations, the large Catholic family started to shrink, notwithstanding the promulgation of the papal encyclical, *Humane Vitae*, with its continued prohibition on the use of artificial contraception. In time, Catholics came to find themselves in a society which



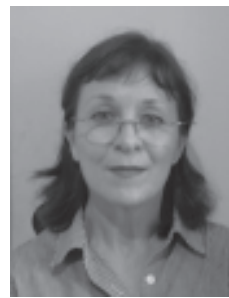
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makes the having of large families exceptionally difficult; social changes begun in the 1960s act (albeit unintentionally) to discourage the large pre-Vatican II family. As a relatively trivial or non-serious example of these changes, I will just mention one at this point: the introduction of compulsory seat belt legislation.

Prior to the legal requirement to wear a seat belt, my family could squeeze up to nine children and two adults into one Holden car, a feat at which our Protestant neighbours marvelled. This was before the family was numerically complete. As children, we were content to nurse the younger ones, sit on the floor of the car or lie on the back ‘shelf’ of the old FJ Holden while our parents encouraged peaceful relations between their offspring by conducting singing contests. Our neighbours could hear us returning home to the tune of ‘Ten Green Bottles’ sung in rounds or Christmas carols in three part harmony, depending upon the season. Of course, this was in Adelaide in the 1950s and ’60s where traffic was considerably less dense than it is today. However, once seat belts were imposed upon car travellers, our family outings were seriously curtailed. And that was just the beginning of a range of changes to a society which had, up until that point, been arranged such that it could accommodate even an Irish Catholic expression of family.

The problem of the seat belt legislation is a non-serious example of factors affecting the Catholic family of the time; the decline in the size of the family was due, perhaps, to more socially significant developments within western society.

What I would like to say at the beginning, however, is that these reminiscences allow me to draw out three themes which I will address today, the first being that social arrangements in Australia were, prior to the 1970s, ordered around the idea that the family is (what the Catholic Church understands to be) the ‘basic unit’ of society. Secondly, those arrangements reflected the ideal that the family is the basic



Dr Helen McCabe, a former nurse, specialises in ethics and health care, and works as research associate at the Plunkett Centre for Ethics in Health Care, Sydney.

provider of social services, particularly of education. And, thirdly, prior to the 1970s, those same social arrangements reflected the ideal that children are properly raised by their biological parents within the context of marriage.

At the outset, I must stress that I am not offering a history of the family, not even a history of the Christian family; instead, in discussing these themes, I am going to refer, simply, to two ‘moments’ in Australian history: the era prior to the 1960s and the present time. In focusing on these two ‘moments’, I hope to demonstrate that, firstly, up until the 1960s, Australia’s social structures were influenced, primarily, by the tenets of Christianity (including a Christian conception of the family) in ways that many secular commentators overlook, and that, secondly, those structures have been undergoing, since the 1970s, considerable upheaval in relation to a decline in the influence of Christianity.

Some historians and theologians have claimed that the 1960s marked the start of post-Christian Australia. If that is the case then it must be true to say that prior to the 1960s the influence of Christianity on Australian society was, at least, discernible if not, indeed, of primary significance. Of course, that is not to say that Christianity was Australia’s national religion; that would be too tall a claim. Yet, Australia was never entirely godless either; even today, most people report believing in a god even if they do not join, or live within, any established religious tradition. Perhaps, what was evident prior to the 1960s was that the majority of Australians *agreed* with the



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Christian Churches on a range of issues, such as the kind of social arrangements that would be best for us as a society.

It is true that Australian society, as elsewhere in the western world, changed radically following the 1960s. A post-modern world, notwithstanding its claims to tolerance, tends, increasingly, to take a derisory view of the Church. Moreover, whenever those who speak on behalf of the Christian churches enter public debate, there are cries of protest against what some commentators interpret as a lack of respect for the distinction between Church and state that is fundamental to a secular, liberal society. To be sure, it is no simple matter maintaining that distinction given that Australian citizens are also members of other social groups which sometimes include one or other of the Christian churches.

I do not wish to lament the rise of a society which is open, at least in principle, to a greater tolerance of those whose conscientious views differ from those of, for instance, most Christians; indeed, a secular liberal society has much to offer that is helpful in the way of informing relations within a multicultural society, including relations between the various Christian denominations. If I have any objections at all to the modern, secular, liberal society it is to point out the ways in which the philosophical basis of such a society is, in itself, undermined in cases where the tolerance it professes to uphold is breached in relation to the views of Christians (among others).

Christianity's Stamp on the Character of the Australian Family

The social revolution that was the 1960s gave rise to a number of changes in Australian society, one of which was to move the family from its prior place of significance so that society became a more dichotomous arrangement. Social activity is now thought to occur within one or another of two spheres: either the market or the political realm. Intermediate institutions, including the family, are be-

ing overlooked in various, subtle ways. This development has been fostered in a number of respects; along with popular culture, tertiary educational institutions have become (arguably) the most influential proponents of this dichotomous worldview, as a brief glance at some undergraduate curricula will attest.

As well, prior to the 1970s, the word family had an agreed meaning and structure: a married couple consisting of a man and a woman and the children they created together. The idea that a family could be reconstructed in alternative ways had not been seriously entertained or, at least, had not found any formal acceptance prior to this point in time. Indeed, even the notion of single motherhood was not only dismissed as (what we might call today) 'an option', it was positively discouraged in socially powerful ways. For instance, there were institutions dotted around Australian cities, providing shelter to single women who had conceived out of wedlock. Prior to the 1970s at least, the babies born to these women were adopted; regrettably, the social stigma attached to single motherhood, along with a lack of material support, served to dissuade single women from keeping their babies at the time.

The traditional conception of family holds a place of importance in all societies; even Plato failed to convince the world otherwise. The English philosopher, Roger Scruton, writes that the family plays a vital role in handing on the work of one generation to the next. It also protects and nurtures children, serves as a form of social and economic cooperation, and regulates sexual activity. At least this is so in an ideal sense. Stories of post-war migrants to Australia generally have an economically happy-ever-after ending which would not have eventuated nearly so often in the absence of a stable and secure family structure. Harold James, a professor of history at Princeton, reports that more than three-quarters of registered companies in the industrialised world are family businesses and, in Europe, some of these include some very large enterprises. I do not know how many Australian businesses



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are family-owned, but I do know they exist and that they promote themselves accordingly as a marketing strategy.

The Church has always viewed the family as pre-political or, that is, prior to the state. It also views the purposes of the market as serving the family. In turn, the flourishing of the family contributes to the common good in ways that are increasingly overlooked in debates about the merits of alternative arrangements. Christian voices have never been silent on this matter and Christian influences have stymied attempts to denigrate the family in a range of respects. So, while various arrangements for co-habitation and parenting now proliferate in ways that would have been unthinkable prior to the 1960s, the Christian conception of family still hovers, sometimes acting as a brake on further experimentation and, at other times, serving as a benchmark against which to measure the success, or otherwise, of 'post-Christian' configurations of family arrangements.

What I would like to do now is to mention some events in Australian Catholic history which have influenced the broader social arrangements of this nation.

Some Historical Events

I will focus on two matters which are germane, one being the story of gaining state aid to independent schools. I have elected to mention this issue because it represents a very clear and obvious example of the influence of Christianity on Australia's social arrangements. The second story is that of the Catholic social justice tradition and the various encyclicals and statements contained therein which find a remarkable degree of coherence with the social arrangements instituted in Australia prior to the 1970s. It is most likely that these statements were a necessary condition of those arrangements. I will address this matter now before returning to the story of state aid to independent schools.

While the Church has never canonised any

particular philosophical theory, it draws upon the natural law to explain its conception of family. Accordingly, it has argued that arrangements for providing for social need ought to be structured around the family. In his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII conceived of the family as a 'true society' 'anterior to every kind of state or nation, with rights and duties of its own ...' This view, long-held, is reiterated in the 1944 Social Justice Statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops; in their summary, the Bishops write: 'Australia will be a great and prosperous nation to the extent that its family life is made strong and secure'.¹ The bishops state that it is 'an undisputed fact of history' that 'a nation grows or declines according as its family life grows or declines'. The bishops go on to suggest that society is conceived, first and foremost, as a collection of families rather than a mass of individuals: '[God] might have drawn other designs (the Bishops write)—but He has decided that human life should begin and be carried on and be passed within family walls... and has made men and women co-partners with Him in the vital work of creation....'²

The Bishops write that, as the 'fundamental unit' of the *Christian* state (at the time of writing, the Australian bishops did not question the legitimacy of the description of the state as Christian), the family ought to be protected and nurtured under the post-war rebuilding of that state; in particular, the Bishops recommended that measures be taken to address the dwindling birth rate. The post-war baby boom followed the promulgation of the Bishops' Social Justice Statement; even if it was a mere coincidence, it was certainly a development in keeping with the Church's aspirations. Other features explored in the Statement were also realised at the time, such as the payment of 'an adequate family wage' and the provision of unemployment benefits should the need arise (the taxation requirements of each citizen lending legitimacy to claims on social resources). The Bishops also recommended that, in our housing policies, buildings be erected



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that will be ‘true homes’—plenty of space to allow for many children, including space for gardens and for play. Hence, they saw a solution in developing housing estates in country towns or, at least, on the outskirts of large cities according to a general plan of regional development (consider the size of the average Australian home and the growth of suburbia). Hence, we find a range of social arrangements that are supportive of the Bishops’ demands, whether they responded directly to them, or not. While other explanations may be forthcoming, it is difficult to see why or how those arrangements would have materialised in the way they did in a complete absence of the Christian influence.

Overall, the bishops’ Statement held the family in highest esteem, charging parents with responsibility for educating their children in the virtues and other moral and spiritual bases for ensuring not only the safekeeping of their eternal souls but, also, the necessary moral credentials for good citizenship. In order to fulfil their responsibility, Catholic parents were instructed to enrol their children in Catholic schools. At this point, Catholic families ran into some difficulties, as the state was unwilling to provide public funds to independent schools. A solution to the problem was eventually forthcoming and the telling of the story can serve as a clear and direct example of the influence of Catholic Christianity on Australian society.

The promulgation of particular views in papal encyclicals and Bishops’ statements are not always given practical expression in the absence of political activity, a task generally left to lay citizens. One such (little known) instance of Catholic political action can be traced to Canberra where, by 1962, Catholic parents had, like their predecessors, struggled to pay both the taxes which funded state schools and the costs of educating their own children in Catholic schools. Of course, political activity around this problem can be traced as far back as 1870. However, it reached a decisive moment in 1962 when Our Lady of

Mercy preparatory school, in lacking sufficient lavatory facilities for reaching a departmental standard of ‘efficiency’, was in danger of forced closure. In the absence of state funding to fulfil the state’s requirements for providing lavatory facilities (they were one lavatory short), Bishop Cullinane of the Goulburn diocese called a meeting to announce his intention to close the school. Catholic parents in attendance, however, determined to take matters even further by closing all four Catholic schools in the Goulburn diocese for the remainder of the second term. The degree to which the Catholic school system ‘took the pressure off’ the State school system became apparent then when 2,000 Catholic school children presented themselves, concurrently, for enrolment in the local State school! Having made their point, Catholic schools reopened a week later.³

The school lavatory saga provided the impetus for taking a major step towards securing state aid for Catholic schools. For soon afterwards, prior to the 1963 election, Menzies announced that the Federal government would make capital grants to independent schools to build science blocks. Following that announcement, and contrary to its near-defeat of 1961, the Liberal Party won the election with relative ease, increasing the vote from 42.1% to 46%. The Labor vote declined accordingly.⁴ Ultimately, the principle of state aid to independent schools was accepted at the federal level in 1963 and at the state level in 1967, solving the problem which had afflicted Catholic parents for a long time in attempting to meet their religious requirements in the absence of economic support.

The issue of state aid to independent schools has not gone away. I will return to it in a minute. For now I will attempt to show that, since the 1970s, forces have arisen to undermine the Christian conception of family, particularly as it is understood theologically and metaphysically within the Catholic Church. For instance, the rise of individualism which followed World War II has been



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most influential. As well, the material success enjoyed by Australians has been accompanied, for reasons that are unclear, with a very different view of standards of morality. As well, the advent of artificial reproductive technology, no-fault divorce laws, and de-facto relationships represent arrangements and activities that are at odds with the Church's conception of marriage and family, a conception which has little intelligibility in the public domain where the influence of preference utilitarianism, rights-talk, and a post-modern outlook now dominate. Proponents of 'whateverism' are genuinely puzzled by the objections of the Church to a range of developments that undermine the institution of the family and that puzzlement represents the gulf that has opened up between (at least) Catholic Christianity and the secular world, a gulf so large that attempts to erect a bridge of understanding between the two have largely failed.

The Family in a So-called Post-Christian World

I began this talk by drawing attention to three themes: firstly, the idea that the family is the 'basic unit' of society; secondly, that the family is, properly, the final arbiter of social services, particularly of those involving children and, thirdly, children are properly raised by their biological parents within the context of marriage. Post the 1960s, however, those arrangements which were reflective of these ideological commitments have been undermined to a considerable degree.

For this reason, the underpinnings and, therefore, intelligibility of the Catholic Christian message often escapes secular society; certain wrongful assumptions are made by commentators who fail to see the deeper understandings of what is being done in the name of Christianity. If you will bear with me while I consider the example of state aid to independent schools again, it is possible to see how this works.

Recently, in her Quarterly Essay on Chris-

tianity and Politics in Australia, Amanda Lohrey takes what she admits to be a more cynical view of state aid to Christian schools. She does this by suggesting that, in seeking state aid for their schools, Christian parents are more concerned about their 'hip pocket' than with the social justice issues they promote in public debate. Religious groups, she suggests, are merely self-serving, special interest groups. To understand her point, it is best, I think, to read Lohrey's own words. She writes:

[I]t's here, in the area of public subsidy to church operations that the contribution of the religious lobbies to manifest social inequity is most evident, especially in regard to the privileging of wealthy church schools. All the rhetorical fire-and-brimstone may be about abortion and homosexuality and to a lesser degree euthanasia and stem-cell research, but the real deal is who gets what from the public purse. If this seems an unduly cynical position, look at the outcomes to date. Despite the fact that the ALP espoused policies that were closer to the publicly stated positions of the churches on almost every position—Iraq, refugees, industrial relations, social welfare—this was not enough of a moral incentive to override the perceived threat to church finances, and in the 2004 election the bishops spoke out against Labor on the basis of Latham's policy of reducing state subsidy to the wealthiest of church schools.⁵

What Lohrey here identifies are the inconsistencies in Christian action in the public domain; to be sure, those who do, *in principle*, concur with the Church line on social justice issues may fail to be true to their convictions when they cast their votes. This creates a credibility problem for the Church, no doubt. Yet, the problem raised by Lohrey is, perhaps, not straightforwardly one of selfish self-interestedness (even if it is not altogether devoid of it). What *is* evident is the serious misunderstanding of the *religious* motivations which prompt some parents to send their children to Catholic schools.

Of course, the greater affluence generally enjoyed by Christian families in recent dec-



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ades has acted to obscure those reasons so that private schooling *appears* to be a choice of the more economically and socially privileged, chosen for the sake of preserving those privileges. At the same time, funding of public social services, such as education, has declined under the Howard government so that the disparities between the wealthiest independent schools and the poorest state schools are so wide that it is no wonder that Latham wanted to rescind on the provision of state aid to the wealthiest private schools: to do so would have given, at least, the *appearance* of addressing inequities in our society.

Lohrey objects to what she sees as the outcomes of religious lobbying: (on her view) ‘manifest social inequity’. To be sure, some Christian parents may be blinkered, screening out the fate of those children who are not their own. However, is the ‘manifest social inequity’ really an outcome of religious lobbying? Surely this is too swift a conclusion. Could it not be more to the point to say that manifest social inequity exists in society as a function of such arrangements as the present taxation and industrial relations systems and other arrangements that act to reserve, for the market, the most privileged of places in society? While it might be understandable that Latham wanted to withdraw funding from the wealthiest of schools (and even some members of the Liberal Party concurred with his view), doing that would not have made a great deal of difference to the lot of the poorest children. Rectifying *that* problem would require much greater social change, surely.

The pre-1960s Bishops would be puzzled if they read Lohrey’s essay in which she describes all Christians who object to extending marriage and the family to arrangements involving homosexual partners as fundamentalists or Christian Right extremists. This seems as unhelpful an understanding of the world as are attempts to divide society, simply, into Left and Right, liberal or conservative, when it is evident that such divisions are too simplistic to be able to explain what is really going on.

Yet, it is difficult, in a highly individualist and proprietary world, to explain the Christian meaning of marriage and the family in ways that are intelligible. So, when we object to a dismantling of these institutions, secular commentators simply assume bigotry and hatred or, at best, a lack of compassion for those who do not toe the Church line. They are unable to understand the values, principles and understandings that some Christians seek to protect and uphold. Perhaps, the telling of stories might help. I will contribute just two short tales here.

A few years ago, the ethicist Dr. Julian Savulescu, was interviewed on Radio National. The topic of the programme was artificial reproductive technology and ‘designer babies’ and Dr. Savulescu argued for greater access to this technology so that parents could have the children they wanted, when they wanted them, and under conditions that suited them (he indicated his preference for a boy with specific physical features who shared his own interests—surfing for example but not music—and a range of other features. After listening to the broadcast, I felt somewhat disturbed by the unbridgeable chasm between Savulescu’s worldview and my own, even though we were engaged in the same field of study. In the same week, my hairdresser informed me that his parents, in search of a better life for their children, had migrated to Australia from Malta after their seventeenth child was born. Only sixteen of their children made the trip to Australia, however, as one had died at birth. He commented: ‘My poor mother—she was grief-stricken for a long time over the little one who died’. The contrast between the two stories could not be plainer.

Social Arrangements in a Post-Christian World

Today, Catholics have fewer defining characteristics than what was once the case. And the influence of the Church in the public domain is less extensive; Cardinal Pell’s AFL predic-



THE FAMILY IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

tions aside, the Catholic Church is more often engaged in raising objections to various developments on both sides of politics than in setting, in any obvious sense, the terms for social arrangements. What is evident, however, is that the post-modern world has certainly arrived.

Of course, people still get married and have children. However, what we see is, perhaps, more a hollow semblance of the social institutions that Christianity gave rise to. For instance, in a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Adele Horin remarked that contemporary weddings are often held to celebrate the success of a *de facto* relationship rather than to sanctify or mark the beginning of marital union: the couple, whose relationship has survived the test of time, the raising of children and other challenges is now celebrated, sometimes fifteen years or so down the track of co-habitation, in a wedding ceremony. So, the outward ritual of the wedding ceremony is what has remained, although its substance is largely changed.

And so has the place of the family. For instance, mothers of unborn babies suffering from abnormalities of one sort or another are often encouraged to have abortions on economic grounds. Similarly, changes to industrial relations legislation suggest that we are now ready to abandon the idea of ensuring a 'living wage' sufficient for supporting a family; the rise of the market, along with its individualistic logic, places that market not only prior to the state but, also, prior to the family.

And to the extent that it is accepted that

homosexual couples have a 'right' to parent children, or that children born through artificial reproductive technology will be loved better by their parents (in having designed them themselves), then we give up the natural law idea that marriage is a unitive and pro-creative institution, in which a couple share in the divinely-ordained work of pro-creation. If you ask the Irish how many children they have, they will sometimes preface their response with the phrase: 'we have been blessed with' four or six or however many children they have. The idea that children are a blessing is reflected in the language that is used. It would make no sense to the speakers of such a language to talk of having a *right* to have children in the way that is increasingly the case in Australia.

Of course, our social structures are coming to reflect the post-1960s worldview, just as they once reflected the priorities of Christians. While there is much to appreciate in the secular, liberal state, it is, nonetheless, a mistake to leave little room for the fostering and protection of the family. History does teach us (if we allow it to teach us anything at all) that the well-being of society is largely determined by the well-being of the institution of the family. If a specifically Christian conception of family is to be given up, then we need to think how else we will support this most vital of institutions. And we need, also, to bear in mind the plight of those who cannot create a family in a traditional sense so that we do not, as we may well have done in the past, violate *their* dignity in the process.

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In societies, especially rich societies, where consumerism and materialism have replaced human virtues, and where culture and education are ‘values free’, the person is actually reduced to an object to be used. ‘Liberated’ from the bonds of family and society, the lone individual, victim of a new form of alienation, is rendered vulnerable to all forms of dehumanisation.

Nonetheless, in the face of all these challenges, many families are flourishing and the Catholic Church is committed to promoting their rights and their well-being. Although we recognise the difficulties which families are going through, they are like the pilgrim Church, the Church “amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God” (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). We confidently proclaim that, in spite of unprecedented pressures, the family is and always will be a gift, a commitment and the hope for humanity!

—from the *Final Declaration of the Congress on the Family, Rio de Janeiro, 08.11.1997*

Family, believe in what you are; believe in your vocation to be a luminous sign of God’s love. Today I repeat to you these words that I spoke during the Meeting with Families on 20 October, 2001. Family, be for the people of our time a ‘sanctuary of life’. Christian family, be a ‘domestic church’, faithful to your evangelical vocation. Precisely because she knows that ‘marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives’ (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 1).

The family that lives the requirements of love and forgiveness to the full becomes the main bulwark of the civilization of love and the hope for the future of humanity.

—John Paul II, 22 November 2001.



MARRIAGE IN THE LIFE OF THE PARISH

He sent them out two by two... Luke 10:1

FRANCINE and BYRON PIROLA

I. WHY MARRIAGE IS IMPORTANT TO THE PARISH

When we in the Church think about marriage and family life, mostly we think in terms of supporting couples. We look primarily towards marriage and family life as a group in need, and we focus our energies on providing support services for them such as counseling, welfare, financial assistance and so on. This approach has a rich history in the Church and is well developed through a vast social welfare network. It is important work and part of our Christian responsibility. And by and large, we do this very well.

However this approach is also seriously limited. It is grounded in a mentality that focuses almost exclusively on the needs of families, and thus overlooks their giftedness. Rarely are married couples called forth for leadership in Church life specifically because of their coupleness or sacramental charisms. The troubled and dysfunctional situations in families tend to dominate our attention and subsequently, our perspective of marriage is skewed towards the problems and needs of family life.

In 1980, Pope John Paul II convened a synod on 'The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World'. The papal encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* was published shortly afterwards. In it, the Pope went to great lengths to emphasize the giftedness of marriage and family life, especially their evangelizing capacity. 'Family, become what you are...the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflec-

tion of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ for the Church His bride' (no. 17).

'Evangelization, urged on within by irrepressible missionary zeal, is characterized by a universality without boundaries...The sacrament of marriage takes up and re-proposes the tasks of defending and spreading the faith, a task that...makes Christian married couples and parents witnesses of Christ 'to the ends of the earth,' missionaries, in the true and proper sense, of love and life' (no. 54).

In this year of the twenty-sixth anniversary of *Familiaris Consortio*, it is timely to turn our attention to the role of the marriage and family life in the parish. Marriage is an underutilized resource in parish life. Before we can effectively empower married couples to take up leadership in parish life, we need to understand just exactly where the power of the Sacrament of Matrimony resides.

The Power of Marriage

The power of marriage for renewing the Church and society rests in the very nature of the sacrament. Matrimony is the vocational sacrament in which the vast majority of adult Catholics live, and yet it's capacity for teaching, renewing, and leading the Church is largely overlooked.

All Sacraments reveal and witness to a dimension of God and our relationship with him.



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Matrimony witnesses to the passionate, intimate love of Jesus for his bride, the Church. St Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians spells it out very clearly. After describing how husbands are to love their wives in imitation of Christ, and wives are to regard their husbands as they regard the Lord, he quotes scripture: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’. This is a great mystery, and I am applying to Christ and the church.’ (Eph 5:31-32).

In commenting on this passage of St Paul’s, Pope John Paul II noted that the Sacrament of Matrimony had a ‘bidirectional’ nature. ‘As we can see, the [spousal] analogy operates in two directions. On the one hand, it helps us to understand better the essence of the relationship between Christ and the Church. On the other hand, at the same time, it helps us to see more deeply into the essence of marriage to which Christians are called.’ (*Theology of the Body*, p. 313) In other words, not only can couples look to Christ and the Church to learn how to love each other well, they as a couple can teach the Church about how Christ loves the Church, and how we as His bride, are to respond to Him.

Thus married couples are called to teach the Church about the nature of Christ’s love; to offer inspiration and leadership in our parish communities.

Couples teach the Church that God’s love is as intimate as it is benevolent, and that his Kingdom is more relational, like a family, than legalistic. Like a passionately ‘in love’ couple, Jesus’ love for us is urgent, personal and intimate. He longs to be close to us, to be one with us, to be in communion. The ‘one flesh’ union of husband and wife is not just a physical joining of their bodies for brief and occasional moments. Nor is it their compensation for having to endure the difficulties of marriage and family life! No, their sexual union is a sacred gesture and is instrumental in what Pope John Paul II called ‘a communion of persons’—the interpersonal communion of



Francine and Byron are the co-authors and national directors of Celebrate Love and Embrace. They are members of the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council advising the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life. They have been married for nineteen years and have five children.

body and soul between two persons in a mutual self-gift.

The passionate married couple thus illuminates and images the Eucharistic communion—Jesus gives his body and sheds his blood in a total outpouring of love for his bride, the Church. When a couple make love, they too give their bodies and shed their blood (*i.e.* lay down their life in service) to each other in the image of Christ. And just as husband and wife become ‘one flesh’ in sexual communion, so also do we become one flesh with Jesus in Eucharistic communion.

Sexual communion is a sacred rite; a deeply holy and sacramental act for the married couple. It is no accident that sexual union is considered so essential to the establishment of the sacrament of Matrimony when the couple marries. ‘Indeed the very words, ‘I take you to be my wife-my husband’ refer not only to a determinate reality, but they can be fulfilled only by means of conjugal intercourse.’ (John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, p. 355.)

Married love is a powerful witness and teacher. It images, and makes real, the profound mysteries of our faith and is thus wor-



II. HOW CAN THE POWER OF THE SACRAMENT BE UTILIZED IN THE PARISH SETTING?

We must now turn our attention to more practical considerations. How, specifically, can a typical parish put this theology into practice. We'd like to offer a smorgasbord of suggestions and case stories.

1. Raise Couples for Ministry

There are many ministries and jobs in the parish that flourish when undertaken by a couple with an awareness of their sacramental gifts. The following are a sample of some ways that parishes are engaging this idea.

kidsChurch

In this version of the 'children's Liturgy of the Word', couples are rostered as the catechists. This has a number of advantages including the important benefit to the couple themselves. Whenever we do kidsChurch in our parish, we learn so much more about the gospel. Our parish priest is a marvelous homilist, but there is no substitute for having to teach a subject yourself in order to really think about the topic. Sharing in this personal growth encourages the spiritual intimacy and development of faith for the couple. A second advantage of having couple catechists is that it gets the fathers involved. Most parish ministries are supported by women. Most of the teachers in our schools are also female. There is nothing wrong with women teaching children the faith. There is something seriously wrong when there are only women teaching our children the faith. By structuring the kidsChurch programme such that couples take on the catechesis, we ensure that the children hear from and experience a masculine perspective.

Baptism Preparation

We were delighted when our parish priest asked us to help him establish a home based Baptism preparation course. He had a model from his previous parish which we adapted and documented. The home based setting not only allowed us to both present the ninety minute programme, it also encouraged both parents and the siblings of those to be baptised to attend. The welcoming atmosphere of a family home made it hospitable to families. This was especially significant for families of mixed faith where the non-Catholic parent would be inclined to stay at home with the other children.

Sacramental Preparation

The same principles can apply to the sacraments of reconciliation, communion and confirmation. Home based and couple led small groups encourage deeper reflection and ownership among the parents of the sacraments. It also helps to avoid the sense of children being batch processed for the sacraments. The RCIA would also benefit from the presence of the 'domestic church'—ask a couple to host the RCIA group in their home, and/or have a couple present the topic of marriage to the group.

Marriage Preparation

There are few who can argue with having couples as the preferred presenters of marriage preparation. It may be difficult to source them, but it is generally accepted as the ideal. While some parishes provide their own marriage preparation, most parishes outsource it to other groups such as Centacare, Engaged Encounter or other local initiatives. We have person-



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ally been involved in two parish-based programmes—Evenings for the Engaged and Embrace. Both are run over six sessions from the home of the presenters.

Youth

Some large parishes employ a youth minister to run programmes for various age groups. For those more average sized parishes with a limited budget, diocesan youth workers and charismatic covenant communities offer programmes and special events to which youth from all over are welcome. One of the few parish based youth programmes available to any sized parish is Antioch (16-20 years old). The Antioch Youth movement has been very successful in Australia, largely due to the involvement of married couples in the adult leadership. These couples bring a sacramental awareness and the practical experience of parenting to their role. They also offer a unique and vital perspective on sexuality and relationships, which is perhaps the hottest topic for young people of this age.

Marriage and Family Parish Councils

Mostly we form our parish leadership group (parish council, parish pastoral council, *etc.*) around individuals who can offer various skills such as being an accountant or a good organizer. If you want to make a statement about how important marriage is, ask a passionate couple to be on the council, not because she's pious or he's so generous with his handy man skills, but because of their marital spirituality. Ask them because they bring the important charisms of unity, hospitality and intimacy.

Better yet, establish a dedicated 'council' or working group of couples to undertake the pastoral planning for marriage and family life in the parish. Empower them with real responsibility and authority. This is part of Pope John Paul II's vision for the renewal of marriage and family in the establishment of the Pontifical Council for the Family in 1981. His hope

was that each diocese and parish would have it's own council of couples dedicated to evangelizing the Church through the family.

2. Education and Leadership Formation

Of course, part of activating and empowering Matrimony in the parish is cultivating couple leadership. Parishes generally do well in promoting formation and spirituality with an individual focus. Few actively target the development of couple spirituality and leadership.

There are a number of excellent options that provide education and ongoing formation for couples. Examples include the Celebrate Love seminar, Marriage Encounter Weekend, Australasian Teams, Couples for Christ, Focolare and the Parenting Colloquium. While some of these initiatives can be run as a parish event, it is not necessary to do so in order to access them. The most important thing is for the parish to advertise and encourage couples to participate in these renewal experiences, not because the couple 'needs' to, but because the parish 'needs' the couple to take up leadership. In our experience of recruiting and running Celebrate Love seminars, couples are wary of an invitation that suggests 'it will be good for them'. No one likes to be judged as inadequate or at risk—especially when it comes to their marriage. Rather, appeal to the reality that their marriage is capable of making a great contribution to the parish in a leadership capacity.

It can be difficult for couples with young children to attend such programmes, as child care is always an issue. One practical way a parish could assist would be to encourage a mutual child-care between families, or call on parish teenagers to help out. Another possibility is to combine resources with neighbouring parishes to host a renewal experience for the deanery.

3. Prayers for Marriage and Family Life

We pray for what's important to us. If we re-



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ally value marriage and the contribution that it makes to parish life, we should pray for it. Every week. Every Mass. Every opportunity.

For several years we ran ‘The Movement of Continuous Prayer for Marriage and Family Life’ in our parish. We recruited thirty-one parishioners/families to pray for one hour a month and assigned one day of the month to each. A booklet with suggestions and reflections on marriage and family life in all its different expressions was provided. Each day, a parishioner or family would pray from their home for the marriages and families of the parish, personally and by name. It gave us all a greater sense of being connected to these families and it raised our awareness and appreciation of marriage and family in our community.

Other simple ways a parish can enter into prayer for marriage:

- Acknowledge and pray for couples who are celebrating significant anniversaries.
- Each quarter, have a blessing at mass for expectant families. A pregnancy is the fruit of sacramental love between husband and wife and should be approached with reverence and awe.
- Include prayers to strengthen marriage in the Intercessions at Sunday Masses.

4. Welcome Families and Couples

Many priests tell us that there just aren’t the couples or families at Mass to call on to do these ministries. Part of an active marriage ministry is building a family-friendly culture at the Sunday liturgies.

With five children, including a four year old with more testosterone than the rest of the family put together, we are very sympathetic to the difficulties families face in just getting to church on a Sunday. For those families where only one spouse is Catholic, there are additional challenges to overcome. Things that families tell us make a difference include:

- The restlessness of small children being accepted. The parish priest can offer

leadership here by making an effort to thank parents of young children for coming, greeting the children and treating them as full members of the parish (which by their baptism they are!). When well-meaning parishioners give a noisy toddler ‘the glare’ (we’ve been on the receiving end too many times) the parish priest can counter it by including the toddler and parents.

- Welcoming newcomers. When new families arrive it helps if there is someone around to welcome them, explain what’s available in the parish, introduce them to other parishioners. In our parish a married couple has taken this on. They make a point to remember the names of newcomers, and will often follow up with hospitality.
- Having toys available in an appropriate part of the Church where parents can still participate in the mass and toddlers can occupy themselves.
- Children’s liturgy of the word or handouts to help young children engage in the readings.
- Contemporary music that is easy to sing, lively and relatable to families.
- Food! Morning tea is a big hit with the children in our parish at Kensington!
- Whenever possible, engaging children or families in the parts of the mass—offertory, encouraging children too young to receive communion to come for a blessing, having the children stand around the altar at the consecration. One of the priests we know asks the children to copy his hand gestures throughout the consecration. This keeps little ones focused on what’s happening and minimizes the visual distraction of wiggling children to the rest of the congregation.
- Encourage family-orientated initiatives. Passionist Family Groups, parish family picnics, parish ball games after mass all help build community with a family focus. They also make it easier for a non-



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Catholic spouse to participate in the parish life.

Pope John Paul II said: 'The future of humanity passes by way of the family'. These sentiments have been echoed by Pope Benedict

XVI. 'Today it is necessary to proclaim with renewed enthusiasm the Gospel of the Family' (Dec 3rd, 2005). Let us take up the challenge to make the vision of these great leaders a reality in the lives of ordinary Catholic families.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCE LIST

1. PMRC (Australia) develops and distributes a number of programmes, including:
 - *Celebrate Love* (Marriage enrichment based on the Theology of the Body) www.CelebrateLove.com.au
 - *Embrace* (Marriage preparation based on the Theology of the Body) www.Embrace.org.au
 - *Evenings for the Engaged* (Marriage preparation). Orders: 02 9662-7272
 - *Antioch* (parish based youth programme) www.Antioch.com.au
 - *Movement of Continuous Prayer for Marriage and Family*. Information: 02 9349-1710
2. Resources from World Wide Marriage Encounter include:
 - The *Marriage Encounter* weekend. A residential, marriage enrichment programme that has been established in Australia for more than 30 years. www.wwme.org.au
 - *Engaged Encounter* is derived from *Marriage Encounter* and offers a weekend experience for couples preparing for marriage. www.engagedencounter.org.au
 - *Retrouvaille* for couples in hurting marriages. www.retrouvaille.org
3. *Australasian Teams* is a network of small groups of couples who meet regularly to support each other to discover the Lord's presence in their marriage and to live in Christian fellowship with other couples. www.tol-oceania.catholic.org.au
4. *Couples for Christ (CFC)* is a movement intended for the renewal and strengthening of Christian family life. www.cfcglobal.org.ph
5. *Focolare* promotes the ideals of unity and universal brotherhood and has eighteen different branches focusing on families, young people, children of all ages, priests, men and women religious of various congregations, and even bishops. www.focolare.org.au



FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

BRIAN LEWIS

FREEDOM OF conscience is something we take for granted these days, but, though it has always been at the heart of our Catholic tradition, the notion of freedom of conscience has had a chequered history in the teaching and practice of the Church, as a brief overview will show.

In the Jubilee Year 2000 the late Pope John Paul II called the Church to an examination of conscience and a 'purification of memory' because of past failures to live authentically as followers of Christ. In his Apologies he listed among the mistakes made by the Church over the preceding 1000 years the many violations of conscience and other rights of the human person perpetrated in the name of the faith in religious wars, the courts of the Inquisition, the Crusades, anti-Semitism and other expressions of grave intolerance. During that long period inadequate notions of conscience, of human freedom and even of faith held sway among some, often influential, members of the Church.

For four hundred years following the Council of Trent handbooks of moral instruction were used in seminaries to prepare priests for the ministry, especially the ministry of the sacrament of penance. They were practical manuals, with a pastoral orientation and only minimally theological in presentation. It is interesting that typically the first and fundamental treatise was devoted in these manuals to conscience. However, although this is a measure of the importance accorded to it, as time went on the full meaning of freedom of conscience was lost and conscience was given only a limited and restrictive role in the conduct of moral life. In some quarters this was pushed to extremes.

As the second millennium of the Christian era progressed, the secular world began to re-

act against current restrictive understandings of conscience and freedom. The rights of individual conscience and of its liberty in face of any kind of despotism and unjust oppression were increasingly elaborated during the eighteenth century and finally found expression in the 'Declaration of Human Rights' of 1789. Ideas of democracy, tolerance, freedom of thought and speech and human rights were spread in the Western World by the French Revolution and today have become an essential part of our modern cultural heritage, although, as has in fact not infrequently happened, the danger of turning freedom of conscience into an absolute is always present.

Because of its heavy emphasis on the law of God, the official Church of the time strongly opposed this promotion of the rights of individual conscience, which it associated with bitter memories of revolutionary anticlericalism. Liberty of conscience was condemned by Pope Gregory XVI in 1832 as a 'pestilential evil and insane raving', a condemnation taken up and confirmed by Pope Pius IX's Syllabus of Errors in 1864. This continued refusal (at least up to Vatican II) to endorse freedom of conscience was one of the main aspects of the burgeoning divorce between the Church and the contemporary world.

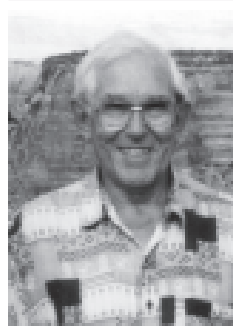
Older Catholics can probably remember how we tended to think of conscience prior to Vatican II. Conscience was something that we *had*, that we consulted for guidance, somewhat in the manner of the commuter consulting the rail timetable or the forward planner looking up the calendar. It was our private rulebook, a sort of built-in personal code of ethics, or perhaps our very own dictionary of moral answers, all given to us by God and enforced by our Church. Conformity and obedience to authority (of God and Church) rather than freedom



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characterised conscience. 'Having a conscience', for example, about snatching handbags from little old ladies or falsifying income tax returns or missing Mass on Sundays meant being a person in whom had been instilled the conviction of the wrongness of such actions and who in consequence would feel guilty in doing them. Since it often takes courage to 'follow your conscience' (that is, in obeying these perceived and accepted rules of conduct), particularly when it involves inconvenience or difficulty, for many of us moral responsibility consisted, not in being a mature and self-determining person (in this way conscience was denied any role in personal self-expression or determination), but rather in awareness of these rules of behaviour together with a strong will enabling us to live by these rules.

The theological underpinning of this kind of thinking was rooted in the kind of theology popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Theologians set out to recapture what they thought were the key elements of the Golden Age of scholastic theology (the movement was therefore dubbed neo-scholasticism). Adopting a particular interpretation of natural law, they laid undue stress on an objective moral order set up by God himself and written on our hearts, an order of conduct which is absolute and which determines the morality of human acts. The task of conscience in this view is to ensure that we conform ourselves to this objective and absolute moral order and to the norms flowing from it. Conscience is thus conceived as simply the bridge between individual persons and this order laid down by God. Only obedience to these norms can ensure that we have a right conscience. Freedom of conscience does not rate highly in this approach. Conscience's only role is in the application of moral rules to particular situations. Largely because it was attributed, wrongly, to St. Thomas Aquinas, this position became quite influential in Roman Catholic circles and was spelled out in detail in the discussion paper presented by the Preparatory Commission to the Second Vatican Council in



Brian Lewis graduated from the Alphonsian Academy of Moral Theology and the University of St Thomas in Rome. He has written much on moral issues, and is now in retirement.

1962. It was rejected by the Council Fathers in the treatment of conscience in *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* of 1965 (*Gaudium et Spes*).

In response to Pope John XXIII's challenge to contact the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel, this document shows that conscience is not something we *have*; it is the very person himself or herself in their inner depths, where they are alone with God, whose voice echoes within (n.16). It is a meeting of persons, not in the first place a confrontation with a law or a moral order. The sense of moral obligation experienced in conscience concerns more than particular decisions about doing good and avoiding evil; in the depths of conscience it is the very person who is experienced as under obligation to be a certain kind of person, that is, a loving, relating person. Conscience in the first instance is a decision about *being*, only in the light of that a decision about particular acts. The experience of particular decisions comes only gradually. This approach to conscience is not centred upon a moral order in the sense proposed by the preparatory working plan but on a law of love, on an order of persons in communion with one another and with God. Conscience renders testimony to our spirit whether in all our moral decisions we express our being in Christ the children of God our Father.

Finally the document makes the point that 'the Gospel announces and proclaims the freedom of the children of God, rejects all slavery which in the last analysis derives from sin, and honours as sacred the dignity of conscience



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and its free decision. All this corresponds with the fundamental law of the Christian dispensation', by reason of which 'the rightful autonomy of the creature, and especially of the human person, far from being taken away, is rather re-established in its own dignity and strengthened in it' (n. 41).

The 1965 *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, a document that Pope Paul VI considered 'one of the major texts of the Council', confirms and proclaims this principle of freedom. On the basis of their dignity as persons, it states, people should not be forced to act against their consciences, nor should they be prevented from acting in accordance with their consciences, within due limits. The Declaration says: 'the usages of society are to be usages of freedom in their full range. These require that *the freedom of human beings be respected as far as possible and curtailed only when and insofar as necessary*' (n. 7. Italics mine). According to John Courtney Murray SJ, one of the principal architects of the document, this statement of the principle of freedom (*as much freedom as possible; as little restraint as necessary*) may be seen as the most significant sentence in the whole document. He went on to explain that, 'though the Declaration deals only with the minor issue of religious freedom in the technical secular sense, it does affirm a principle of wider import – that the dignity of man consists in his responsible use of freedom' (*Religious Freedom* (1966), 673-4). In his view the Declaration, taken together with the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, has ushered in a new era of reconciliation with the modern spirit and opened the way to a new straightforwardness in the dialogue between the Church and the world.

Some, of course, take the notion of freedom of conscience to mean open slather, a licence to do what you want. It is true that many today, including Catholics, believe that one is entitled to make up one's own mind without reference to any outside authority, either of church or state, and that one can do what one

likes in matters of faith and morals, provided the rights of others are not trampled upon. Thus the individual is made completely autonomous in making personal decisions and truth becomes completely relative. The late Pope John Paul II was so alarmed at this trend that he tackled it head on. In his 1993 Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* he reacted strongly against this exaggerated exaltation of personal freedom and its offshoot, 'a claim to moral autonomy which would actually amount to an absolute sovereignty' and make conscience a law unto itself (n. 35:3). On this basis the document criticised unidentified theologians, who, it claims, have distorted the true understanding of conscience 'in relation to freedom and God's law' (nn. 55:1-56:2).

Strongly upholding the principle of freedom: *as much freedom as possible; as little restraint as necessary*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom is at pains to spell it out in some detail. 'It is in accordance with their dignity as persons that all should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth' (n. 2:3). Our exercise of freedom must be responsible, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty. This means that in facing difficult decisions we are called upon to reflect deeply on what we propose and do our best to arrive at the right answer, taking into account all relevant aspects of the situation. Since our actions can often have an impact on others, we must always be careful that we do not encroach upon their human rights. As Catholics we should listen attentively to what the Church has to say about the issue – if it has spoken on it. And sometimes we may need to consult others wiser than ourselves for guidance. All this is implied in the Council's explanation of the principle of freedom of conscience.

Clearly, then, there has been a development in our understanding of what it means to live as a human person in community, and so in our perception of the notion of freedom of conscience, understood in its full theological meaning and afforded its proper role in



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authentically Christian living. This theme of freedom of conscience is of great relevance to any dialogue between Church and the world, because it lies at the heart of numerous actual problems both within the Church, for example, the relationship between the teaching authority of the Church and its exercise and the freedom of believers (keeping in mind that there is an order or a hierarchy of truths taught and that all are not on the same level), and in society at large, for example, in regard to society's treatment of its

gay and lesbian members, its attitude to asylum seekers, racial intolerance and sectarianism, or by contrast its indifference or neglect in the area of social justice. However, the progress made in the teachings of Vatican II regarding the primacy of conscience and its legitimate freedom must not be seen as merely an attempt on the part of the Church to catch up with contemporary secular thinking; it is imperative to understand this progress in continuity with biblical revelation and our basic theological tradition.

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ECUMENICAL CONSENSUS ON MARY

MARIE FARRELL RSM

IN CELEBRATING the fortieth anniversary of the close of Vatican Council II, it has been both rewarding and instructive for Catholics to re-visit Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium* (the Constitution on the Church)—‘The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church’. An important insight from this chapter is recognition that the apostolic work of the Church for ‘the regeneration of humanity’ should rightly look to Mary.¹

One of the many fruits of the Council was the establishment of bilateral dialogue by means of the Anglican and Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). Both communions are now rejoicing in what is surely a significant moment in our ecumenical relationship, namely, the joint statement on doctrines concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*.

Launched on the Feast of Christ’s Presentation, February 2nd, 2005, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* had a long gestation period occasioned by the prior need for ARCIC to address matters of Church authority, and especially that of papal infallibility. According to its first statement on authority (1977), ARCIC realized that difficulties arose for Anglicans because of the Catholic dogmas of Mary’s Immaculate Conception and Assumption—not because of their teaching *per se*, but because of doubt among Anglicans whether it was appropriate to define these beliefs as essential to the faith of believers since neither dogma was sufficiently supported by Scripture. Nevertheless, *Authority in the Church II* (1981) acknowledged the unique role of Mary in the Christian dispensation.

Under the general topic of ‘infallibility’ seven points of agreement about Mary were itemized: her role must not obscure the fact that Jesus Christ is the one and only Mediator between God and humanity; Christian understanding of Mary is inseparably linked with the doctrines of Christ and the Church; as Mother of God (*Theotókos*, literally ‘God-bearer’) she received a unique vocation; she was prepared by divine grace to be Mother of the Saviour by whom she was herself redeemed; she has already entered into to the glory of heaven; she is honoured in the communion of saints by both Churches who celebrate her feasts; she is a ‘model of holiness, obedience and faith for all Christians, and can therefore be regarded as a prophetic figure of the Church’.² As we shall see, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* has been judiciously designed to bypass the issue of papal infallibility as these same points are considered.

As an Agreed Statement, and not an authoritative declaration, the document is open for further refinement. It should prove to be a valuable tool for parish discussion groups.

The Statement places a great deal of importance upon context—especially to influences affecting processes involved in the development of doctrine, to those behind previous ARCIC statements, and to liturgical and devotional experiences of the Commission members themselves during the five years of their coming together.³ Appreciation of differing contexts has obviously heightened sensitivity among the Commission members themselves. The Preface to the Statement signed by Archbishop Alexander J. Brunett (Roman Catholic Co-Chair) and Archbishop Peter F.



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Carnley (Anglican Communion Co-Chair) states clearly that:

[In] framing this agreed statement we have drawn on the Scriptures and the common tradition which predates the Reformation and the Counter Reformation...[W]e have attempted to use language that reflects what we have in common and transcends the controversies of the past. At the same time...we have had to face squarely dogmatic definitions which are integral to the faith of Roman Catholics but largely foreign to the faith of Anglicans. The members of ARCIC over time have sought to embrace one another's ways of doing theology and have considered together the historical context in which certain doctrines have developed. In so doing, we have learned to receive anew our own traditions, illumined and deepened by the understanding of and appreciation for each other's tradition.⁴

Compass readers will be interested to learn that besides Archbishop Peter Carnley (Perth), other Australians on the Commission for *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* were Rev Canon Dr Charles Sherlock (Melbourne) and Rev Fr Dr Peter Cross (Melbourne).⁵

*The Introduction (1-5)*⁶

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb (Lk 1:42) is chosen well as expressing 'our common faith about the one who, of all believers, is closest to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.'⁷ The Introduction wisely lays out the entire landscape against which the task of the Commission was to be carried out in response to a request from Roman Catholic and Anglican Bishops for a study of Mary in the life and doctrine of the Church. Such a task could only come to fruition when, with entrenched positions put aside, Mary's person and role are understood within the whole history of salvation that is embraced 'in the light of a theology of divine grace and hope...deeply rooted in the enduring experience of Christian worship and devotion.'⁸



Sr Marie T Farrell is a Mercy Sister who is a Senior Lecturer with the Sydney College of Divinity and who teaches theology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

Mary in Scripture (6-30)

Appropriately, initial attention is given to the scriptural foundations of marian theology since they furnish the normative witness to God's plan of salvation. Avoiding the limitations of any one method of interpreting scripture, the Commission drew upon the whole scriptural tradition of the Church. Readers will appreciate how this statement reflects both ecumenical and ecclesial influences operating during the dialogue.

The rubric of 'covenant' has been carefully chosen for interpreting the Old Testament typologically. A sense of the universality of the divine *economia* is established to demonstrate clearly how the 'line' reaching from Noah, through Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and the 'elect Israel' including Sarah and Hannah has, in the fullness of time, culminated in Christ born of Mary. Placed masterfully just at the threshold where the Old Testament consideration crosses into that of the New Testament, is the text of Romans 8:28-30. Here St Paul expresses astonishment at God's gracious favour towards those who are called according to divine purpose, and who are predestined, justified and glorified. Already there is anticipation of eschatological emphases to be reinforced throughout the statement.

Reflection on the Matthean and Lukan birth narratives follows naturally from the trajectory of grace and hope emerging from Old



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Testament. Focus on the ‘newness’ of the Christ-event invites wonder at the mystery of the Incarnation. Emphasis is given to the way human boundaries of the covenant are stretched in Mary’s conception of Jesus by the Spirit. Two important theological observations are made concerning the virginal conception of Jesus. First, that it is a sign of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit and not about the absence of a human father⁹ and, secondly, for believers it is an eloquent sign of the divine Sonship of Christ and of new life through the Spirit. Seen in this way, the virginal conception becomes a powerful expression of what the Church believes about Christ as Saviour rather than about a miracle in the body of Mary.

A strong sense of the presence of a future already mysteriously fulfilled—that is, of ‘realised eschatology’—is stressed as the role of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of Mary is considered. We are alerted to the Spirit’s ‘overshadowing’ of Mary at the Annunciation, to her presence at the Pentecostal ‘outpouring’ of the Spirit, and how in her hearing and keeping of the word of God she was so graced as to meet the demands incumbent upon members of the ‘true family’ of Jesus (Luke 8:21).

Reflection on the symbolic theology of the fourth Gospel reinforces the synoptic proclamation of divine initiative in the mystery of the Incarnation; for all who are born *not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (Jn 1:13) can apply to the birth of Jesus. References to the narratives of Cana (Jn 2:1-12) and Calvary (Jn 19: 25-27) underscore Mary’s maternal role in the messianic community in such a way that her reciprocal roles of ‘woman’ and ‘disciple’ are related to the identity of the Church.

This section of the study leaves us with the conclusion that it is impossible to be faithful to Scripture without giving due attention to the person of Mary.¹⁰ Moreover, it is evident that:

Following through the trajectory of the grace of God and the hope for a perfect human response...Christians have, in line with the New Testament writers, seen its culmination in the

obedience of Christ. Within this Christological context they have discerned a similar pattern in the one who would receive the Word in her heart and in her body.¹¹

Mary in Christian Tradition (31–51)

Focus is now directed to the centrality of Christology for marian theology. We applaud the Commission for the remarkably succinct summary of the Christological controversies of the first five centuries and for illustrating how associated marian traditions originated. Clearly Anglicans and Roman Catholics can testify unequivocally to the faith of the ancient church in the true divinity and true humanity of Jesus Christ. The designation of Mary as *Theotókos* is re-affirmed; under the banner of this title theological reflection will develop in the remainder of the statement.

In order to balance the Christological approach to Mary just established, paragraphs 35 – 40 of the statement shift concentration to the celebration of Mary in the early Church. Devotional themes affiliated with various titles—‘New Eve’, ‘Ever-Virgin’ and *Panhagia* (‘All Holy One’)—are proposed as examples of how patristic exegetes ‘delighted in drawing feminine imagery from the Scriptures to contemplate the significance both of the Church and Mary’. One can identify easily how seeds sown in early piety gave rise to a ‘high’ or privileged marian theology dependent upon the fundamental principles of the Divine Motherhood and of Mary as Archetype of the Church.

Review of the effects of popular piety augmented by apocryphal legends is helpful in exemplifying the extent to which marian doctrine of the Middle Ages displaced the centre of gravity from Christ to Mary-in-herself. Thus, instead of representing the faithful Church, Mary became in effect a dispenser of grace to the faithful—a distortion only recently repudiated when a move was rejected to declare dogmatically that Mary is Mediatrix of grace. The statement describes accurately how



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excessive marian piety from the late Middle Ages threatened faith in Jesus Christ as the one and only Mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim:2:5).

The Commission is also to be applauded for its survey of the history of marian piety from the Reformation to the present. Anglican and Roman Catholic communions can now engage in radical re-reception of our common tradition and of Scripture as the 'fundamental touchstone of divine revelation'. This section pinpoints significant moments that have enabled our communions to endorse sound marian theology. Anglican re-reception has involved renewal of prayer books, insertion of the name of Mary into Eucharistic prayers, re-establishment of liturgical celebration of the Assumption, and development of resources for use in marian festivals. For Catholics, *Lumen Gentium*: 8 and *Marialis Cultus* of Pope Paul VI are identified as having been critical in re-setting devotion to Mary within orthodox bounds of Scripture and Tradition.

This section confirms Mary's place in the prophetic tradition of Christianity where she is inseparably linked with Christ and the Church.

Mary Within the Pattern of Grace and Hope (52 – 63)

Here is where the eschatological motif of the document is most skillfully concentrated. Paragraph 52 states something that, in recent times had apparently become less than obvious:

We...view the economy of grace from its fulfillment in Christ 'back' into history, rather than 'forward' from its beginning in fallen creation towards the future in Christ. This perspective offers fresh light in which to consider the place of Mary.

A coherent cluster of New Testament citations denoting the ultimate destiny of the Church, sets the scene for understanding Mary within the context of divine grace.¹²

Mary is again acknowledged as embodying Israel, the 'elect'; the pattern of grace seen

in her life mirrors the destiny of the Church. The Commission affirms that having been prepared by God's prevenient grace from within the womb, Mary is both personally and representatively 'God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand' (Eph 2:10). From within a 'template' of grace afforded by biblical accounts of Elijah, Enoch, the penitent thief and Stephen martyr, Mary can also be seen as a faithful disciple now fully present with God in Christ and as a sign of hope for all humanity. In faith, therefore, Christians can discern how fitting it is that Mary has been wholly 'gathered' to the Lord where she takes her place among the entire 'cloud of witnesses' (Heb 12:1).

Given the problem of papal infallibility for Anglicans, the subtlety of this part of the document is quite extraordinary in enabling the theological meaning of the dogmas of Mary's Immaculate Conception and Assumption to be isolated from the formulae of definition. Concerning the present place of Mary in glory, the Commission declares that:

[W]e can affirm together the teaching that God has taken the Blessed Virgin Mary in the fullness of her person into his glory *as consonant with Scripture and that it can, indeed, only be understood in the light of Scripture*.¹³

Reference to the Immaculate Conception places positive stress on the 'glorious grace' that favoured Mary from her beginning. In anticipation of Mary's vocation as *Theotókos*, the Commission states that:

We can affirm together that Christ's redeeming work reached 'back' in Mary to the depths of her being, and to her earliest beginnings. This is not contrary to the teaching of Scripture *and can only be understood in the light of Scripture*.¹⁴

Questions are raised about whether the dogmas of Mary's holiness and glorification have been divinely revealed, and therefore, whether they would necessarily be 'of faith' for Anglicans should there be full ecclesial union in the future. It is noted how both com-



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munities understand that these beliefs depend entirely upon Mary's identity as *Theotókos* – a belief that is itself totally dependent upon faith in the divinely revealed doctrine of the Incarnation.¹⁵

Mary in the Life of the Church (64 – 75)

The significance of Mary within the patterns of grace and hope already established now proceeds to examination of Mary's role in the life of the Church. The final section of the statement is situated with superb theological delicacy in the context of God's 'Yes' in Christ and our 'Amen' through him to the glory of God (2 Cor 1:20; Col 1:27). When Mary's 'fiat' given freely in the Spirit is interpreted as being spoken by a unique member of Jesus' eschatological family, then her 'Amen' becomes a model of the 'Amen' of every disciple and for the whole Church.

One outcome of the study has been to identify differing influences concerning the role of Mary's ministry within the Church. In nutshell, Anglicans are represented as tending to appropriate Mary into their devotional lives as an inspirational model; Catholics as tending to be conscious her ongoing ministry in the life of the Church. Aware of these differences among their members, the Commission has been able to agree that:

... in understanding Mary as the fullest example of the life of grace, we are called to reflect on the lessons of her life recorded in Scripture and to join with her as one indeed not dead, but truly alive in Christ. In doing so we walk together as pilgrims in communion with Mary, Christ's foremost disciple, and all those whose participation in the new creation encourages us to be faithful to our calling.¹⁶

Conscious of the fact that although various ways of honoring Mary in liturgy and prayer are common to both our communions, the Commission saw further need to address the problem of how prayerful intercession to Mary might, even today, threaten the doctrine of Christ's mediation. Assurance is given that

any intercessory prayer seen to blur the Trinitarian economy of grace and hope must be rejected as failing to meet the criteria of Scripture or the ancient tradition. Hence Mary's distinctive ministry within the Church is presented as assisting others through her active prayer.

Christian experiences of the ministry of Mary are surveyed briefly using the lens of her maternal images drawn especially from the fourth Gospel. Caution is expressed and careful discernment advised lest new exaggerations of marian piety associated with private revelations should recur in our times.

The ministry of Mary as witnessed in her visitation to Elizabeth and in the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:39-56) is lauded for having inspired communities of men and women in various cultures to work for justice among the poor and oppressed. Brief, but necessary comment regrets that the witness of Mary's obedience to God's will 'has sometimes been used to encourage passivity and impose servitude on women.'¹⁷

This section ends with an unambiguous affirmation that the practice of calling upon Mary and the saints to pray for us is not communion-dividing.

Conclusion

Another positive step in Anglican-Roman Catholic relations has been achieved. Reviews have revealed mixed reactions to the theological method of the Agreed Statement.¹⁸ It has been branded as too cerebral, and as engaging in 'theological fudge' in an attempt to relate the two recent marian dogmas to Scripture. An Orthodox scholar regretted that the statement was not bold enough in speaking of Mary's active role in salvation. Generally, though, the fine use of biblical and eschatological themes permeating the work has been welcomed.

In keeping so strictly to a 'privileged' theology of Mary derived from her vocation as *Theotókos*, the statement has, I suggest, fallen



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somewhat short of situating Mary firmly within (vs 'above' or 'greater than') the Church. Since the '60s and under the influence of modern biblical scholarship, there has been a groundswell in advancing a marian theology 'from below'. This 'anthropological turn' using a paradigm of discipleship, has in no way diminished belief in the uniqueness of Mary's divine motherhood, but it has redressed a certain abstract quality whereby Mary of Nazareth had become so idealized as to 'distance' her from other disciples. The 'from below' theology demonstrates well how the entire mystery of Mary may be derived from her resolute faith. Mary of Nazareth was a daughter of Abraham before she was called to be *Theotókos*. Contemporary use of a disciple-

ship paradigm has meant that many who were 'oppressed' by the predominant pre-Vatican II theology of Mary, have been 'freed' to discover her as 'truly our sister'¹⁹ and pilgrim-companion in the journey of faith.

Recent controversies within the Anglican community, that have also affected relations with the Catholic Church, cannot cloud the significance of what is a fitting conclusion to the work of ARCIC II. This five-year project of deeply committed ecumenists is a tangible sign of new horizon of hope opening towards visible *communion* between our Churches. *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* instills confidence that Mary can be, and is, a symbol of communion rather than a sign of contradiction among Christians.

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1. *LumenGentium*:8, 65.
2. See Edward Yarnold SJ (a member of both ARCIC 1 & ARCIC 2), 'Mary in the ARCIC I Final Report', *One in Christ* 21:1, 1985, 70-72.
3. Commission meetings were marked by daily celebration of the prayer of the Church with pre-Reformation marian readings and with Evening Prayer accompanied by the *Magnificat*. See Sara Butler, 'The Catholic Contributor's View', *The Tablet* 21/5/05, 8.
4. For full text of *MGHC* see *Origins*, June 2, 2005, Vol.35:3, 33-50.
5. We dedicate this paper to the memory of Peter Cross who died on June 17th, 2006.
6. Numbers in parenthesis indicate paragraph nos. of the *MGHC* text.
7. *MGHC*, 1.
8. *MGHC* 6.
9. Notes 2 and 3 address problems of interpretation re the Church's claim about the virginal conception of Jesus.
10. See par. 77 for conclusion drawn from pars 6-30.
11. *MGHC*, 11.
12. 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4-6; 5:5; Eph 1:3-5,14; 2:6; 5:27; 1Cor 15:42-49; Rom 5:21-22; 6:1-6; 8:17,30; 11:26; Col 3:1.
13. Emphasis mine.
14. Emphasis mine.
15. Differences re full re-reception among Anglicans await re-reception of matters pertaining to Church authority.
16. *MGHC*, 65.
17. *MGHC*, 74.
18. E.g. Ruth Gledhill, 'Cracks in Anglican Dissent over Mary', *The Times* 17/05/2005; John Jillons, 'Call Her Blessed', *The Tablet* 25/3/2006; Alana Harris & Harriet, *Ecclesiology* 2:3, 339-356.
19. See Pope Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, n 56.



A LENTEN MEDITATION

DESMOND O'DONNELL OMI

Counsellor: May I ask you why you came to see me?

Client: Truthfully I don't think that I need to, but my eldest son thinks that I am manifesting some strange behaviour. I'm here to make him happy.

Counsellor: Could you tell me about this?

Client: You read the story in the local paper about my son going off and coming back years later.

Counsellor: Do you think the story as told is accurate?

Client: Yes it is, but most people lost sight of me and my feelings in the story. They speak only of 'a prodigal son'. They concentrate on guilt, blame and forgiveness. Yes, I suppose my young boy was foolish, but people missed my feelings and they misunderstand the deeper experience of what happened to me. Maybe that's why my elder son sent me to you.

Counsellor: Please, tell me your own understanding of what occurred and how you felt about it.

Client: Our family, like any good Jewish family, is very close. At least we were.

Counsellor: And your boy did not feel this closeness?

Client: You see, my son—he's my youngest—was always rather impulsive; he does not always act his age. One day he demanded his share of our family property in cash and.....(long pause)

Counsellor: And.....?

Client: I gave it to him. I said yes, but with a very heavy heart. He could see how I felt, but he persisted. Of course it took a while to sell that part of the family estate and I kept asking him not to leave home. Yes, I gave it to him, and of course the family thought that I was confused. They were

even angry.

Counsellor: How did you feel when the boy did this? Angry too, I suppose?

Client: No, not angry, but very sad and worried.

Counsellor: You were sad at the loss of the land?

Client: Maybe, but I was much more deeply saddened that my boy was leaving home. I was very concerned about him, very. He was leaving a comfortable and loving home, with servants, good food and overall security. Anything could happen to him.

Counsellor: Tell me about your sadness.

Client: Well, there is not much to tell; I was very worried like any parent would be.

Counsellor: Are you sure that you were not angry?

Client: No, no. How could I be angry at my son whom I loved, just because he was acting foolishly to harm himself? Being angry would be focusing on myself.

Counsellor: That is a little unusual in the situation. You were not angry with the boy who was splitting the family estate?

Client: No, I was not angry. You read my story. There is no mention of anger in it, although some religious people in the village say that I was angry and maybe suppressed it.

Counsellor: Did you have any other feeling in the situation? Did you feel, shall we say, offended?

Client: No, as I told you, my thoughts were solely on the boy I loved, and not on myself. I was not offended. That would have been thinking about myself. You read my story. There is no mention of my son offending me. I was just sad, disappointed if you like, and anxious about



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his safety and wellbeing. We Jews are better in the country Yahweh gave us, rather than out in the diaspora.

Counsellor: So you were not angry or offended; just sad and worried about your boy's welfare?

Client: That's right. Have you not read the story?

Counsellor: Why do you think your family is worried about you?

Client: They think that somehow I lost my head in letting my son take his share of the farm before my death, and allowed him to avoid the responsibility of caring for his mother and I while we are alive.

Counsellor: But go back to your feelings of what you would. How are things now?

Client: Well, you read the story. My son came back recently and I welcomed him home. I feel very happy.

Counsellor: So?

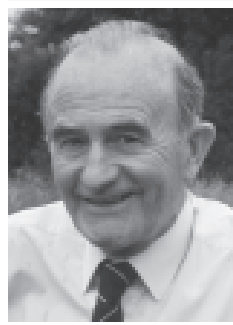
Client: Again my elder son thinks that I should not have welcomed him back, and that I am more confused than ever. He believes I should have sent him away, and now he thinks that I need counselling even more than before. You see, my wayward son spent all the money living promiscuously and returned only because he was hungry, penniless and working in a pig sty. Imagine a Jew and my son, working in a pig sty !

Counsellor: And how do you feel about his brother's reaction?

Client: Well, again I am sad that he cannot share my feelings of joy.

Counsellor: Maybe he felt that you should be annoyed at his brother's rejection of your authority. Did the flaunting of your authority not annoy you? Was disobedience not an issue for you?

Client: No, no. You see by leaving home, my son was hurting himself more than hurting me, and I was concerned about that most of all. Not about my authority. Besides, he came back starving, looking emaciated and smelly.



Desmond O'Donnell is an Oblate priest and a registered psychologist in Dublin. He worked for twenty-eight years in Australia.

Counsellor: And how did that make you feel about him?

Client: He didn't even have shoes, and his clothes were just rags. So you can just imagine how I felt for him. Like any father, I didn't feel *about* him; I felt *for* him.

Counsellor: And why do you think your family is so worried about you?

Client: Well, I was so happy that I even ran to meet him, and I would not let him—as tradition demands—kiss my feet. Yes, I was so happy that I embraced him warmly. I could feel my old heart beating against my ribs with joy. I am sure he felt it too. Some of the villagers laughed at my stumbling attempts to run towards my reckless son and welcome him.

Counsellor: So you were really happy at his return?

Client: Of course. I can't understand why my elder son was so angry. He thought that I did not love him as much as my son who went away.

Counsellor: How did he show his anger?

Client: Well, maybe you too will think I am confused when I tell you that I gave him the best robe in the house, that I called all the neighbours in and had a party with music and dancing to welcome my boy back. To the annoyance of my other son, I even had the calf we had been fattening for Rosh Hashonah our New Year celebration killed for the party. But I was so happy, so very happy. Some religious



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people said I should have given the boy a penance or at least made him promise never to do it again. But I could not. He himself wanted to do penance by becoming a servant. Imagine my beloved son becoming a servant in his own home. I never wanted that. But I was so happy to see him again. That's the only feeling I had.

Counsellor: Are you sure?

Client: Oh! I was a little sad when my elder son listed off his brother's sins in public and refused to meet his brother. I always suspected that he felt the need to earn my love by obeying my orders and working hard. Deep down that must have made him feel like a servant. Maybe that's his problem. It made me sad too. I told him again that all I have is his.

Counsellor: Unforgiveness usually hurts the

person who harbours it. How about you?

Client: What do you mean?

Counsellor: When did you forgive the boy?

Client: I never forgave him.

Counsellor: Excuse me! Did you say that you never forgave him?

Client: That's right. I didn't need to because I never condemned him.

Counsellor: Oh !

Client: I think that, like a lot of people in the village and since then, you did not read the story. Where are anger, condemnation, penance or forgiveness mentioned?(long pause)..... There was just deep sadness at the leaving and overwhelming joy at the return.

Counsellor: I am beginning to understand.

Client: When is my next appointment?

Counsellor: I don't think you need one. I think I need to read the story again.

The son's 'leaving' is...a much more offensive act than it seems at first reading. It is a heartless rejection of the home in which the son was born and nurtured and a break with the most precious tradition carefully upheld by the larger community of which he was a part. When Luke writes, 'and left for a distant country,' he indicates much more than the desire of a young man to see more of the world. He speaks about a drastic cutting loose from the way of living, thinking, and acting that has been handed down to him from generation to generation as a sacred legacy. More than disrespect, it is a betrayal of the treasured values of family and community. The 'distant country' is the world in which everything considered holy at home is disregarded. [...]

Leaving home is ... much more than an historical event bound to time and place. It is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace, that I am indeed carved in the palms of God's hands and hidden in their shadows. Leaving home means ignoring the truth that God has 'fashioned me in secret, moulded me in the depths of the earth and knitted me together in my mother's womb.' Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one.

Home is the centre of my being where I can hear the voice that says: 'You are my Beloved, on you my favour rests'.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Darton, Longman and Todd: London, pp. 33-35.



REVIEWS

Frank O'Loughlin, *The Future of the Sacrament of Penance*. Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2007. ISBN 9781921032080 (pbk) and ISBN 1 921032 08 1 (pbk).

Frank O'Loughlin is parish priest of Sandringham, Melbourne. He was Director of the Diocesan Liturgy Centre in Melbourne for fifteen years, and he writes and lectures widely on Sacramental Theology and Liturgy. He wrote this book because fellow priests at a Convention of the Australian Council of Priests urged him to.

The Sacrament of Penance has fallen on hard times. The use of the Sacrament is in serious decline and many report dissatisfaction with the experience of the Sacrament, both penitents and confessors. Even high quality liturgical celebrations of the Second Rite draw disappointing numbers of parishioners. The Sacrament is generally considered a spiritual discipline or moral practice rather than a Sacrament. Something has to be done—but what?

The author looks back in history to discover the richness of the tradition of the Sacrament. It has always been a Sacrament that has developed or changed according to circumstances and the culture of the times. He then explores the foundations of the Sacrament in Scripture, especially the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the concept of memorial. He focusses on what is important for the proper understanding of the Sacrament and for finding suitable ways to celebrate it.

What is most needed, he concludes, is a change of mentality. Only if that occurs will we have a Sacrament of Penance worthy of the name.

Barry M Coldrey, *Sacred Places, Pilgrim Paths: A Guide to Catholic Pilgrimages in France and Belgium*. Tamanaraik Press, 2006. P.O. Box 12792, aBecket Street Post Office, Melbourne, 8006. Tel: (03) 9480-2119 and email: busherw@bigpond.com.

\$24.95 (postage and packing included).

Australia has been Christianised for only two hundred years; there are few pilgrimage centres. The shrine to Blessed Mary McKillop in North Sydney is an exception. However, in the British Isles and Ireland, spring and summer pilgrimages are popular, while among Christians and spiritual seekers in Western Europe, pilgrimages are huge, especially among backpackers, the middle aged and the recently retired.

The book commences with an exploration of the idea and purposes of pilgrimage and an historical overview of Christian pilgrimage since the fourth century. The Holy Land, Rome and Santiago de Compostella are the focus at this stage.

However, modern European pilgrimage is predominantly Marian. Mary has made certain places holy by her presence. The author focuses on Mary's appearances at La Salette, Lourdes, Pontmain, Pellevoisin and L'Ile Bouchard in France; and at Beauraing and Banneux in Belgium.

There are also sections on the appearances of Jesus to St Margaret-Mary Alacoque at Paray-Le-Monial, the shrines of St Bernadette Soubirous at Nevers, St Joan of Arc at Rouen, and St Therese at Lisieux, together with small pieces on Rocamadour, Mont St Michel and Chartres. Taize is also covered.

The book is intended to assist Australian and New Zealand Catholics to make pilgrimages when they are abroad. Australia has a population of more than twenty million people and at any one time over one million of them are living and travelling overseas. The British Isles are their most popular travel destination, and from London many major centres are easy to access by car, coach or Eurostar. There is much practical information to assist pilgrims to reach their destinations hassle-free and make the most of the pilgrimage experience.



PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

APRIL—JULY

From the Second Sunday of Easter (Year C) to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed while this issue of *Compass* is current. It focuses on the readings for Sundays between mid-April and late July, from the Second Sunday of Easter (Year C) to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

1. The First reading for each Sunday, as we know, has been selected generally with the Gospel in mind. There are notable exceptions in the Sunday selections below, especially with the final Sundays of the *Easter Season*. During this time the first reading is from the Second ('New') Testament and Luke's *Book of Acts*. The aim of *Acts* is to show how the life of the Risen Jesus continues to enliven the early Christian community. This conviction reaches its liturgical highpoint in the celebration of Pentecost. The implications of these readings for our reflections on today's church and our experience of community are most relevant. At a time when church attendance is falling and ecclesial leadership under scrutiny, there is an invitation that emerges through all these readings to return to the faith conviction reflected by the early Christians in the readings: God is present and close, and desires our renewal.

Outside of Easter the June-July selections for the first reading range from *Genesis* (Body and Blood, and the actions of the enigmatic

Melchisedek; Ordinary Time 16 and 17 with its reflection on Abraham), *Deuteronomy* (Ordinary Time 15, about God's Law), *1 Kings* (Ordinary Time 13, Elijah's anointing of Elisha), and the prophetic tradition with *Isaiah* (Ordinary Time 14, God's consolation of the people). There is also an outstanding reading on the Feast of the Holy Trinity (June 3) from the Book of Proverbs celebrating God's Wisdom (*Sophia*).

2. The Second Reading in the present Easter selection continues from the *Book of Revelation*. This is a prophetic letter written to churches in west Asia Minor towards the end of the first century CE, by a Seer, John. The intention of the writer is to offer consolation and perspective to Christians struggling in their cultural situation. This is most relevant today. The selection from *Revelation* that we have in Easter offers ample opportunity to reflect on the potential of Christian life in Christ.

Outside of Easter, in Ordinary Time, the lectionary returns to its usual presentation of selections from Pauline literature with semi-continuous readings. From Ordinary Time 11 to 14, the *Letter to the Galatians* (chapters 3 to 6) is proclaimed. Galatians is one of Paul's most important letters. Written probably from Ephesus c 54 CE, it addresses concerns about how one can have communion with God (which Paul calls, technically, 'justification'). For Paul, rather than a legalistic theological rigorism, Jesus is the only way to this communion. He brings about a community of faith



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that is inclusive and non-discriminatory. This is a central feature of the letter.

In Ordinary Time 15 to 18, our attention is on *Colossians* 1-2. This Letter in the Pauline genre was probably written by one of Paul's disciples, sometime in the 60s. It seeks to affirm for Christians, tempted to perform cultic and ascetic rituals to appease the cosmic forces, the place of Jesus and his authority in the universe. This is the main idea that flows over the Sundays of Ordinary Time 15 to 17 (15-29 July). Readings from Galatians and Colossians might provide alternatives to the main liturgical themes suggested by the first reading and the Gospel.

3. The Gospel readings during May-July are split between John and Luke. John's Gospel, with its exalted portrait of Jesus, makes it an appropriate focus for reflection on the meaning of the Easter life that comes from the Risen Jesus. John's Gospel provides the themes celebrated in the final weeks of Easter (Healing, Alertness, Shepherding God, Renewal and Presence).

Luke's Gospel appears on the feast of the

Ascension, with its final story of Jesus' ascension and priestly blessing of his disciples. This concludes the gospel, forming a literary frame with its beginning, and completing the unfinished blessing of Zechariah in Lk 1. For the weeks into Ordinary Time, Luke continues as the main gospel of proclamation. Its urban connection and intent to make Jesus relevant for disciples living in a Greek-Roman world of the 85s CE, make this gospel important today. Our selection, from mid-June to the end of July, concludes Jesus' Galilean Ministry and begins the dominant section of the Gospel concerned with Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Here the writer explores key themes for a spirituality of discipleship: freedom of discipleship and its unencumbered nature (Ordinary Time 13), mission (Ordinary Time 14), its surprising outreach (Ordinary Time 15), christological focus (Ordinary Time 16), and prayer (Ordinary Time 17). All these themes continue to be important for our own communities as we seek to develop a contemporary form of discipleship that is relevant and culturally critical.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

April 15—Easter 2: *Acts 5:12-16*. The healing power of the risen Jesus continues to pervade the life of the early Jerusalem Christian community. *Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19*. John's apocalyptic image of the risen Jesus: 'the first and last...the living one' (v17). *Jn 20:19-31*. Jesus breathes his spirit of courage and forgiveness on to the assembled disciples. *Theme—Healing*. Signs of healing pervade the world: acts of kindness, the patching up of broken relationships, steps towards reconciliation. All these (and others) are signs of the presence of the risen Jesus. What signs of his presence are tangible in my community and can be celebrated this Easter day?

April 22—Easter 3: *Acts 5:27-32, 40-41*. Peter and John are arrested for preaching about the risen Jesus—an act which they must continue to do no matter the consequences. *Rev 5: 11-14*. John's apocalyptic vision of Jesus: exalted, honoured,

worshipped and sharing in God's wisdom and power. *Jn 21:1-19*. The concluding chapter of the gospel pulls together two key themes: discipleship love, and the importance of alertness to the risen Jesus who offers direction for the future Church. *Theme—Alertness*. John's final chapter prepares the gospel audience for a new moment in its history. Alertness and attention to the risen Jesus are essential. What practical ways is that happening in our midst now? Who are those in our local communities show this kind of attentiveness?

April 29—Easter 4: *Acts 13:14, 43-52*. Paul recognises that his mission is to the Gentiles. *Rev 7:9, 14-17*. John's apocalyptic vision of those who have suffered and remained faithful to Jesus. *Jn 10:27-30*. Jesus is the shepherd who knows his sheep and protects them. *Theme—Shepherding God*. God seeks to shepherd and look after us. Jesus is God's loving presence to us revealed through this com-



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munity. What are examples of how God's shepherds us in our local church community?

May 6—Easter 5 *Acts 14:21-27*. Paul and Barnabas continue their preaching mission of encouragement and forming leaders among the Gentiles. *Rev 21:1-5a*. This is a delightful vision of God's presence within the human community that establishes joy and renews creation. *Jn 13:31-35*. Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure, leaving them with his injunction about love. *Theme—Easter Renewal*. God's life continues to renew us, as it did the early Christians (*Acts*), and creation (*Revelation*). Many local examples abound of people and situations that renew and encourage. These can be celebrated as signs of Jesus' ongoing Easter presence.

May 13—Easter 6: *Acts 15:1-29*. A watershed story in Luke's story of the early church: the formal acceptance of the Gentiles into the life of the Christian community. *Rev 21: 10-14, 22-23*. The vision of last week continues here and celebrates God's city on earth, totally inclusive and accessible (with so many gates). With God's presence so tangible, there is no need of a temple. *Jn 14:23-29*. Jesus continues his preparation of the disciples for his leaving them. They are promised his abiding peace and the presence of his teaching Advocate. *Theme—Easter Presence*: God's presence is tangible in, around and among us. Easter continues; it is especially tangible in moments and places of gracious hospitality and acceptance.

May 20—Ascension: *Acts 1:1-11*. With Jesus' departure the disciples are encouraged to continue in their active ministry in the world. They cannot simply remain gazing into the heavens. *Heb 9:24f*. Jesus is with God forever, acting in our interests. *Lk 24:46-53*. In this final Gospel scene, set on Easter day, Jesus blesses his disciples and departs physically to God. The Gospel ends on a note of joy. *Theme—God's Presence in times of apparent aloneness*: Dealing with absence is one of the most painful experiences. This absence can occur when feeling alone, deserted or mourning the death of one close. Or it can occur in feeling the loss of an institution (like the church) that seems to have abandoned one. Reflection on all these experiences can open the door for renewal in God's desire to be with us.

May 27—Pentecost: *Acts 2:1-11*. A story remi-

niscient of Sinai: the covenantal renewal of God's people that brings unity and energy. *1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13*. The Holy Spirit empowers, gifts and renews the Christian community with unity. *Jn 20:19-23*. Jesus breathes his spirit on to the frightened community of disciples and brings peace and forgiveness. *Theme—Unity of God's community*. The readings celebrate the unity of God's people that emerges through the action of the Spirit. There are many signs of that unity today, especially amongst Christian communities. These could be named and celebrated. Ecumenism is a reality already.

June 3—Holy Trinity: *Prov 8:22-31*. This is a hymn to God's *Sophia* (wisdom), eternal, creative and active. *Rom 5:1-5*. Communion with God through Jesus brings peace and an authentic existence. *Jn 16:12-15*. Jesus' Spirit will guide his disciples into God's truth. *Theme—God's inner life of friendship*. God's life permeates the universe, community, our personal lives. We can easily see signs of this life, of God's *Sophia* encouraging us, despite difficulties and apparent contradictions. One obvious sign of God's Triune life is friendship.

June 10—Body and Blood of Christ: *Gen 14:18-20*. A king's hospitality with bread and wine brings about blessing for Abram. *1 Cor 11:23-26*. Paul's eucharistic memory of Jesus' action with bread and wine. *Lk 9:11b-17*. Jesus offers sustenance and hospitality in a desert. *Theme—Hospitality*. The Eucharist is the setting for hospitality, inclusivity and nurture. Can we name ways our local community provides such eucharistic hospitality? Who does it? Where?

June 17—Ordinary Time 11: *2 Sam 12:7-10, 13*. King David recognises his sinfulness when confronted by the prophet Nathan. *Gal 2:16, 19-21*. Here is Paul's radical statement of his faith in Jesus as the centre of his life. *Lk 7:36-8:3*. A powerful story of authentic discipleship, from a woman who focuses her total loving attention on Jesus. *Theme—Focussed on God*: Nathan helps David see his need to come back to God (1st Reading) and Jesus shows what true fidelity really consists of as demonstrated by the women (Gospel). What are some of the ways that enable us in our challenged and diverse world to focus on God? Who models this kind of practice?

June 24—Nativity of John the Baptist: *Is 49:1-*



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6. The servant of God, who feels exhausted, recognises that he is called by God and has a mission to others. *Acts 13:22-26*. Here in a sermon from Paul (written by Luke) is a summary about Jesus and the ministry of John the Baptist. *Lk 1:57-66,80*. The birth of John the Baptist raises questions about his future ministry: 'What will this child turn out to be?' *Theme—The prophetic call*. Baptism is the sacrament of the prophetic ministry in which all of us are invited to be involved. Like John the Baptist, we herald and identify God's presence through Jesus in our world and lives.

July 1—Ordinary Time 13: *1 King 19:16,19-21*. Elijah anoints Elisha as his prophetic successor. *Gal 5:1,13-18*. Paul encourages freedom formed through the Spirit and revealed through love. *Lk 9:51-62*. Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem begins as he calls for discipleship without compromise. *Theme—Freedom*. The Letter to the Galatians offers a powerful moment to reflect on the kind of true religious freedom that comes from God's Spirit forming us to be truly free. How does the local community encourage this kind of freedom?

July 8—Ordinary Time 14: *Is 66:10-14*. God's desire to comfort the disconsolate is tangibly and powerfully expressed in this beautiful hymn. *Gal 6:14-18*. Paul's desire of his total union with Jesus, even in suffering. *Lk 10:1-12,17-20*. Jesus sends his disciples on a difficult and, at times, unappreciated mission. *Theme—Union with Jesus*. Paul exemplifies the meaning of Christian living—union with Jesus that permeates his whole life to the point that it becomes a reflection of Jesus' own life. There are many examples of those who live this kind of life today. These might be celebrated.

July 15—Ordinary Time 15: *Dt 30:10-14*. Moses reminds the people that God's Word ('Law'), is accessible, personal and interior. *Col 1:15-20*.

A powerful hymn to the *Sophia*-Jesus, celebrating his cosmic authority to reconcile all. *Lk 10:25-37*. A parable that subverts the traditional and expected patterns of preferential behaviour *Theme—Our World: From Colossians*, Jesus' presence imbues the whole universe. Therefore the world is good. This challenges the conventional commercial and industrial treatment of our world. It also invites into a spirit of reconciliation.

July 22—Ordinary Time 16: *Gen 18:1-10*. Abraham offers hospitality to unexpected and unrecognised angelic visitors, and is blessed. *Col 1:24-28*. The writer encourages a disposition to make God's Word fully known, to teach through Jesus in all wisdom and bring others to genuine maturity. *Lk 10:38-42*. Luke offers us a snapshot of ministerial tension, to get all the work done or focus on Jesus. The encouragement is to focus on Jesus in the midst of life's concerns. *Theme—Hospitality*. A life of busyness and time of upheaval can leave us diving for self-survival. The readings (1st and Gospel) encourage a disposition of hospitality practically open to others and essentially focussed on God.

July 29—Ordinary Time 17: *Gen 18:20-32*. God is revealed as compassionate, forgiving and conversational. *Col 2:6-14*. The writer celebrates the communion that the baptised Christian shares with Jesus. *Lk 11:1-13*. This is Luke's insight into Jesus' teaching on prayer. *Theme—Communion with God*. Two readings (1st and Gospel) invite reflection on the centrality of prayer in our lives, as conversation with a God who is open. In a NT highpoint, *Colossians* presents Jesus as God's tangible expression in bodily form. Both themes are important and not mutually exclusive. They invite us into communion with God through Jesus.

Congratulations to Fr Michael Trainor, awarded an AM in the 2007 Australia Day honours list for service to education, chiefly in theology and archeology, to international and inter-faith relations, and to ecumenism.