THERE ARE construction works going on in our church as I write. The other day, as Jeremy, the project manager, was taking delivery of some building materials, a curious neighbour asked him what was going on. On being informed about the nature of the work, the neighbour said: ‘When I see a church I feel sad.’ When asked ‘Why?’ he replied, ‘Because the churches are dying.’

Jeremy related the comment to me with considerable astonishment. He certainly did not share the perception that the churches are dying, and cited the resurgence of interest in spirituality as evidence that the churches are not dying but finding new vigour.

Statistics show that Jeremy has reason to be astonished. Globally the number of Christians, including the number of Catholics, is increasing (cf. the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops on *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church*).

On the other hand, the neighbour’s perception, as we are all too aware, is not unfounded. In the western world many local communities are struggling for survival. In our parish we are a bold few, all the bolder because we are ‘in the heartland of Sydney atheism’ (cf Compass 2008/4, p.1). We are swimming against the tide, locally speaking. We have no certainty that our small community will survive as it now is into the distant future. In a few years the diminishing number and the ageing of the clergy (myself included, perish the thought!) will force changes and hard decisions.

On Pentecost Sunday this year our parish will be host to a gathering of Pastoral Councils and other interested parishioners from our MSC parishes in Sydney. The theme for the gathering will be ‘Your parish in five years time’. We will all be invited to face the future and its challenges and explore possible ways we might guarantee our survival as parish communities.

When we hear the comment that the churches are dying, however, we think first of the Church institution and reject the idea. Whether the numbers be great or small in particular places, and whether local communities flourish or close down, it will never be that the Church as the People of God will die. The Church is here till the end of time. We base our conviction first of all on what Jesus did. For instance, he said to Peter:

You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the underworld will never hold out against it. (Mth. 16:18).

No forces of destruction will destroy the Church, neither hostile forces from without, nor the forces from within, the sins and weaknesses of its members.

This text from Matthew’s Gospel is an important one for Roman Catholics. Other denominations do not read in it all that we Catholics do. Questions then arise: upon what grounds do Catholics find more significance in it than other Christians? are we justified in doing so? To answer these questions we need to examine the text and also go beyond the text.

First we might note that scholars of all denominations are in general agreement on the likelihood that the text reflects Jesus’ own words spoken in the Aramaic language. The ‘name’ Jesus gave to Peter is an indication. Matthew’s Greek version reads: ‘You are Petros [a first name] and on this petra...’ The original Aramaic version would have worked much better: ‘You are kepha and on this kepha...’ The exact repetition of kepha makes more sense as a statement of Jesus. Also petra is a rock of any kind, but kepha is the rock that one digs down to find and
on which the builder lays his foundations—as the wise man who built his house on rock. Such details seem to help us get closer to the very words originally spoken by Jesus, viz. ‘You are kepha and on this kepha I will build my Church’.

From this text and many other indications in the New Testament, scholars of all denominations agree that Peter was appointed by Jesus to be the leader and guarantee of the stability of the new community. Where Catholic theologians differ from those of other denominations is in their claim that Peter’s ministry of ensuring stability was passed on to his successors, and that the Petrine ministry is essential to the nature of the Church that Jesus established. This claim cannot be proven from the biblical evidence, nor is there a strict historical proof. Instead, Catholic theologians point to what happened in the generations after the death of the first apostles and onwards to our own time.

By the end of the second century every church, except Alexandria, had a single bishop, recognized as a successor of the apostles in their role of pastoral oversight. Furthermore, communion with the successors of Peter was seen as an essential guarantee for bishops and local churches of their belonging to the Church that Christ established. This claim cannot be proven from the biblical evidence, nor is there a strict historical proof. Instead, Catholic theologians point to what happened in the generations after the death of the first apostles and onwards to our own time.

The Church Christ established remains an all-too-human reality, but it is a divine reality as well, ‘after the nature of a sacrament’ (Lumen Gentium 1) Indeed, the Church is the fundamental sacrament for Karl Rahner.

Because God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are intimately involved in the being and life of the Church, and because of the divine purpose in establishing the Church to be an instrument to continue Christ’s work of redemption, we believe in a Church that will endure to the end of time. This is our faith. This is the Church we believe in. The belief that this Church is hierarchically structured as Catholics maintain is the fruit of discernment of the action of the Spirit in the life of the Church from the earliest times.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor
CONVERSING WITH OTHERS

Interreligious Dialogue in Catholic Health and Aged Care

GERARD HALL SM

We might think that ‘conversing with others’ is a rather limp expression of what Catholic mission or ministry is about. However, I would like to suggest that the notion of conversation or dialogue is actually central to the Catholic understanding of the Church’s life, identity, mission and pastoral ministry. This is articulated in a coherent and sustained fashion in major ecclesial documents since the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). In particular, as I will show, the call to interreligious dialogue is given particular emphasis as an integral expression of Christian mission. While the applications need to be made by all Catholic institutions—indeed, all Christians—our task here is to raise questions and issues on the specific role of interreligious conversation in the context of identity, mission and pastoral praxis of Catholic Health and Aged Care.

Mission and Dialogue

There was a time when the notion of the Church’s mission seemed to preclude real dialogue with people and cultures. After all, it seems reasonable to argue that the Church’s task is to proclaim Christ to the world. Indeed, the argument went, the salvation of all people depends on their acceptance of what the Church has to proclaim, namely the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If dialogue played a role, it was more or less a preliminary activity which may more effectively enable people to hear what the Church teaches.

What, then, is wrong with this approach? Let me begin by saying that the Church in no way disowns its mission of proclaiming Christ to the world. Proclamation of the Gospel is, was and always will be central to the Church’s evangelizing mission. However, proclamation and catechesis—announcing the truth of Jesus Christ and explaining the Church’s teaching—have never been understood as the only aspects of Christian mission. Presence and witness, working for social justice and human liberation, the place of worship and contemplation, to name a few, are also essential aspects of mission. So too, as we will see, is interreligious dialogue.¹

Vatican II

How, then, does dialogue fit within the view of Christian mission that emerged from the Church’s call to renewal at the Second Vatican Council? In the words of Dario Vitali, who teaches church history at Rome’s Gregorian University, ‘the Council represented a Copernican revolution for the church, which challenged itself by asking how it could reopen a dialogue with the modern world’.² Commenting on the Council, John O’Malley states: ‘There is scarcely a page in the council documents on which dialogue or its equivalent does not occur’.³ Moreover, it is worth noting that, on being elected Pope during the Council, Paul VI’s very first encyclical focused on dialogue—within the church, with other Christians, other religions and the entire world—as the heart of the church’s program of renewal.⁴ The Council’s most developed document which both promotes and engages in, at times, profound dialogue with contemporary society...
is its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.\(^5\)

Specifically in regard to interreligious dialogue, the Council’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions challenged Christians ‘to enter dialogue and collaboration with members of other religions’ in order to overcome divisions, foster friendly relations, achieve mutual understanding, and to work together with people of all faiths for peace, freedom, social justice and moral values.\(^6\) In its Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, an even more profound theological rationale for dialogue is proposed when Christian missionaries are told they should enter dialogue with those among whom they live in order to ‘learn of the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations’.\(^7\)

**John Paul II’s Pontificate**

It is probably fair to say that nobody has had a more positive impact on the importance of interreligious dialogue at the heart of the Church’s life and mission than John Paul II. In his very first encyclical, he refers to the one ‘Spirit of truth’ uniting all religions.\(^8\) In his missionary encyclical, he explicitly recognizes that interreligious dialogue is an integral element of the Church’s evangelizing mission.\(^9\) Moreover, he led by example in such symbolic initiatives as: his visit to the synagogue of Rome (1986); praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem (2000); inviting religious leaders to join him in prayer for World Peace in Assisi (1986 & 2002); and his public apologies for the church’s negative impact on women, Jews and Indigenous peoples.

The most important document which articulates the Church’s official position regarding the place of interreligious dialogue as an expression of pastoral mission is called ‘Dialogue and Proclamation’.\(^10\) This is a particularly rich exposition which confronts head on the varieties, skills, obstacles and challenges involved in interreligious dialogue for Christians. It is to be read in conjunction with John Paul II’s missionary encyclical.\(^11\) Moreover, I note it is particularly directed to Catholics—but not only them—who have ‘a leadership role in the community or are engaged in formation work’.\(^12\) The document acknowledges there are diverse understandings of dialogue, but is here referring to those ‘positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment’.\(^13\) The notion of mutuality is important. Such dialogue goes beyond the desire to develop a respectful and friendly spirit with people of other religious faiths. It also wants to learn from them the ways in which the mystery of God is understood and experienced by them.\(^14\)

There are, of course, different forms of dialogue which the document calls: the dialogue of life; dialogue of action; dialogue of theological exchange; and dialogue of religious experience.\(^15\) While much could be said about each of these, each form of dialogue should in some way enable ‘Christians and others ... to deepen their religious commitment (and) to respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call and gracious self-gift’.\(^16\) Interreligious dialogue should, then, involve the ongoing experience of conversion in which participants are moved ‘to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes allow the understanding of their faith to be purified’.\(^17\) Specifically in regard to Christians, the document enunciates a number of fruits of dialogue before declaring
that ‘far from weakening their own faith, true dialogue will deepen it’.18

Growing in Mission Consciousness

At this point it may be tempting to leave the theological theory behind and focus entirely on the Catholic hostel, hospice or hospital. But before that I need to say, like Jesus at the Wedding Feast of Cana, I have left the best bit till last. If we want to focus on how we do ministry and dialogue together, we have a rather wonderful example. Of course, I am speaking of Jesus himself. Our mission, the Church’s mission, and the mission of any Catholic institution is primarily an extension of Jesus’ own mission which is about the reign of God in the world. When Jesus begins his mission, he does not start with a theory—and theologians may be horrified to discover he does not appeal to theological principles. He simply goes to the scroll and reads the words of the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and anointed me

to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives,
to give sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim the time of the Lord’s favour.
(Luke 4: 18f.)

If I may say so, Jesus’ mission is dialogical in two senses: he is in dialogue with God through the experience of God’s own Spirit in his life (and it is for this that Jesus often goes off by himself in the desert to pray); and he is in dialogue with the people of Israel, especially those on the margins of society. This too is an experiential dialogue. He establishes living contact with the poor, the blind and the lame; he reaches out to the despised tax collectors, drop-outs, prostitutes and sinners; he establishes life-giving relationships with his disciples and friends including Magdalene, Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Even this was counter-cultural in terms of the day by bringing women into his circle of intimate friends.

Yet, as with all of us, Jesus grows in the understanding of his mission. Initially, he does not think his mission is meant to go beyond Israel and even forbids his disciples to go the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5f.). Yet he is approached by a non-Jewish ‘Syro-Phoenician’ woman, a Canaanite, probably a half-caste (Matt. 15: 21-28). She asks for Jesus’ blessing for her sick daughter, but initially neither he nor his disciples seem very interested. Jesus ignores her. Then, at the disciples’ behest, he rebuffs her: ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’. But she persists: ‘Lord help me’. Jesus’ reply, however we explain it, seems harsh, even rude and insulting. He says: ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs’. To this she replies: ‘Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table’. It is not so much that Jesus is outsmarted; rather, he grows in awareness that his mission for God’s reign in the world includes those who are outside the fold. His dialogue with this non-Jewish woman disrupts his worldview, enlarges his consciousness and changes his attitudes and behaviour.

We see this in Jesus’ subsequent approach to ‘foreigners’ with whom he enters into dialogue in a fully respectful manner. For example, he engages in a long conversation with the Samaritan woman and speaks to her of a time when true worship will not be restricted to any particular people or place. When the disciples return, John tells us that ‘they were astonished’ to find him speaking with this woman—though no one asked ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ (John 4: 22-27). Jesus often performs healing miracles for foreigners (Mark 7: 24-30; Matt. 15: 21-28). He also recognizes in the Roman centurion a greater faith than in all of Israel (Matt. 8: 10). Moreover, Jesus seems far less concerned about people’s beliefs than their attitudes and actions. At the heart of his prophetic ministry are the words of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3-12) where he speaks of universal human values of righteousness, peace, justice and mercy.

Our own Church has come to such a mo-
ment in which our understanding of mission is enriched by the increasing contact Christians have with people of other traditions. What is required is a positive and open attitude evident, for example, in Paul’s speech to the Athenians where he praises their religious spirit (Acts 17: 22-34) or in the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, such as Justin, Irenaeus and Clement, who recognize God’s universal presence throughout history both before and since the coming of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. The danger of Christian mission, evident in too many historical incidents, is a type of religious triumphalism that seeks to convert the other without recognizing our own ongoing call to conversion. This is where recent emphasis on interreligious dialogue as an essential component of mission is so valuable. What we witness to in dialogue is our own belief that Jesus is the Word of God and that the Spirit of God is truly present in our midst; but what we learn in dialogue is that the Word and Spirit of God are also manifest in other peoples, traditions and religions in ways that confront our narrowness of vision and challenge us to see the mystery of God’s ways in the stranger, foreigner and religious other.

The Pastoral Challenge—Interreligious Dialogue in Catholic Health and Aged Care

If we accept that interreligious dialogue is an essential component of Christian mission, this needs to be incorporated into mission statements, policies, planning and strategies in all Catholic institutions including Health and Aged Care. It should be especially evident in areas of pastoral ministry. This does not mean a watering down of Catholic identity; to the contrary, it requires a depth-commitment to Christ and the Gospel as its starting point. Interreligious dialogue is not served, for example, by replacing explicit references to the mission of Jesus with more generalized statements of care and compassion for the sick and the aged.

I appreciate the issue of religious symbols such as Crucifixes or artistic representations of the Divine can be particularly problematic for those of some religious traditions—one thinks especially of Islam. This seems to me an example of where sensitive dialogue with persons of other faith-traditions comes into play. On the one hand, there needs to be a sense of proportion: such religious symbolism, though important to Catholics, is not an absolute. So there is room for dialogue, negotiation and, in certain situations, a particular image or statue could be temporarily covered or removed as an expression of respect for that person’s beliefs. On the other hand, the presence of such images may be fertile ground for religious dialogue. In other words, interreligious dialogue is at the heart of the discernment process.

A Catholic hospital or hospice will naturally provide, as far as possible, an extensive range of religious services including the Eucharist and other sacraments. However, this does not mean that ecumenical and interfaith services—nor the provision of specific non-Catholic religious rituals—are neglected. Again, this requires sensitive dialogue with chaplains, ministers and members of the hospital or hospice staff and patients. Religious services will only have meaning on the basis of the quality of pastoral care. Evidently, this means that the Catholic institution will be a place of hospitality in which every attempt is made to respond to the pastoral, spiritual and religious needs of all staff, patients and their families.

The practice in many Catholic institutions of establishing Pastoral Teams inclusive of chaplains from various faith traditions—at least appointing sessional chaplains from those traditions—seems an excellent way of establishing interreligious dialogue as central to its pastoral planning and ministry. The need for someone skilled in interfaith activities to lead such a team and work with chaplains from a range of traditions is more important today than ever before. I would add that, in the con-
text of Catholic health and aged care, such a person should be a Catholic who is both committed to and knowledgeable about his/her Catholic faith-tradition and the mission focus of the particular institution. Pastoral Care Assistants, including volunteers, have an invaluable contribution to make and should include, as far as feasible, people with theological and/or liturgical skills as well as the ability to work sensitively with chaplains and people of all faiths in pastoral ministry. The desirability of providing chaplains and others with specific formation in interreligious dialogue is evident.

In today’s secular culture, our understanding of interreligious dialogue needs to extend to those who espouse no specific religious tradition. They may describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ rather than ‘religious’. In this situation, it may be better to speak of spiritual or cultural dialogue relating to people’s attitudes towards life, illness and death. This may lead to the exploration of religious beliefs. In any case, what John Paul II once called the ‘method of dialogue’ is the way that pastoral ministers need to engage with their hearers. In other words, interreligious dialogue in this broad sense remains at the heart of pastoral praxis even with those who come from a non-religious, perhaps anti-religious, stance. Conversing with others and sharing their concerns is always Jesus’ starting point evident, for example, in his conversations with the Samaritan woman (John 4: 24) and the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35).

**Conclusion**

In a recent issue of *Health Matters*, Therese Vassarotti identifies the essence of Catholic health ministry in terms of ‘maximising the dignity of people’ as distinct from ‘the commodification of their needs’. She goes on to quote the words of John Paul II who calls the new millennium a ‘time for a new ‘creativity’ in charity, not only ensuring that help is effective but also by ‘getting close’ to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is not seen as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters’. This challenge, important as it is for all Christian ministry, is crucial when that ministry involves people of other faith traditions.

Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas speaks of encountering the face of the other as the most profound of all human experiences. As a survivor of the Jewish holocaust, he asks: ‘What right have I to be, to live, in the face of the other person’s suffering and death?’ The face of the other not only makes ethical and human demands on me but is also a source of revelation where ‘I hear the Word of God’. This demands we fully respect the ‘otherness’ of the faces we meet in pastoral ministry:

Every face we encounter is a face of otherness. Every face says, ‘I am other to you’. Every face says, ‘I am not you’. Every face says, ‘Don’t kill me; don’t absorb me into your world; don’t obliterate me by making me the same as you. I am other. I am different. I am not you’.

Ministry to the sick and elderly has always been a cherished expression of Christian love. Here one encounters the face of the other in a situation of vulnerability. If we are to ‘maximise the dignity of people’ in such a situation, we need to fully respect their diverse cultural, spiritual and religious identities by making ourselves vulnerable through dialogue. In particular, by focusing on the importance of interreligious dialogue we can be assured our ministry will be experienced, not in patronising terms, but as a genuine, mutual sharing of brothers and sisters. In theological terms, this is nothing less than a continuation of the mission of Jesus that has universal outreach in witnessing to God’s continuing covenant with humanity.

**NOTES**

1 Discussion of the connection between mission and dialogue, with particular reference to Australian Catholic Agencies, is provided in the edited work by Neil Ormerod, *Identity and Mission in*
Catholic Agencies (Strathfield, St. Paul’s, 2008).


11 DP, 4.

12 DP, 7.


14 ‘While keeping their identity intact, Christians must be prepared to learn and receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions’. DP, 49.

15 DP, 42.

16 DP, 40.

17 DP, 49.

18 DP, 50.


22 Terry Veling, Practical Theology: ‘On Earth as it is in Heaven’ (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2005), 123. For a helpful overview of Levinas’ philosophy, see Veling, Chapter 7, 115-135.


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WHEN MUSLIMS and Catholics get
together, what do they want to talk
about? What questions do they want
to ask one another? Based on a case study in
Auburn, NSW, this paper attempts firstly to
provide some answers to these questions. The
second section will relate the responses to con-
temporary theory on inter-religious dialogue be-
tween Christians and Muslims, and suggest
some directions for the future of Muslim-Catho-
lic dialogue.

Several forms of interreligious dialogue
have been identified by theorists and experts in
the field. This study takes a different, and com-
plementary, approach by asking members of the
Muslim and Christian communities in western
Sydney what questions they would like to ask
one another. There is very clear support for the
dialogue of understanding: respondents in the
study sought an understanding of the other’s
beliefs ahead of other dimensions of
interreligious dialogue. It is suggested that, in
preparing communities for dialogue, attention
must be paid not only to strengthening partici-
pants’ understanding of their own beliefs, but
in assisting them to understand the framework
of faith of their dialogue partners. It will be
shown that religious communities can extend
their horizons beyond stereotypical views, and
evince interest in a wide range of beliefs and
practices of their dialogue partners.

* * * *

The Questions

The two faith communities chosen were the
Muslim community, worshipping at Gallipoli
Mosque, Auburn, a suburb of Western Sydney,
and the Roman Catholic Parish of Saint John’s,
Auburn. The same suburb, Auburn, was cho-
sen in order to minimize variations in responses
attributable to socio-economic status. Fifty re-
spondents from each community opted in, on
the same weekend; Friday prayers for Muslims,
and Sunday Mass for Catholics.

Muslims were asked to respond to the ques-
tions: what is the question you would most like
to ask a Catholic? Similarly, Catholics were
asked: what is the question you would most like
to ask a Muslim? The question form was cho-
sen because it is open-ended, and thereby en-
couraged responses according to categories
determined by the participants rather than sug-
gested, or imposed, by the researcher.

The Place: Auburn

Auburn is seventeen kilometers from the cen-
tre of Sydney and is characterized by great eth-
nic diversity. Over 64% of the population was
born outside Australia. Its cultural diversity is
reflected in the languages spoken in the area.
Only twenty two per cent speak English only at
home while the other main languages spoken
are Arabic, Cantonese, Turkish, Mandarin, and
Korean. A recent refugee population from Iraq,
Afghanistan and Sudan has added to the multicultural map of Auburn. The main religions of the Auburn area are Christianity (36%) and Islam (25%). Catholics comprise 20% of the population (Auburn Council 2008).

Auburn Mosque was officially opened 28 November 1999, although a building functioning as a mosque had existed on the site since 1979. The congregation attending Gallipoli Mosque is fifty percent Turkish. St John’s Catholic parish was established in 1915 to cater for a working class population, mainly of Irish descent. Today Lebanese and Anglo/Saxon/Celts constitute the majority of the population with worshippers present from the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka, and a small number from African countries.

The Responses

Responses to the question fell into two broad categories: content of faith and practice of faith.

With regard to the content of faith, most Muslims wanted to ask about the Trinity and how it is understood by Catholics. The difficulty, for Muslims, in reconciling monotheism with belief in the Trinity was made explicit by some respondents but underpinned all questions on the topic.

Jesus was the second most popular topic nominated by Muslims. Questions related to his divinity and sonship and were grounded in the issue of belief in one God: how can the God, who is One, have a son who is divine? Questions linked the role of Jesus as Saviour with the crucifixion and the need for Jesus to die on the Cross. Some questioned if Jesus actually died on the cross.

The questions Catholics wanted to ask Muslims centred on God’s relationship with Muslims and their way of relating to God. Catholic respondents were interested to know how God shows His love for His people and how God forgives sins in Islam. Additionally, they wanted to know if markers and rituals existed in Islam which are similar to the markers for significant life events in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church, for example, baptism, confirmation, marriage, sacrement of the sick, and rituals for burial.

Other questions from Catholics encompassed the role of the Prophet Muhammad in Islam, and Islamic belief in the afterlife. It was noted that Islam holds Mary, the mother of Jesus, in high esteem and clarification was sought on the esteem, if any, shown in Islam to the Prophet Muhammad’s mother.

In framing their questions in the category of content of belief, Muslims sought knowledge of the Trinity and Jesus within the Islamic framework of a strong monotheism. The formulation of some questions suggested that belief in the Trinity and in Jesus as the Son of God was incompatible with the Islamic understanding of a monotheistic religion; an understanding which excludes any sense of partnership in the one God.

It can be seen that, in framing their questions, Catholics sought knowledge of Islam in the Catholic framework of content of belief. They were interested in the correspondence with Islam of the most basic points of revelation of the Christian God: the One who loves and forgives. The sacramental structure of Catholic life and practice clearly informed questions about relationship between God and the followers of a religion.

Practice of Faith

Muslims wanted to know about the prayer life of Catholics. They asked about the obligation to pray, the frequency, pattern and content of
prayers outside Sunday Mass, and prayer to Mary and the saints. Some misunderstandings of Catholic belief appeared, for example, reflecting the theology of some Reformed Christian Churches, one respondent asked why Catholics relied on belief alone and not on good works as well. A small number asked why celibacy was necessary for priests.

Catholic responses were spread over a number of areas: a small cluster questioned why Muslims and Catholics do not work together on projects inspired by what is common in their faiths, for example, social justice and pro-life issues. Other questions canvassed the reasons Muslims are so exact about the time of prayer, and why Muslims prefer to bury their dead on the day of death. A more general question asked what Muslims find fulfilling in the practice of their religion. Sanctions drew one question: can one be expelled from the mosque for moral laxity?

In the context of practice of faith, what was surprising was what was not asked by Catholics. There were very few questions about women in Islam, only five out of fifty addressed the topic and there were no questions about the wearing of the veil or hijab. This finding may be explained by the high visibility of veiled Muslim women in Auburn leading to an understanding of the practice as part of the multi-faith and multi-cultural landscape, and as something which no longer warrants comment or question. It may be that a different result would have been obtained had the Catholic group come from another part of Sydney where the Muslim women wearing the hijab are few or non-existent.

However, the interest of the Catholic community in aspects of Islamic practice other than the wearing of the veil is an encouraging sign, and gives hope that, in spite of the media’s preoccupation with the position of women in Islam and the veiling of women, non-Muslims exhibit interest in Islam over a much broader range. It is evidence of the community’s capacity to develop beyond, or refuse, the categories the media seeks to impose.

**Tolerance, Conflict and Organisational Matters**

Although Catholics did not ask specifically about jihad, their questions did cover the domain of conflict and tolerance. A strong strand was lack of reciprocity between rights Muslims enjoy in Western democracies and rights non-Muslims are not afforded in some Muslim countries. Although one question was forcefully formulated—taking for granted that Muslims want to expunge all other religions—the majority, and moderately expressed, sentiment was that, in Australia, Muslims enjoy freedom of religious expression which is not enjoyed by non-Muslims in countries with a predominantly Muslim population. No differentiation was made between Muslim countries which, as a matter of government policy, do permit non-Muslim religions to practise, and those which, as a matter of government policy, do not do so. Although the generalizations in the formulation of the questions reveal a lack of understanding of the cultural diversity within Islam, they also evidence the conviction that the refusal of freedom of religious expression cannot be explained away by an appeal to cultural diversity.

The conflict in Iraq and the practice of Muslims deliberately targeting and killing other Muslims, an activity which is reported frequently in the print and electronic media drew some questions. Respondents focused on the incongruence between the teaching of the Qur’an on the peaceful nature of Islam and the violent activities of Muslims against other Muslims in Iraq, expressed in some responses as a Sunni versus Shi’a conflict. Internal Muslim conflict is an issue on which the Australian media does not comment frequently, although some Muslim organizations in Australia, from time to time, issue condemnations of all forms of terrorism.

Muslims asked no questions relating to conflict within Christianity or to tolerance of Islam
COMPASS

among Christians.

**Organisation**

Leadership and authority attracted mild interest from both groups. Questions from Muslims centred on the Pope: how a supreme leader is to be understood; how the Pope is a representative of God; what impact he has on the daily lives of Catholics.

Catholics sought understanding of Muslim authority and leadership structures in the light of their own leadership structures. They asked why there was no single leader for Muslims. They also sought clarification of some titles used for Muslim leaders, for example, imam, sheikh, mufti.

**Placing the Findings in Contemporary Catholic Thinking**

Typologies of interreligious dialogue introduce some useful distinctions between the forms of dialogue, but also raise other problems, one of which is the distinction between specialist study of religious truths and the exchange and clarification of religious truths within non-specialist gatherings. Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald has discussed the fourfold typology of dialogue earlier proposed in *Dialogue and Proclamation*: the dialogue of life; the dialogue of action; the dialogue of theological exchange, the dialogue of religious experience. The first refers to a simple neighbourly spirit, sharing joys, and sorrows, and some examples of organized forms of the dialogue of life are proposed by Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald: 2006; 27—34. Pontifical Council: 1991). The dialogue of action refers to collaboration on social projects, inspired by a sense of justice for all people.

The dialogue of theological exchange, or dialogue of discourse, as Fitzgerald prefers, envisages a dialogue of specialists, and the descriptions given refer to formal national and international dialogues, or other high level formal settings. Nonetheless, it is not immediately clear if the defining element of this form is the specialist participants, or that which is the subject of discussion. On the other hand, the dialogue of religious experience envisages sharing of ‘prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute’. Fitzgerald suggests that the topics for discussion are selected from the realm of spirituality (Fitzgerald: 2006, 33).

Statements from significant Catholic figures appear to narrow the field of the dialogue of religious experience. The President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Cardinal Tauran, in welcoming the Open Letter, ‘A Common Word Between You and Us’, described the invitation to dialogue as ‘an eloquent example of the dialogue of spirituality’. In response to a question about the possibility of theological discussions with Muslims, the Cardinal stated that it was difficult to discuss the content of faith because of the Islamic interpretation of the Qur’an (Tauran 2007; AlBayrak 2006).

Leaving aside the objections which may be raised against his statement on the Qur’an, it is clear that Tauran distinguishes the dialogue of spirituality from the dialogue of theological exchange, and ascribes discussion on the content of faith to theological dialogue. Another high-ranking Vatican official, Cardinal Amato, stated that, while dialogue based on building friendships and overcoming prejudice is appropriate for all Christians, the dialogue of truth, in which religious teachings are discussed, must be conducted by experts (*L’Osservatore Romano* 9.11.2007).

The difficulty here may be a definitional one, but it is difficult to envisage non-specialist sharing of faith which would be confined to the building of friendships and the sharing of spirituality and exclude elements of the content of belief. Indeed, this case study has clearly shown that Muslims and Catholics want to know about the others’ beliefs.

An Australian scholar, Des Cahill, while conceding that interfaith dialogue is partly about truth and, in the process, the demystification of the other, contends that ‘at a pragmatic level, the interfaith agenda essentially is concerned
with social cohesion in a culturally religious and diverse society’ (Cahill 2007). This finding can stand alongside the notion that, while social cohesion may not be an explicit aim of those who participate in interfaith dialogue, it may be a byproduct of the dialogues.

Implications for Dialogue

The findings of this small study call our attention to four areas which, in the immediate future, at least, will underpin Catholic-Muslim dialogue in Australia: understanding; reciprocity; diversity; collaboration.

A clear finding of the study is that knowledge of the religious beliefs of the other is important for both Muslims and Catholics. The level at which this knowledge is exchanged is not confined to the dialogue of theology in which Catholic theologians and Muslim scholars might engage in discussion. The study demonstrates that the dialogue of understanding, the exchange of information on fundamental beliefs, is desired by the respective religious communities; it encourages greater awareness of the immediate categories of information reception of the other group, and suggests that, in preparing for dialogue, both groups need to be assisted to understand the frameworks of faith of their dialogue partners. A previous study identified a critical set of polarities facing the organizers of dialogues concerning the nature of the dialogue to be developed: community versus specialist; dialogue of difference or commonality (Keely 2006).

Reciprocity of rights continues to present difficulties because lack of reciprocity is part of the experience, or memory, of some Christians in Australia, whose country of origin is a country with a majority Muslim population. These Christians, or ancestral family members, migrated to Australia to escape such situations. While Australian Muslims do not have to defend the policies of other countries, sensitivity to the difficulties posed by these practices is helpful.

For some Catholic respondents, the notion of reciprocity was associated with the view that Muslims in Australia are intent on propagating Islam to the extent of making all people Muslims. It is interesting to note that some Muslims articulated the sense they have that non-Muslims were suspicious of them for the same reason. The tension arising from this dynamic of mutual suspicion, perceived or real, can only be worked out in the context of respect for religious freedom, continued dialogue and friendship.

Collaborative action was put forward by some respondents because of the common ground between the teachings of the Catholic Church and the teaching of Islam on respect for life. However, what appears as lack of respect for human life on the part of some Muslims outside Australia is puzzling for Catholics in Australia who wish to embark on an agenda of collaborative action with Australian Muslims. Such collaboration would demonstrate respect for religious diversity and contribute to social cohesion.

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OF COURSE, SATAN was not always the devil.

In recent decades, the devil has become a staple of popular films and taken over older images in many people’s imaginations. When we see a Satan or a Devil movie, we can ask ourselves just what aspect of the devil tradition the film-makers are tapping into. Some will be drawing on the devil as the serpent tempting Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden. Others will be remembering the cosmic battle between the archangel Michael and the Dragon in the books of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Again others will be stimulated by the biblical images of hell (fire and torment and gnawing worms). There are also the many writers and directors who are not so familiar with the texts that they draw on their own memories and imaginings, however accurate or inaccurate they may be.

But, this, in fact, is what has happened in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and in the quite separate Jewish traditions and Christian traditions. The oral folklore, the literature, including the commentaries on the biblical texts and the theological writings, the sculptures and paintings, the transformation by disciples of witchcraft and Satanism, the secular interpretations (both comic and serious) mean that there are quite different pictures of the Devil; that there is a developing iconography throughout the centuries. And, for the last hundred years or more there have been the cinema images, reinforcing old ideas and pictures, playing with the old ideas and producing new images - and some plain old money-making ventures.

So, when we are enjoying a horror movie with a satanic theme, we need to do a bit of homework to appreciate what is going on and what is in the mind of the makers. Are they in touch with the genuine tradition (for instance, in the movie versions of the Gospels)? Are they mixing bible texts with Renaissance art styles (for instance, Fantasia and the Berlioz’s Night on Bald Mountain and the Gospel story of the last judgment with the apocalyptic monsters)? Are they pursuing an informed and scholarly approach to the devil (for instance, exploring the question of an incarnation of the divine which Christians believe in Jesus as divine and human—is it possible for an incarnation of the devil as in Rosemary’s Baby and The Omen series?) Or is the movie just a play on what the devil might be like (Peter Cook as a satirical Satan in Bedazzled or Al Pacino—using the name, John Milton, and evocations of Paradise Lost—in The Devil’s Advocate?)

The Hebrew Scriptures

1. Angels
The best place to start is with angels. We have been so influenced by paintings, classical and popular, that it may take a bit of mental adjustment to realise that, originally, angels were not meant to be considered as what we might call separate individuals. Rather, they were personifications of God, of particular qualities of God. Those familiar with Biblical stories may remember that Gabriel was a personification of God’s communication with people; Raphael, God’s healing power. But, once personified and, especially, when named, the angels took on a life of their own in people’s imaginations. It is important to realise that the angels were, therefore, good.

2. Satan and Job
A question worth asking is: where do we find the first mention of Satan in the Bible? Although the book of Genesis is found at the beginning of the Bible, it is not the earliest
written book. In fact, it was finally edited and written in the 5th century before the Christian era. But Satan appears before this. The place? The book of Job. One of God’s personifications, the Tester of human fidelity, the Satan is something like the legal prosecutor, ‘adversary’ or even, in our later terminology, the ‘devil’s advocate’ (and the Greek is ‘diabolos’ meaning ‘one who passes to another information against a third party’) who roams the earth looking at how faithful people are. His eye is caught by the devout Job and Satan proposes to God that he be allowed to inflict suffering on Job who will then curse God. As we know, it doesn’t happen. Despite the loss of his children and all his possessions, despite personal sickness and torment, he remains faithful (Job 1 and 2).

The Satan as an aspect of God appears also in the re-write of the history of the kings in I Chronicles 20 where David’s presumption in making a census of the people is attributed to the Satan who is angry with Israel and stirs up David.

So, the first image of the Satan is not that of an evil being but, rather, a being who is a facet of God, a tester of human fidelity. The prophet Jeremiah, a prophet who often laments that he has been born and called to speak on God’s behalf, (as in ch.12) is a similar figure of suffering who deals directly with God as does the figure of the faithful servant of God (in the second part of the Book of Isaiah, especially 42,49, 50, 52-3) who suffers for human sin but is finally glorified.

3. Genesis and the Serpent

But, when the Hebrew people were in exile from Judea in Babylon, they discovered for the first time other creation stories, saw temples and statues of deities and were challenged to formulate their own beliefs in oral and literary form. In order to understand human disobedience to God, they wrote the Genesis stories of Adam and Eve. Now the adversary is evil, defying God and wanting the first man and woman to turn against God. The Hebrews borrowed (as they often did) some trappings from the stories they heard from the neighbouring cultures and made them their own. They chose the figure of the serpent (which had been a sign of healing during the Exodus, Numbers), ‘the most subtle of all the wild beasts that God had made (Genesis 3:1) and it became the true tempter, the evil tempter. The Satan now has an evil dimension. An angel and a symbolic snake are part of the imagining of evil—and the theme of God destroying the devil is also introduced along with the theme of the specially chosen one, son of the special woman (because Eve means ‘mother of all the living’), who will crush the devil, crush the tempting Satan:

‘Be accursed beyond all cattle, all wild beasts. You shall crawl on your belly and eat dust every day of your life. I will make you enemies of each other: you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. It will crush your head and you will strike its heel’. (Genesis 3:14-15).

In view of this text, it seems strange that there are not more movies showing this confrontation between the woman and the devil. There are many heroes who destroy the devil—and, a new theme that is introduced, the offspring of the devil who will ultimately be crushed but who will be dangerous and venomous to the ‘sons (and daughters) of God’ who will confront the devil in later generations.

In the much later Book of Wisdom (not a canonical book in Hebrew and Protestant Scriptures but accepted in the Catholic canon), we read ‘it was the devil’s envy that brought death into the world’ (Wisdom 2:24, written
in the first century BCE).

In the centuries after the fifty years’ experience of exile in Babylon (587-537 BCE), the remnant Jewish people, centred on their capital, Jerusalem, did not get involved in foreign politics as they had done before but, rather, focused on the writing and the translating of their sacred books into Greek, the Septuagint, and developing synagogue prayer and worship. They developed their literature of prayer and of wisdom (see Psalm 109 which is a variation on Job but without the Satan, and Psalm 91 where angels care for the tormented person, a psalm that Jesus and the Satan/Devil will argue about in the temptations in the desert).

In the prophet Zechariah (about 500 BCE) we find that the writers are beginning to see Satan as malevolent, not just a tester of the human race, but an enemy—and an enemy of God. Satan is standing at the right hand of the High Priest who is standing before the ‘angel of Yahweh’ (God himself) and the ‘angel of Yahweh’ changes tone towards Satan now, ‘May Yahweh rebuke you, Satan, may Yahweh rebuke you’ (Zech. 3:1-2).

4. Asmodeus.

There is also a Hebrew mythology in stories and writings outside the recognised Scriptures (for instance, stories of Lilith, wife of Adam). Some of these stories have been drawn on by the writers of the Satan movies. An interesting example is found in the book of Tobit (again, not recognised as canonical by Jews or Protestants but accepted by Catholics). One of the major archangels, Raphael, the voyager and healer (introduced in 3:16), is a principal character in this book. But there is also reference to diabolical ‘possession’: Sarah, the virtuous woman, has seven of her husbands killed by Asmodeus before the marriages could be consummated. It is considered that she is in the grip of Asmodeus, ‘that worst of demons’ and needs to be rid of him. Tobias, the dutiful son of the worthy Tobit, is able to rid her of her demons and marries her.

The origins of the figure of Asmodeus are similar to those of Satan. He is probably the ‘destroyer’ (as in 2 Samuel 24:16 and Wisdom 18:25). It is suggested that the Asmodeus figure is related to a Parsee demon, Aesma, another example of the Hebrew people appropriating ideas and images from neighbouring cultures. Asmodeus is found in the traditions of Judaism after the biblical era - and in The Testament of Solomon is an enemy of the marriage act.

5. Manes and the principles of Good and Evil

Around the time of the Jewish exile in Babylon, there were spiritual movements in Persia, in Babylon. It was the period of the rise of Zoroastrianism and the time of Manes and the growing way of thinking about Good and Evil. Rather than holding a belief in a source of Good (which could be called God) and evil as subordinate to the Good, a physical and moral absence of Good, the Persians thought of two equal principles or sources of Good and Evil. With the interest in astrology and its accompanying symbols from the observation of the stars, a mentality developed that tended to go beyond the earth, used colours and numbers, often in a hyperbolic and poetic style, to interpret the universe. The name given to this movement was ‘Apocalyptic’ and, over the centuries, it infiltrated the Jewish imagination.

In the 7th century BCE, the prophet Ezekiel was already using this kind of imagery, the most famous of which was the apocalyptic battle with Gog, of Magog, whose cavalry was at Megiddo and where, on the plain of Megiddo, Gog, symbol of evil, would be defeated. (It is from Megiddo that we derive the word and meaning of Armageddon.)

It is not a difficult step to introduce this apocalyptic imagination to the themes of Satan and the devil.

6. The Book of Daniel

The name of the angel who confronts Satan in Zechariah 3:1-2 has the symbolic name, Michael, literally ‘who is like God’. This Michael is a great angel, later the principal
archangel. He is re-introduced in the Book of Daniel which dates from the second century BCE (10:20-11:1). It is often a morale-boosting book for the Jews who were experiencing fierce military assault and religious persecution from the Syrian king, Antiochus. In chapter 7, there is an image of beasts (representing the kings hostile to the Jews) but the saviour figure of the Jewish Scriptures, the Son of Man, comes in majestic triumph on the clouds of heaven and vanquishes all the beasts.

This theme of the struggle against the beasts, especially under the image of the dragon, is linked with Daniel, chapter 12, where Michael the good angel protects the people in a time of great tribulation. (Daniel 12 is a great source of imagery for Satan movies, especially as it is taken up in the book of the Apocalypse.)

7. Life after death

The last theme from the Hebrew Scriptures for background to the Satan movies is the introduction of the theme of life after death. It comes as a surprise to many to discover that until about two hundred years before the coming of Jesus, there was only the vaguest of notions about a true life after death—and this from a people who had spent centuries in Egypt even building pyramids, the extraordinary monuments to a belief in life after death. The Hebrew notion was that of ‘Sheol’, where people lingered like ‘shades’ in a gulf or a pit. The person was not annihilated in death but the aftermath of life was almost life-less.

With the reflections in the psalms, in the book of Job and other wisdom literature, there emerged, along with some influence of Greek thinking about the immortality of the soul and some eastern thinking about the new life of the body, the ‘resurrection of the body’, a fuller understanding of what came to be called heaven and hell. One can find an early trace of it in that same chapter of Daniel, chapter 12, with a reference to a Book where the names of the virtuous are written. But Daniel is still advised to keep this book a secret.

This gives these initial explorations of the theme of life and death a mysterious quality, Michael defending the virtuous but the wicked ‘wandering this way and that’ and wickedness increasing (v 4).

The apocalyptic influence tended to reinforce the conflict of two sources, one of good and the other of evil. There were to be terrible times of woe, described with apocalyptic dramatic hyperbole. A fuller life after death could be anticipated. This imaginative look at the end of days gave a new context for the activity of the Satan of the Devil.

The Christian Scriptures

It is commonly agreed that most of the Christian scriptures were written between 40 and 100 of the Christian era. Paul was a pharisee and knew his scriptures well and so his letters, the earliest of the writings, reflect the developments of thinking from the Judaic tradition. The other letters of the New Testament also draw on these traditions. The Gospels, which were decades in the making, going through an oral phase until the apostles grew old or were executed, were then written down by particular communities with their own interests in the life and death of Jesus. Matthew’s Gospel is considered to be a Gospel for Jewish Christians. The New Testament ends with the apocalyptic Book of Revelation which was heavily influenced by Jewish apocalyptic imagination. The movie-makers have drawn on the Christian developments of the Satan themes, especially in the Jesus movies.

1. Paul

Paul does not use a great deal of Satan and devil language. He tends to talk more about sin and death rather than personifying it in diabolical symbols (Romans 7:13). Explicit references to Satan are to his role as enemy of the human race and as the punisher: the man guilty of incest in 1 Corinthians 5:5 is to be handed over to Satan for punishment; Satan as the ‘god of this world’ who blinds unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4), who is also referred to as ‘the ruler who governs the air, the spirit
who is at work in the rebellious’ Ephesians. 2:2). In one of his earliest letters, when Paul believed that the second coming of Christ was imminent—as the years passed, he realised that this ‘Parousia’, this special Second Coming, was not going to happen in the immediate future—he spoke of The Rebel, The Enemy, a symbolic person who would act destructively on Satan’s part (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). The moviemakers have dramatised this emissary of Satan who, though not Satan, nevertheless embodies the Satanic and diabolical in this world. But it is Jesus who ‘by his death could take away the power of the devil’ (Hebrews 2:14).

Which means that Paul is not a strong source for movie-makers. He certainly writes about angels—a now seemingly quaint reference to women covering their heads at worship ‘out of respect for angels’ (considered as guardians of public order and worship). He also draws on the hierarchy of angels described in Hebrew literature, ‘choirs of angels’ with names such as Sovereignties and Powers which Paul refers to. He also refers to the power of God in reference to coming in glory with the angels.

2. The Gospels

The tempter

Satan makes an immediate appearance in the Gospels, in the first chapter of Mark, considered the earliest of the Gospels. He is the Satan who tests Jesus in the desert, just as the Satan tested Job. Satan is not presented as the evil one in this Gospel. Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tested for forty days and forty nights (succeeding in confronting the Satan and remaining faithful to God whereas the chosen people of the Exodus, wandering the desert for forty years did not). The Gospel says that he was cared for by angels (Mark 1:12-13).

Matthew and Luke also put the temptations in the desert into a positive context, that of Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit. For Luke the tempter is simply the devil. Luke’s devil has some dominion over the whole world and offers Jesus his power and glory if Jesus will worship him. This is a powerful development of the theme where the devil now has cosmic power and wants to be worshipped. At the end of the temptation scene in Luke, the devil leaves to return ‘at the appointed time’, the time of Jesus’ passion and death.

Matthew has a more detailed development. The Satan is first simply referred to as ‘the tempter’. After the first test about turning stones into bread, he is called ‘the devil’. It is the same after the other two tests. But Jesus’ final words are, ‘Be off, Satan!’ The Gospel with more explicit reference to Judaism has all three.

Jesus uses this language of Satan himself. For instance, when Peter wants to protect Jesus from suffering, Jesus puts his refusal very strongly, ‘Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle in my path because the way you think is not God’s way but man’s’ (16:23). Peter is like the tempter. With Judas, however, he is referred to as a devil by Jesus after the miracle of the loaves (John 6:70-71: he is seen to be the tool of the devil, ‘They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot to betray him’ (John 13:2). The Satan is the dark devil who has succeeded in his tempting of Judas: ‘Satan entered him... he went out. Night had fallen (John 13:27-30).

This theme continues in The Acts of the Apostles where Ananias and Sapphira keep back money they have promised to give to the early community. Peter asks Ananias how ‘Satan can have so possessed you that you should lie to the Holy Spirit?’ (5:3).

Possessed by devils

Diabolical possession movies have been popular since The Exorcist. The Gospel foundation for this is in the several miracle stories where Jesus ‘casts out devils’ and ‘unclean spirits’ from afflicted people. Who or what these devils were has been long discussed. At some time, they are symbolic of harmful illness, as with the boy described by his father as a lunatic whereas he sounds like an epileptic; but ‘when Jesus rebuked it, the devil came out of the boy’
Matthew 17:14-18. A much more detailed version of the fits and of the behaviour of the disciples and Jesus is given in Mark 9:14-29. Luke’s version is shorter but also graphic in its description of convulsions and the boy foaming at the mouth—‘the devil threw him to the ground in convulsions’. The spirit is ‘an unclean spirit’ (Luke 9:37-43).

Often the devils speak out against Jesus, or argue that they do not want to come out of the person they inhabit and possess. Early in Jesus’ ministry, in Mark 1:21-28, the crowds watch and listen as an ‘unclean spirit’ and Jesus argue (also in Luke 4:31-37). In Matthew (8:32-34), there is a dumb demoniac who speaks when the devil is cast out.

Mark has quite a long narrative about a possessed man on the far side of the Sea of Galilee who lived in a cave, so fierce that he had to be chained, who howled and gashed himself with stones. The evil spirits possessing him are challenged by Jesus and their reply as to their name is the famous quotation, ‘My name is legion, for there are many of us’. This is the story where the outcast devils go into the herd of pigs and rush headlong over the cliff into the sea (Mark 5:1-20). Matthew has a shorter version with a few different details about the man and his behaviour (8:28-34), Luke a longer one (8:26-39) where the spirits plead not to be sent back to their home, ‘the Abyss’, the depths of the earth.

There are several women friends of Jesus called Mary and their stories in the Christian storytelling and art tradition get entangled with one another. This is especially true of Mary of Magdala. The main reference to her is with several women who were ‘cured of evil spirits and ailments’, ‘from whom seven demons had gone out’. This has led people making her the actually anonymous prostitute of Luke 7:36-50 as well as attributing to her (because of the anointing with oil) stories of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:1-11). This gives some kind of ‘official’ basis for the linking of possession and sexuality.

A key Gospel text on possession is Luke 11:14-22, also Matthew 22-28. Jesus is in debate with his critics, the religious leaders, who accuse him of casting out devils in the name of ‘Beelzebul, the prince of devils’ (sometimes referred to as Beelzebub). Jesus says that Satan cannot be divided against himself and that it is by the power of God that Jesus casts out devils—and that this is a sign that God’s kingdom is amongst us. However, he adds that the devils prowl—‘when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it wanders through waterless country, looking for a place to rest, and not finding one, it says, ‘I will go back to the home I came from’. But, on arrival, finding it swept and tidied, it then goes off and brings in seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and set up house there so that the man ends up by being worse than he was before’ (vv 24-26).

In the Gospels it is not so much Satan himself who possesses people but rather his associate devils who act for him and in his name. 

The devil and hell

Hell and the devil have also been popular movie themes. The Gospels offer some imaginative basis. Jesus threatens the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida in Galilee with wanting to be exalted on high but with being thrust down to hell (Lk. 10:13-15). Jesus alludes to a prophecy from Isaiah (14:13-15) where a proud king, referred to as the Daystar, son of Dawn:

‘How did you come to fall from the heavens...
How did you come to be thrown to the ground,
you who enslaved the nations?
You who used to think to yourself,
‘I will climb up to the heavens;
and higher than the stars of God
I will set my throne.
I will sit on the Mount of Assembly
in the recesses of the north.
I will climb to the top of the thunderclouds,
I will rival the Most High.’
What! Now you have fallen to Sheol,
to the very bottom of the abyss!
Jesus goes on to refer to this passage when he talks about the ‘fall’ of Satan. I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven’ (v.18).
Daystar can be the name of the ‘Light-bearer’, Lucifer. It was not difficult for later generations of Christians to link the Lucifer and his pride and vaunting against God with the story of the fall of the Daystar and make the link that the Gospels make to Lucifer being Satan, thrust down to hell.

Matthew and Mark have several allusions to this hell making it a place of horror, of darkness, worms, torment. It is eternal fire in 18:5-10 in the passage where those who give scandal to children are damned and where anyone who sins with a limb should cut it off or pluck out an offending eye. It is, in Mark 9:48, a place ‘where their worm does not die nor their fire go out’. This is a direct quotation about punishment from Sirach 7:17—‘Be very humble since the punishment of the godless is fire and worms’—and from Isaiah 66:24—‘...the corpses of men who have rebelled against me. Their worm will not die nor their fire go out; they will be loathsome to all mankind’.

It is worth noting that the specific reference is not so much to hell as to Gehenna, to the valley of Jerusalem, Gehinnom, where infant sacrifice once took place and which became a rubbish tip.

Jesus does not refer to hell in the Sermon on the Mount (5-7), but, as the Gospel goes on there are more references to hell: ‘The disciple is not superior to his master... if they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they not say of his household?’ (10:25); ‘fear him... who can destroy both body and soul in hell’ (10:28). Allusions to aspects of hell occur in Jesus’ parables, like that of the Rich Man and Lazarus where the Rich Man who feasted lavishly and never gave anything to the poor man at his gate goes into hell. And Lazarus who is in heaven (referred to as the ‘Bosom of Abraham’ Luke 16: 19-31) cannot move from heaven. The Rich Man wants Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, ‘for I am in agony in these flames’. At the end of the parable where the guests refuse to come to the wedding feast, the man without the wedding garment is to be bound hand and foot and thrown out into the dark where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth (Matthew 22:13-14 and also Matthew 8:12). It is the same with the man who buried his talent instead of trading with it (Matthew 25:30).

At the end of Jesus’ last discourse in Matthew, the parable of the Last Judgment (25:31-46) and the separation of the faithful sheep from the faithless goats, those who have cared for the sick, prisoners and those who have neglected them, Jesus is again explicit about the devil and hell, ‘Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...and they will go away to eternal punishment’.

Satan and the Prince of this world.

There are not so many references to Satan in John’s Gospel. There are those for Judas. In an angry confrontation with his critics who claim to be true children of Abraham, Jesus says that:

- The devil is your father, and you prefer to do what your father wants.
- He was a murderer from the start; he was never grounded in the truth; there is no truth in him at all: when he lies he is drawing on his own store, because he is a liar and the father of lies (8:44)

With this background, Jesus in his last discourse, refers to Satan as the adversary, the tempter and ‘the prince of this world being already condemned’ (16:11). John’s Gospel was the last to be written and it reflects the themes of the other Gospels but is not as expansive in dealing with Satan. Satan appears more strongly in the other Johannine writings, the letters and the Book of Revelation.

The antichrist

The first letter of John opens with a declaration of faith in the incarnation of Jesus, that he was truly, fully human when he walked the earth. One of the images for Jesus and, especially for God, is light. Darkness is the realm of untruth, of lies. Being born into this light and living in it means that Jesus’ disciples have
overcome the darkness. By the second chapter John is referring to this as a victory over the Evil One. This is the beginning of John’s developing theme of Jesus and Christians overcoming the Tempter - crushing the head of the ancient tempter, the serpent in the garden of Eden (2:14).

Then comes the first mention of an Antichrist (to be considered as the same as the Rebel, the Enemy of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:4). The antichrist is not Satan at this stage. In fact there have been several antichrists, ‘rivals of Christ’ who were part of the community but left, John saying that this proved they never really belonged. In fact, the conclusion is then drawn that anyone ‘who denies that Jesus is the Christ—he is the liar, the Antichrist, and he is denying the Father as well as the Son’ (2:22). These liars can also be false prophets who have a spirit of falsehood in them (4:1-6). The same theme finally appears in the summary of the letter: the protection of God against the Evil One in whose power the whole world lies’ (5:18-19). John associates the false prophets, the antichrists with the Evil One, so it is not difficult to see how Christians started to identify the Antichrist with the Devil.

This is reinforced in the second letter of John where the word used this time is The Deceiver: ‘There are many deceivers about in the world, refusing to admit that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. They are The Deceiver; they are the Antichrist’ (v.7). Just as Paul says all disciples make up the body of Christ, so all deceivers/antichrists make up the body of The Deceiver/The Antichrist.

**Apocalypse**

Revelation is the major apocalyptic work of the Christian scriptures (there were contemporary non-biblical apocalyptic writings by both Christians and Jews at this period, later first century and early second century of the Christian era). The direct influences are the book of Daniel, especially chapters 7 and 12, with the imagery of the kings and emperors as beasts, the coming of the Saviour into the court of God with the 144,000 worshippers and the battle between Michael and the Dragon, as well as the book of Ezekiel, especially chapters 39 and 40, reference to eschatological battles. The book has images of church communities, of liturgy: candles, lampstands, incense, images of Jesus as the Lamb, of the Church as the New Jerusalem as well as the dramatic four horsemen of the apocalypse and the seals, especially the seventh, to be broken. The symbols of the apocalypse have extended beyond Satan movies.

The first half of the book is full of light, the symbol of the presence of God, and angels appear more numerously than any other biblical book, all servants of God, all facets of God.

It is in chapter 12 that the darkness appears. First it is a red dragon who attacks the pregnant woman who symbolises the Church. Its tail sweeps the stars from the sky and it stalks the woman finally confronting her to devour her child—images of powers of evil confronting the Church and disciples. Christian interpretation soon saw the pregnant woman as Mary and Mary as a sign of the Church. It is an easy step from this to seeing the dragon as the devil confronting Jesus, but that is not the original meaning.

Next, Michael reappears and we have an apocalyptic version of the fall of the Daystar of the prophet Isaiah, the fall of Lucifer who is now Satan and is the primeval serpent. The dragon does now become the devil and both he and Michael have armies of angels doing battle. ‘The dragon fought back with his angels, but they were defeated and driven out of heaven. The great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had deceived all the world, was hurled down to the earth and his angels were hurled down with him’ (12:7-9). So, with the apocalypse, the themes all come together in this vision of a cosmic battle of good and evil.

But the dragon still pursues the mother and the rest of her children, ‘that is, all who obey God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus’ (12:17).

Through chapter 13, beasts like those from
the book of Daniel appear, representing the contemporary earthly powers, especially that of the emperor of Rome who is branded with the symbolic number 666 (though there is a textual variant of 616). Hebrew and Greek numbers were also letters and the totals of the letters of a name became a symbolic identification. (The author might now be regretting that he wrote the verse about 666: ‘There is need for shrewdness here; if anyone is clever enough he may interpret the number of the beast: it is the number of a man, the number 666’ (13:18). Many a writer has considered himself shrewd enough!

In chapter 15, there is the image of plagues and of a glass lake suffused with fire, and standing by the lake those who had fought against the beast and won’ (v.2). The next chapters focus on the destruction of Babylon— which stands for Rome. One of the symbols is the ‘famous prostitute’, Rome and its idolatry. But there is also an appearance of a beast, one of the emperors, who is described in a recurring phrase as, ‘who once was not and now is not’. But this beast is to rise from the Abyss, a kind of second coming, and then go to his destruction (17:8-18).

Before the book ends with the coming of the new Jerusalem and the prayer for the coming of Jesus, ‘Maranatha’, there is an apocalyptic battle and Babylon is destroyed. It is also the end of the devil. Those who refuse the beast’s brand-mark come to life again and reign for a thousand years with Christ.

While the first letter of Peter warns that Christians ‘be calm and vigilant, because your enemy, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for something to eat. Stand up to him, strong in faith, and in the knowledge that your brothers all over the world are suffering the same thing’ (1 Peter 5:8-9), Revelation tells us about the end of the devil’s days: ‘Then I saw an angel come down from Heaven with the key of the Abyss in his hand and an enormous chain. He overpowered the dragon, that primeval serpent which is the devil and Satan, and chained him up for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and shut the entrance and sealed it over him to make sure he would not deceive the nations again until the thousand years had passed. At the end of that time he must be released, but only for a short time...

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive all the nations in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, and mobilise them for war. His armies will be as many as the sands of the sea; they will come swarming over the entire country and besiege the camp of the saints, which is the city that God loves. But fire will come down on them from heaven and consume them. Then the devil, who misled them, will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet are, and their torture will not stop, day or night, for ever and ever (20:1-3; 7-10).

Here the New Testament ends.

But speculations about the devil, Satan, antichrist did not end. Interpretations have continued throughout the Christian era, in theology, in spirituality, in fringe movements and cults, in art and literature, in drama, in prayer and in later, more rationalist centuries, in interest in the occult and, in more recent decades when it was asked, ‘Is God dead?’, in fiction and movies where Christians and non-Christians alike have been fascinated by this heritage and with a mixture of insights, deep and shallow, authentic and fanciful, have made their Satan movies.

The Christian Era

Not all the Christian writing of the first century was considered ‘canonical’, that is, to be regarded as a sacred text of the scriptures. There was quite a lot of writing, some of it letters to emerging churches, some of it meditative, some of it apocalyptic. It was also the period of the Jewish writings and the beginnings of commentary on the biblical texts. Which meant, then, that it was a period of interpretation, with some highly imaginative
elaborations of old stories and invented stories of biblical figures who might have been mentioned only in passing. As the early Christian centuries went on, there was also a passion for knowing more about Jesus’ life—developed in what came to be called ‘apocryphal gospels’—and a passion for giving names to characters who were originally anonymous. Everyone knows, for instance, that Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist on a dish but, if you ask which Gospel Salome appears in, the answer is none. In Mark’s Gospel, the only Gospel which recounts the incident, she is merely called the daughter of Herodias.

So, writings and later Christian art offered all kinds of information—but it was interpretation of the biblical texts. And this material influenced later interpreters so that movie makers may be tapping into authentic material or merely tapping into some local, colourful fantasy.

There is a case in point already in one of the last books of the New Testament, the letter of Jude. In a criticism of false teachers, the writer says they are abusing the angels and goes on to remark that ‘Not even the archangel Michael, when he was engaged in argument with the devil about the corpse of Moses, dared to denounce him in the language of abuse; all he said was, ‘The Lord correct you’ (v.9)... Commentators note that this material in Jude contains references to two Jewish writings: ‘Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs’ and ‘Assumption of Moses’.

It might be useful to outline some of the steps in the development of thought about and images of Satan down the Christian centuries:

- One of the most dramatic representations of the devil in the early centuries is in the moral struggles of the so-called ‘Desert Fathers’. Following the example of such saints as Paul, the first hermit and, especially, Anthony of Egypt, many Christians fled the pagan world and lived an anchorite’s life in the desert. By the fourth century, a number of the men banded together and monasteries were established. However, there are vivid stories recounted of the temptations of the hermits (and the theme of sexual temptation is strong in this regard), of literal struggles with the devil and devils who often appeared in voluptuous female form. This is certainly a theme that has continued through the ages.

- At the same time, theologians began reflecting on and writing about Christian doctrine and more formal theological expressions of sin, temptation, the devil and hell were formulated. There was speculation about the nature of hell, its ‘material’ of punishment (fire) and whether it was eternal. Theologian Origen speculated that at the Last Judgment, all sinners would have paid their price of their sins and all would rise to heaven. This was also the period of trying to understand the human condition and human sinfulness and the formulation of a doctrine of ‘Original Sin’ which reinforces the Genesis stories of Adam and Eve and the devil as the serpent.

- Influences of Greek philosophy and the traditions of Persian thought were strong on many of the theologians and preachers. The Gnostics spoke of everything flowing, emanating from God—and often suggested that Jesus was not truly human but a divine being in a human shell. Neo-Platonists took up Plato’s ideas that anything on earth was merely a shadow of the true reality that existed in an ideal world. All kinds of connections could be made between these heterodox ideas and the biblical notions.

The greatest of the theologians of the first millennium, St Augustine, illustrates this. In his early years, before his conversion, he lived a worldly and intellectual life, had a mistress and a son and was strongly influenced by Manichean thought, that there were equal principles of evil and good. His writings, using imagery of light and darkness, is eloquent on sin and evil. He has also been considered strongly misogynist with the link, like that of the desert fathers, between woman and temptation and sin.

- During the so-called Dark Ages (from
the 6th century to the 10th century), there was an extraordinary interaction between the ‘barbarians’ and Christianity, especially with the preaching of the missionaries. But it also meant that ‘pagans’ influenced religious practices and beliefs just as the Roman traditions were incorporated and ‘baptised’ by the church. Celtic spirituality encountered Christianity as did the Nordic myths of Germany and Scandinavia. However, the times were so difficult, even for survival, that it was only when peace prevailed that beliefs and doctrines were more clearly formulated.

Historians refer to the Middle Ages as comprising three periods, Early, High and Late. The Early Middle Ages date from about 1000 to 1200 CE, a period where Europe was to emerge from the barbarian invasions and their aftermath to a time of peace and economic and cultural growth. Theologians were taking up where the predecessors of several centuries before had finished and began to research the scriptures and the earlier writers to catalogue sayings on various church doctrines. But with the end of the first millennium, fringe and unorthodox groups abounded, many with apocalyptic messages and bizarre interpretations of the battle between good and evil and the role of the devil and the last times for earth. Aspects of this kind of millenarianism can be seen in The Name of the Rose, set in a remote Italian monastery in 1327 but still with members of these sects being hounded by authorities who later became the Inquisition. In the film, there is also a treatment of the theme of witchcraft which became more prevalent and public during these centuries (as later in such stories as The Hunchback of Notre Dame). The presence of Satan/The Devil is stronger because of the links with these groups and with witchcraft—as evidenced in the biblical stories in the stained glass windows in the Gothic cathedral statuary and, especially, with the gargoyles.

The High Middle Ages, especially the 13th century, saw the golden age of theology with scholars like Thomas Aquinas. It was also the century of Giotto and the flowering of fresco paintings where biblical stories caught the imaginations of the artists. As the Middle Ages moved into the Renaissance, motifs which included the devil, especially images of The Last Judgment and Hell, were prevalent, culminating in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel.

The Late Middle Ages saw a decline in medieval culture and religion. The Black Death and its devastation had dire consequences for church order which led to the need for change and, ultimately, to the 16th century Reformation. Sect writings were still prevalent though suppressed, and followers charged with heresy. However, the dilution of religious authority and the rise of nationalism led to the Renaissance and its art. The focus was on human beauty rather than diabolical evil.

However glorious the vision of 1500 with the opening up of new worlds in the Americas and the changing understanding of the universe, the 16th century saw the greatest upheaval in the Church’s history and the division of Christendom into churches which, instead of fostering dialogue, urged polemic which led to persecution and religious wars. Once again, fringe sects arose and witchcraft thrived (remembering Macbeth, and that James I of England showed great interest in the subject). In religious art, especially in the Catholic tradition, the Baroque, larger than life statues and the light and dark of the paintings, were the last images of the classical symbols of the scriptures. The Protestant tradition moved away from images, were even iconoclastic as was Oliver Cromwell, but the 16th century ended with new outbreaks of possession amongst non-conformist Puritan groups like those in Salem, dramatised in The Crucible.

But, with the coming of the Age of Reason, the 18th century, there was a move, in European and European-influenced culture, away from religion and piety. Science and philosophy had displaced faith and the century culminated in the French Revolution and, perhaps, the American revolution. The 18th is not a century...
for developments in reflection on Satan.

- From the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, there was a shift in religious thinking. While the Industrial Revolution gave birth to a creed of Progress, the romantic and revolutionary reaction to reason had its consequences for religion. A new piety emerged, more popular and sentimental. The battle between good and evil was dramatised in Catholic prayers, especially in prayers after 1917 for the conversion of Russia, in a struggle between Archangel Michael and the devil, ‘...thrust Satan down to Hell’. Statues of warrior Michael abounded (for instance, Jacob Epstein’s sculpture at Coventry Cathedral).

It was also an era of visions. The 1917 apparitions of Mary to the Portuguese children at Fatima emphasised a spirituality of Hell. In some areas of Catholic piety this has continued to the present with children in Medjugorje in the Balkans claiming apparitions of Mary and the need for repentance and the threat of Hell as well as the current popularity of the devotion to the Divine Mercy to us human sinners promoted by the Polish nun, St Faustina (canonised, 2000).

With the experience of the Russian revolution into the Stalinist era, with the world wars and consequent regional wars, the imagery of ‘demonising’ the enemy has given new currency to the language of Satan and the Devil.

However, along with the renewed piety, there was in many countries, especially the UK, a new interest in the occult, in seances and the other world.

- The move to foreign missionary work on the part of most Christian churches (especially during the 19th century) has meant that the churches have ‘seen the devil’ metaphorically in pagan customs and rituals. In some areas (as in the doomsday cults in Africa today), possession by ‘the devil’ has become more prevalent. Also the need for rituals of exorcisms (the case on which The Exorcist is based occurred in Georgetown, Washington DC, in 1949).

However, the cultural transitions of the 60s, especially concerning religion, theology and spirituality, have had enormous influence, especially on best-sellers, movies and television. Bishop John Robinson published a book in Britain in 1963 asking questions about the relevance of so much God discourse, Honest to God. Soon after, especially in the United States, Paul Tillich and other theologians echoed this questioning of traditional religious concepts and language and coined the phrase, ‘God is dead’. Time Magazine had a black cover for its April 1966 story, ‘Is God Dead?’ (This is the issue read by Mia Farrow in the doctor’s waiting room in Rosemary’s Baby - Polanski deliberately introducing this into his pioneering movie on Satan and Satanists.)

Is it true that when God is dead, people want alternatives? The general answer seems to be in the popularity of so many movements which come under the general heading ‘New Age’ and which have proliferated since the 60s. However, there was a renewed interest in Satan. God might be dead, but Satan was not. Ira Levin’s novel, Rosemary’s Baby, was popular in the mid-60s. It had a Catholic context, the visit of Paul VI to the United Nations in New York in late 1965. Roman Polanski’s 1968 film was the first of the new phase of Satan movies, reinforced by The Exorcist five years later and then in 1976, The Omen. The millennium brought a number of Satan films, especially End of Days and Dogma. But, given millennial anticipations, it is surprising there were not more.

**Conclusion**

This survey of the Biblical data and changing church interpretations for 2000 years indicates that the Satan movies sometimes drew on the leads from the Jewish scriptures or the New Testament. But, often, they draw from eclectic sources of literature or the visual arts—of the film-writer’s imagination. The resulting films have moved away from ‘pure’ biblical reference and offer syncretistic tales and interpretations. But, they still draw indirect inspiration from a Judaeo-Christian tradition of three thousand years.
THE NOMINATION of St Maximus the Confessor as a Doctor of the Church was always a strong possibility; the most curious thing about it was that it took until 2007 to finally happen. The salient question is not so much: ‘Why Maximus?’, but: ‘Why did it take so long?’

The answer to this question lies possibly in Maximus’ approach to the tricky theological question of the apocatastasis, for his thinking on this subject has often been opposed by Catholic theologians. According to this doctrine, at the end of time all rational creatures—angels and human beings, whether good or evil—will be reconciled in God’s kingdom. Sometimes known as ‘the universal homecoming’, sometimes as the Greater Hope (as opposed to the merely Great Hope, which refers to the calling into eternal life of each individual¹), the word itself has an astrological background, standing for the return of planetary or stellar bodies to their initial starting point in the heavens².

The doctrine of the apokatastasis pantón (‘restoration of all’) is based on a range of biblical sources. In Acts 3:21, Peter says that Jesus ‘must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything of which He spoke’, and while it is clear that Peter is referring here to the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises³, when combined with 1 Corinthians 15:28 (where Paul says that at the end of time ‘the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all⁴), it becomes a potent mix. Other influential texts are 1 Corinthians 15:22 (‘As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive’) and 1 Timothy 2:3-4 (‘God our Saviour … desires everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth’). At the Mass I attended on Sunday, the final hymn included a reference to ‘that great day when all will be one’. The proposition that all people will eventually come to enjoy eternal life is certainly a well-resourced one.

It is also a controversial teaching. In the eighteenth century it was the apocatastasis that was at the heart of the debate between Whitefield and Wesley, Calvinists and Arminians; and in the universal Church its history is at least as ancient as the early Alexandrian theologians. It was Clement who provided the principle that God does not punish but corrects; Origen added that since the soul is essentially rational it must eventually be convinced of the divine truth⁵. Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Hilary, Peter Chrysologus and even at one time Jerome of Bethlehem are all said to have written in favour of the teaching that ‘not a single being will be lost to the darkness
Michael Modini is a teacher at a Catholic high school in the Brisbane Archdiocese and a former student of both the Catholic Institute of Sydney and the Brisbane College of Theology.

**The ‘Two Feet of God’**

The argument at the heart of any doctrine dealing with the ‘greater hope’ of universal salvation is, of course, that the divine justice and the divine mercy (St Bernard’s ‘two feet of God’) have long been seen to be in tension. As Mark O’Brien wrote recently in *Compass*, ‘it is fair to say that few of us would follow a God who is soft on evil (unjust) and few of us could relate to a God who is not loving and merciful’. On the one hand the existence of hell is a given; on the other hand no-one among us really wants to spend eternity knowing that other people are suffering eternally in hell—especially when those people could so easily be us.

And yet, although God desires all to be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), in order for salvation to take place this desire must be mutual; to affirm the apocatastasis absolutely is, as Peter Phan says, to ‘fail to take seriously human freedom as a created capacity for self-determination’. Pope John Paul II was characteristically emphatic on the subject. ‘Can God,’ he wrote, ‘who has loved man so much, permit the man who rejects Him to be condemned to eternal torment? And yet, the words of Christ are unequivocal. In Matthew’s Gospel He speaks clearly of those who will go to eternal punishment (cf. Mt 25:46). Who will these be? The Church has never made any pro-

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nouncement in this regard."12

Yet, although we cannot say definitively
that ‘all will be saved’, nevertheless we are
permitted—at least according to Hans Urs von
Balthasar—to hope that all will be saved. In-
deed, in his book of approximately that title,
Balthasar says that ‘it is necessary for us to
hope that all men are saved’ (emphasis added).

As Avery Dulles explains, Balthasar:

… rejects the ideas that hell will be emptied at
the end of time and that the damned souls and
demons will be reconciled with God. He also
avoids asserting as a fact that everyone will be
saved. But he does say that we have a right and
even a duty to hope for the salvation of all, be-
cause it is not impossible that even the worst
sinners may be moved by God’s grace to repent
before they die. He concedes, however, that the
opposite is also possible. Since we are able to
resist the grace of God, none of us is safe. We
must therefore leave the question speculatively
open, thinking primarily of the danger in which
we ourselves stand.13

The problem—and the mystery—therefore
remains. Phan adds that the doctrine of the
apocatastasis is indissolubly linked with the
theology of hope: ‘humanity encounters God’s
saving will not in theoretical certainty but in
hope.”14 But is there really any hope for the
unrepentant sinner—those men and women
whom we love (and whom God loves so
much), but who seem destined not to love
God? Is there hope for those who deserve to
die? For those who by their own actions con-
demn themselves to die forever?

The Transforming Power of Christ

For Hans Schwarz the doctrine of the
apocatastasis is a christological one, ultimately
resting on the conviction that ‘through Christ
God has redeemed the whole of creation, a feat
that does not tolerate any exception.”15 If
Schwarz is correct, and the ‘ancient and still
amazingly modern confession of the Church
[is that] we can be saved only by the compas-
sion shown to us in Christ”16, then the second
Person of the Trinity is ultimately more mer-
ciful than implacably just. I am reminded here
of the assertion that the *Apocalypse of Peter*—
an influential early Christian text accepted as
scriptural by both Clement of Alexandria and
the compiler of the Muratorian canon—was
rejected by the tradition of the Church prima-
ry on the basis of its statement that it will be
God, and not Christ, who will come to judge
sinners17. St James’ statement that ‘mercy tri-
umphs over judgement’ (James 2:13), Solo-
mon’s that ‘even though you have absolute
power, you are a merciful judge’ (Wisdom
12:18) and St Catherine of Siena’s that ‘you
temper your justice with mercy”18, thereby
become christological statements, complying
with titles of Christ such as Wisdom (Sophia)
and Life-giving Womb.

Yet God has always been merciful (cf.
Psalms 103:8, 111:4) and there is something
other than mercy involved here. As Professor
and later Cardinal, Pope Benedict explored the
theme of the after-life in the Regensburg Dog-
matic Theology series. With reference to ‘the
final purification of the elect’—the doctrine
of Purgatory confirmed for Catholics by the
1336 bull *Benedictus Deus* of Benedict XII—
the then-Professor Ratzinger noted that:

The Christianizing of the early Jewish notion
of a purging fire lie[es] precisely in the insight
that the purification involved does not happen
through some thing, but through the transform-
ing power of the Lord himself, whose burning
flame cuts free our closed-off heart, melting it,
and pouring it into a new mould to make it fit
for the living organism of his body.”19

In *Spe Salvi* the Pope developed this doc-
trine, explaining that although the Eastern
Church ‘does not recognize the purifying and
expiatory suffering of souls in the afterlife”20
(i.e. Purgatory), nevertheless ‘some recent
theologians are of the opinion that the fire
which both burns and saves is Christ himself,
the Judge and Saviour”21.

In *Eschatology*, Ratzinger asserted that the
notion of a purging fire was rejected by
Chrysostom (and thereby the Eastern Church
at large) precisely because it had become (un-
necessarily) linked with the idea of a general
restoration / apocatastasis. In *Spe Salvi*—as

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in *Eschatology*—Pope Benedict went on to acknowledge that the Orthodox do, however, accept ‘various levels of beatitude and of suffering in the intermediate state’\(^{23}\). For Greeks as for Latins the souls of the departed … … can receive ‘solace and refreshment’ through the Eucharist, prayer and almsgiving. The belief that love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues beyond the limits of death—this has been a fundamental conviction of Christianity throughout the ages and it remains a source of comfort today.\(^{24}\)

In the *Apocalypse of Peter*—that ‘most ancient work extant in which sinners are delivered from hell by the intercession of the righteous on or after the Day of Judgement’\(^{25}\)—it is the compassion of the saints which results in the conferral of divine mercy upon the damned. In his *Apocalypse*, St Peter is told by Christ himself that ‘it is because of them that have believed in me that, at their word, I shall have pity on men’\(^{26}\). As co-workers of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:9), perhaps it is to the extent that we have not cared enough or carried the Lord’s message far enough in this life that the compassion of the saints becomes co-instrumental in the after-life instead.

The Transforming Power of the Church

But why should our compassion have this salvific aspect? Ultimately it must have something to do with our ‘putting on Christ’ (cf. Gal 3:27, Rom 13:14). For St Maximus, the will of God is by nature *saving*: by this saving will God created the world, became a human being, and raises men and women to immortality. The Word became flesh not in order to distort the nature that God had created, but to deify it, and the submission of the human will assumed by the Logos to the will of the Father—as an example of obedience for the sake of our salvation—suggests that it is the submission of our human wills to that of God which has salvific implications for the rest of humanity. Similarly, for St Catherine, the human soul:

… feeds and is nourished …

By conforming her will with your high eternal will—

That will which wants nothing other than that we be made holy.

So the soul which considers this strips herself of her own will

And clothes herself in yours.\(^{27}\)

If it is true, furthermore, that compassion for others is a constitutive dimension of the perichoresis (genuine reciprocal penetration) of the two wills—divine and human—in Jesus Christ\(^{28}\), and if it is true that there is a place for us in this divine-human interface, then in the process of our deification the compassion of Christ becomes our compassion as well. For St Maximus, the deification of mankind does not mean transforming it into something that it isn’t, but becoming more and more what it is—saying ‘yes’ rather than ‘no’, as Pope Benedict says; conforming ‘our will with the great truth of being’\(^{29}\).

The ultimate reconciliation between God’s justice and God’s mercy seems, then, to have a communal—indeed, an ecclesial—aspect: through the ‘innumerable interactions’ that link the lives of all people we hope that we will be saved together. In *Spe Salvi* the Pope goes on to quote Henri de Lubac, who considered that salvation has always been a ‘social reality’.\(^{30}\) Earlier, in *Eschatology*, Ratzinger had quoted Origen, who has ‘the finest statement on this that I have been able to find’. Origen used St Paul’s analogy of the one body of Christ to assert that it is ‘one body’ which is waiting for justification, ‘one body’ which rises for judgement…. You will have joy when you depart from this life if you are a saint. But your joy will be complete only when no member of your body is lacking to you.’\(^{31}\) Balthasar preferred to quote Cardinal Daniélou, who wrote:

Too often we think of hope in too individualistic a manner as merely our personal salvation. But hope essentially bears on the great actions of God concerning the whole of creation. It bears on the destiny of all humanity. It is the salvation of the world that we await. In reality
hope bears on the salvation of all men—and it is only in the measure that I am immersed in them that it bears on me.\textsuperscript{32}

Hope is, then, a communal thing, and it is this \textit{res communis} that ‘liberates us from the shallowness, apathy and self-absorption which deaden our souls and poison our relationships’\textsuperscript{33}. It is because our hope is ecclesial that we can rejoice in the purpose of God’s will set forth in Christ, which is ‘to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph 1:10). And it is because we are all connected that there is hope in the life after this life for us all.

I forget who it was that first said that every theologian creates God in his or her own image. Currently I am a teacher at an Australian high school, and my God is therefore one who wants more than anything else for all his students, without exception, to pass into the eternal blessedness of life beyond Year 12. Whether this theology strictly coincides with the one the Living God has dreamed up for us in eternal reality I probably won’t know until I graduate myself. Nevertheless, if I have learned anything from St Maximus the Confessor and his friends, it is that it is one in which I am encouraged to hope.

\textbf{NOTES}

1 Cf. the words of Christ to St Martha: ‘If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die’ (John 11:25-6).

2 Although clearly—apart from the early Christian Platonists—none of the writers mentioned in this article seriously believed that souls ‘return’ (like planets) to an original starting point in heaven.

3 Hans Urs von Balthasar (\textit{Dare we hope ‘that all men be saved’?}, 225) points out that the translation ‘until everything predicted by God’s prophets has come about’ is equally possible. The reference to ‘all men’ in the title of the book means, of course, ‘all people’.

4 Or ‘all things to all people’.

5 Hans Schwarz (\textit{Eschatology}, 339) notes that even though Origen believed ‘God through Christ will restore his entire creation’ he also believed in the end there will be a complete destruction of the body, and the restoration will involve ‘various movements of progress’.


7 Balthasar, \textit{Dare we hope ‘that all men be saved’?}, 246.

8 John Paul II, General Audience of Wednesday, 28th July, 1999.


12 John Paul II, \textit{Crossing the Threshold of Hope}, 185. With regard to the last part of this statement, Pope Pius III is said to have pronounced irredeemable the soul of his predecessor, Alexander VI (d. 1503), while even today the people of Rimini insist that their Duke Sigismundo Malatesta (d. 1468) was damned \textit{in medias vitas} by Pius II.


15 Schwarz, \textit{Eschatology}, 341. Schwarz adds (p. 351) that ‘we know that a person will only be saved for Christ’s sake’.


17 Richard Bauckham (\textit{The Fate of the Dead: Studies in the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses}, 232) adds that, according to this document, it is Christ who effects the release of the damned from hell, because he is the eschatological judge who has condemned them.

18 Mary O’Driscoll, \textit{Catherine of Siena: Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity}, 91.

19 Joseph Ratzinger, \textit{Eschatology}, 229. On the
following page of the same work Ratzinger describes Purgatory as ‘the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints’. 20 Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi, 48.

21 Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi, 47. ‘His gaze, the touch of his heart heals us through an undeniably painful transformation ‘as through fire’.’

22 Ratzinger, Eschatology, 227.

23 Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi, 48; cf. Ratzinger, Eschatology, 228.

24 Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi, 48. Pope Benedict’s purgatory is less a place of suffering, then, than a place of hope.

25 Bauckham, The Fate of the Dead, 144. Bauckham (pp. 233-4) describes this Apocalypse as just one of a number of apocryphal writings in which the eponymous heroes (the Virgin, St Peter, St Paul, St Michael), when confronted with the suffering of the damned in hell, are moved to compassion and obtain for them from God a period of respite from their suffering. Naturally, in the Apocalypse, God tells Peter to keep this information a secret: ‘You must not tell that which you hear to the sinners lest they transgress the more’.

26 Early Christian Writings, ‘The Apocalypse of Peter’.

27 O’Driscoll, Catherine of Siena, 55. In her Dialogo, St Catherine is told (p. 170) that ‘the union which the soul has made with me is more perfect than the union between the soul itself and its own body’.

28 See Part I of this essay.


30 Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi, 14.

31 Ratzinger, Eschatology, 185-6.

32 Balthasar, Dare we hope ‘that all men be saved’?, 166-7, citing Daniélou’s Essai sur le mystère de l’histoire, 340.

33 Benedict XVI, Homily, World Youth Day.

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IN THE EARLIER part of Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount Jesus had warned his disciples that unless their righteousness exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees, they would never enter the kingdom of heaven (5.20). In a series of six illustrations, he had proposed a conversion that moved well beyond the literalist preoccupations of the scribes and all ego-directed ethics, and was based instead on the way of love and the freely accepted vulnerability entailed in it.

Exceeding the Righteousness of the Pharisees

He concluded his reflection on the kind of conversion he called for by turning his attention to the Pharisees, specifically to their practices of piety—practices that were common to many other religious traditions, namely, voluntary almsgiving, prayer and fasting. The Sermon assumed that these practices were part, also, of the disciples’ pursuit of righteousness.

Jesus said little about any intrinsic value in the customs, other than that ‘the Father who sees in secret will reward you’ (6.4,6,18). Rather, through them Jesus addressed, and rejected, the dynamic that governed all social interactions within the culture of the time, and that was based on a sense of mutual indebtedness. One good turn did not merely deserve another—it established a right to reciprocal benefit. If the benefit could not be returned in kind, the recipient incurred a debt of gratitude expressed by flattery and the payment of due ‘honor’ to the benefactor. Indeed, people’s sense of personal identity was rooted in the ‘honor’ in which they felt themselves held by others. What mattered in the culture was not purity of heart but the extent to which people ‘looked good’ in the estimation of their neighbours. Deep in their hearts was a pervasive sense of rivalry, that led, in some cases, even to ‘honor killings’. To ‘lose face’ was unbearable. Freely given love, and the deliberately accepted vulnerability inherent in it, were virtually unthinkable and certainly counter-cultural in both the Jewish and Roman worlds, though, in Jesus’ mind, authentic love was the only way to genuine justice and peace. Such radical love still makes sense today only to those already embarked on the process of the ‘second conversion’.

Almsgiving. Jesus’ first target was almsgiving (6.1-4). Earlier in the Sermon, Matthew had included Jesus’ injunction: ‘Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you’ (5.42). Given the social structures of the time, he had seen generosity to anyone in need as an essential response of discipleship, and had connected it with the freely-embraced cost and vulnerability of life in the kingdom. Here, he chose simply to require that it be done in secret (6.4); and contrasted such anonymity with the ostentatious giving of Pharisees (6.2).

Prayer. Jesus next addressed the issue of prayer (6.5-15). The point of prayer for disciples, in contrast to Pharisees and others, was not to look good before others (or even to feel good in oneself?). Prayer was to be done in private—a personal interaction with God who sees in secret (6.6).
Matthew then proceeded to critique what he saw as the Gentile approach to prayer (though it is to be found, in fact, among practitioners of all religions)—a search to control God by the selection and use of the right words and formulas. So often, prayer can in fact betray a lack of confident trust in God, rather than be a trusting encounter with a loving and caring God (6.7-8). Mature love surrenders the desire for control and is content to remain powerless and vulnerable before the one it loves.

Within this discussion of prayer Matthew inserted Jesus’ outline of the prayer of the Christian community, what we have come to call ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ (6.9-15).

Throughout the Sermon, Jesus had referred to God as ‘your Father’. It is with this Father that the community engages as sons and daughters. It is a prayer made in solidarity with all fellow disciples, whom it recognises as brothers and sisters. The attitude is respectful, but intimate and trusting.

The first three statements are phrased reverentially in the passive voice: ‘hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth’. Centuries before, the prophet Ezekiel had spoken of God hallowing his Name by reforming conquered Israel and making of it a nation that would respect justice and act with a ‘pure heart’ (Ezekiel 36.23-27). In the present context, the community prays that God would once more hallow his name through the coming of his kingdom. In the mind of Jesus, that kingdom would take shape as people accepted the vision of God, allowed themselves to be empowered by God’s inclusive love, and did God’s will in practice by acting according to the values of mercy, peacemaking and purity of heart.

The thrust of the prayer is not to direct the hand of God, but to keep the mission of the community ever before its mind. The only life-giving power abroad in the world is the creative love of God. As that is believed, understood and taken hold of by disciples, they learn to critique their present cultural life-styles and, hand in hand with God, find themselves wanting and empowered to shape God’s kingdom on earth.

The prayer next asks God to give to disciples, each day, their daily bread. The request echoes God’s feeding of the Hebrew people in the desert of Sinai with bread from heaven, the manna (Exodus 16.17-21). According to the tradition, that bread was sufficient each day for everyone. But its nature was such that it could not be hoarded for future need. Receiving the bread was a clear act of trust in the God of ‘enough’.

At the same time, the request expresses hope in the fullness of the kingdom when those who hunger and thirst for a world where justice reigns will have their fill. When prayed by disciples in today’s global world, most of those praying do not have enough bread for their needs. The God of ‘enough’ is not the problem. Among the reasons for their poverty is the fact that the wealthy nations of the world choose not to share from their own relative super-abundance. The prayer presents a profound challenge for disciples in the Western world.

The prayer then has disciples pray for God’s forgiveness. As in the earlier part of the prayer, the thrust of the plea is not to influence an otherwise unwilling or distracted God, but to alert disciples to the ongoing dynamic of life in the kingdom. Discipleship demands constant opening to the forgiving God, and surrender to the dynamic that carries disciples, in turn, to love and forgive each other. Rivalry and hostility are etched deep in the hearts of
all; they are the conditioned habits of the kingdoms of the world. Only gradually do disciples become aware how much these attitudes dominate their own lives. For Jesus, freely and deliberately chosen forgiveness was the way of the kingdom, the one and only way to break the destructive cycle of revenge and retaliation. It was firstly the way of God.

The petition used the word ‘debts’, rather than trespasses or sins; and thereby recalled the beautiful Hebrew tradition of the Jubilee Year, when slaves were freed, land was returned to its original owners, and debts were wiped. Obviously, the word was used metaphorically in relation to God; but its use served to situate discipleship within the context of God’s vision for a just world, modelled on, and empowered by, the freely given and indiscriminate love of God.

The prayer concludes with the plea that God protect disciples from temptation and the power of the evil one. Within the Gospel world view, temptation and testing by the evil one were specific. Matthew showed Jesus being tempted at the beginning of his public life and again immediately before his arrest and murder. The ultimate thrust of those temptations was to abandon his mission. Freely facing those temptations, Jesus reaffirmed his role to confront the world with its instinctive envy and violence, and to show another way, the way of the kingdom, which was the way of love, with its vulnerability and openness to exploitation. Matthew had indicated in the earlier part of his Sermon many of the practical applications of this approach.

For fragile disciples, the vulnerability of love is always problematic. Their efforts to pray the Lord’s Prayer honestly leads them to confront their weakness and invites them to turn in trust towards God.

At the end of the Lord’s Prayer Matthew reiterated the indispensable need for forgiveness; and added a statement which, on face value, insisted that God would not forgive those who refused to forgive others. Later in his narrative, he would attach a similar threat to one of Jesus’ parables (18.35). Luke’s Gospel carries no such reference. The observation would seem to have either originated in Matthew’s community or been personally added by Matthew to emphasise his point.

Matthew’s desire to highlight forgiveness of others as constitutive of discipleship was laudable. However, in doing so, he made God’s forgiveness seem conditional. God’s love is not conditional. Indeed, God’s love is the starting point of all forgiveness. Until disciples understand God’s forgiveness, welcome it into their own lives, and allow themselves to be caught up into its intrinsic dynamism, they remain unmotivated and unable to forgive others. Perhaps Matthew’s intention was primarily to warn disciples—in the strongest terms he could think of.

Fasting. After his comments on almsgiving and prayer, Matthew recorded Jesus’ observation on fasting (6.16-18). As with almsgiving, Jesus assumed that disciples would fast, and warned that such fasting not be undertaken to gain honour from others. It was to be done in secret.

Jesus did not address the issue of why fast at all. He was aware how the prophets before him had criticised the human propensity to substitute religious ritual, including fasting, for the more demanding need for justice and peace. Later in the Gospel he would condemned scribes and Pharisees for falling into that trap (23.23-24). His advice to disciples was ambivalent: ‘The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them … The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast (9.15).’ Did Matthew regard the bridegroom as present or absent? At the end of his Gospel he would have the risen (and ascended) Jesus assuring the disciples that he would be ‘with (them) always until the end of the age’ (28.20).

Reward and Punishment

On a number of occasions in the Sermon,
Matthew recorded Jesus using the language of reward and punishment. How are these terms to be understood?

There is a passage in the book ‘The Way of a Pilgrim’, a classic of Russian Orthodox spirituality, where the author wisely addressed the problem:

One who performs saving works simply from the fear of Hell follows the way of bondage, and he who does the same just in order to be rewarded with the Kingdom of Heaven follows the path of a bargainer with God. The one they call a slave, the other a hireling. But God wants us to come to him as sons to their Father ... he wants us to find our happiness in uniting ourselves with Him in a saving union of mind and heart. (SPCK, London, 1986, p.36)

God’s rewards were not Matthew’s prime concern, and may have served more as a literary balance to the ‘honour’ rewards universally sought within the culture. However, his references to punishment (more graphically described later in the narrative) often seem to be clearly intended.

People will understand the language of reward and punishment differently, depending on their levels of moral maturity.

Some will see them as extrinsic consequences, arbitrarily determined by some authority figure (in the current context, by God).

Others will consider them still as extrinsically imposed but no longer arbitrarily determined—depending, rather, on whether their behaviour has measured up to the expectations of significant others (of God) or to the reasoned requirements of social (or divine) law and order. Both categories have yet to embark on the journey of second conversion.

At a more mature level of sophistication, reward and punishment are not regarded as extrinsic factors at all. Rather, reward is no more than the conscious awareness (carrying into eternity) of inner harmony associated with genuine value and punishment is precisely the dissonance consequent on humanly destructive behaviour. Growth in love is its own (eternal) reward; refusal to love its own (eternal) punishment.

As with Jesus’ earlier illustrations of moral behaviour, the references to reward and punishment more aptly have the force of parables, teasing the imagination and inviting ever deeper reflection.

Acquiring the Mind and Heart of Jesus

Accepting the vulnerability associated with genuine love, responding non-violently to aggression in ways that invite conversion, breaking free from the universally accepted assumptions and customs of the culture, do not come easily. They suppose a clear and unshakable trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Such trust calls for continually deepening wisdom and maturity. Acquiring the mind and the heart of Jesus takes time, and does not happen automatically.

What are some of the factors that enable such growth? Matthew addressed these issues in what remains of the Sermon. (Most of the teachings are to be found also in Luke’s Gospel, where they are not collated, as in Matthew’s Sermon, but spread throughout the narrative.)

Human Desire. Matthew began with two comments dealing with the crucial issue of human desire. The first contrasted treasure on earth with treasure in heaven (6.19-21), and concluded with the observation, ‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’. The second emphasised the need for clear and deliberate choice, ‘you cannot serve God and wealth’ (6.24).

The underlying issue is: what fascinates the heart? As human beings, our evolutionary inheritance has bequeathed to us the basic needs of survival, social belonging and security. These needs become translated into myriad desires that reach far beyond the original needs, and whose specific shapes we learn from others. In a world of limited resources, these desires give rise to competition, rivalry, envy, resentment and violence. It is these desires that shape the customs and interactions of the societies and cultures in which we live.

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They become the values of Empire, the antithesis of the values of the Kingdom of God. Usually they are unrecognised; and their power is greater the more they remain hidden from awareness. The behaviours criticised by Jesus in the early section of the Sermon were all expressions of these desires.

Jesus understood that the basic human needs for survival, acceptance and security were, at their deepest level and in their proper human expression, the needs for life, love and trust. These he saw originating from and guaranteed by the creating and redeeming God. It is this insight that defines the true ‘treasures in heaven’, and that grounds the choice for God rather than wealth (and all it is mistakenly thought to bring).

Connecting the two observations of Jesus was his comment on the need for the ‘healthy eye’, the eye that sees with the clarity of love and discerns between superficial desires and the deepest needs of human hearts (6.22-23). This ‘healthy eye’ is at the same time a prerequisite for and a product of the on-going journey of conversion. It is the fruit of self-knowledge (which he would soon address) and a contemplative response to experience.

Freedom to Trust. Matthew then added Jesus’ comment about worry (6.25-34), the frantic searching for security and control: ‘What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?’ Not that these things do not have their relative importance. What Jesus criticised was the insecurity driving the questions, and the lack of trust that they identified.

His response was to say that worry was unnecessary, and of itself unproductive and impotent: The birds sought their food, plants grew, the human body functioned - but they were not driven by worry. God provided resources in abundance. They only needed to be found.

In the human sphere, the greater problem lay in the fact that nature’s abundant resources were not being shared. The peasants of Galilee and the poor of Antioch went hungry, unhoused and poorly dressed, because those with power were unwilling to share, ultimately because they were themselves frightened of the desire-driven selfishness of everyone else. Theirs, precisely, was a problem of trust.

Jesus’ solution was clear: ‘Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well’. Firstly, learn to trust, then learn to share, and all will have their fill.

Self-awareness. Where to start to deal with the fearful selfishness and rivalry driving social interactions? Matthew listed two teachings of Jesus pertinent to the problem, both of them in their separate ways addressing the issue of self-knowledge.

He began by briefly revisiting the comment made by Jesus earlier in the Sermon (5.21-26) where he had warned against anger and condemnation (which could lead in extreme cases to the ultimate response of murder) (5.21-26). This time (7.1-5), he insisted: ‘Don’t judge— or you will be judged similarly’. Matthew’s use of the passive voice probably meant that God would be the judge. As noted earlier, such threats are best understood as quasi-parabolaic statements, interpreted differently according to people’s levels of moral maturity.

Jesus then gave the wonderfully graphic illustration of what current psychology would call the process of transference or projection. We see the ‘speck in our neighbour’s eye’ but do not see the ‘log’ in our own.

Effectively Jesus was addressing the problem at the root of much injustice and aggression, both personal and social. What disturbs us in others, particularly when the disturbance carries a strong emotional content, is almost certainly what we fail to recognise in ourselves. We see others as competitors, as threats to our own self-interest and desires. We blame them for their negative attitudes and hostility towards us. In reality, by blaming them, we divert attention from the hostility and violence unconsciously lurking in our own hearts.

The problem is exacerbated in the broader
society. Rather than addressing the simmering hostility poisoning community relationships, societies scapegoat unpopular minorities, or other nations, and blame them for their problems. The problem is never with ‘us’—it lies with ‘the axis of evil’ arrayed against us! Blame the other! The solution to the problem, in Jesus’ mind, was simple—self-awareness. Without it, genuine conversion is impossible.

Matthew continued the reflection by recounting Jesus’ teaching about the need ‘to ask, search and knock’ (7.7-11). Jesus addressed the question introduced earlier in the Sermon—the confusion between needs and desires. Desires come to be felt as needs. Ultimately, they become disconnected from needs, and assume value in their own right. How to break free from the deception? The answer again is simple—by growing in self-knowledge.

We begin by bringing our desires into the open; and we do it in the presence of God. We start from where we are, by ‘asking’ God for what we think we want. We need to be honest and real; otherwise God cannot make contact with us. If our immediate request is not answered, provided we persevere by searching and knocking (looking into the unexplored), we begin to question ourselves whether what we have asked for is what we really want. Our search goes deeper. Over time, with persistence, our prayer changes in light of our growing insight. Our desires align with our basic human needs simply for life, love and trust. We finish up recognising that what we really want for ourselves is precisely what God wishes to grant. We discover that the Lord’s Prayer becomes our own prayer.

Between Jesus’ two reflections on self-knowledge, Matthew inserted a short but puzzling warning not to ‘give what is holy to dogs’ or to ‘throw pearls before swine’ (7.6). Without any context beyond that given here, it is difficult to be sure what Jesus was referring to, or indeed why Matthew chose to insert it. It is not found in Luke’s Gospel. For the Jewish members of Matthew’s community, ‘dogs’ may have been a derogatory term sometimes used for Gentiles, and mention of ‘swine’ carried a similar connotation. But there were also Gentile members in the community, who would hardly have appreciated being referred to in that way. Some more general application seems to be needed.

Why did people insult, revile and persecute disciples (or, in our Western world, simply ignore us, see us as irrelevant or pushing hidden agendas)? Why is it that things that excite us and seem so clear and even beautiful do not affect others in the same way? The blame may not always lie solely with others. We need to be aware of the possibility of the ‘log’ in our own eye—our own prejudices—obscuring the way we see others.

Clearly, we are sent to be salt of the earth and light of the world (5.13-16). Already the Sermon has made the point that the expectation of being misunderstood and opposed is no reason to desist from sharing what we believe in. How to evangelise? Insistence on what we see to be the truth, aggressively asserted from a position of assumed superiority, often invites automatic rejection, especially in a world that has become cynical and anti-authoritarian. Pope Paul VI wrote insightfully about the need to enter into respectful dialogue with others as the primary means of evangelisation.

**Practical Reminders.** Before summing up the Sermon, Matthew added two more brief observations of Jesus.

The first was an example of widely shared wisdom, already appreciated by Jewish scribes. Of itself, it sounds rather utilitarian and pragmatic, a rule of thumb, by no means exhaustive but helping to translate into practice the multiple imperatives of the Law: ‘in everything do to others as you would have them do to you’ (7.12). Within the Sermon it presumed the motivation and the all-inclusive vision of the kingdom already indicated—the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets’. Dis-
principles were to take the initiative to break the endless cycle of desire, envy and hostility in which the world was enslaved, and meet them, rather, with consistent mercy, non-violent love and reconciliation.

The second observation was simply a reminder that the ‘road to life is hard’ and the ‘gate is narrow’ (7.13-14). The alternatives are clear. The choice for life must be deliberate. The observation did not say anything necessarily about the relative populations of heaven and hell. Jesus’ immediate concern was with the personal and social experience of life in God’s kingdom on earth. Certainly, present choices will resonate into eternity; but about the details of that eternity we know little. We all need to trust in a merciful and forgiving God.

The Imperative of Action. The Sermon concluded with three illustrations of the insistent need to put the message of Jesus into practice.

The first (7.15-20) maintained that the criterion by which orthodoxy would be discerned (distinguishing the ‘false’ from the true prophet) was ‘good fruit’. The second (7.21-23) clarified the meaning of ‘good fruit’, stating that it consisted in doing ‘the will of my Father in heaven’, namely, that his kingdom come on earth. Truly orthodox disciples, therefore, would be those resolutely committed to practical mercy, purity of heart and peace-making, who, by their lived example, called people away from competitiveness and rivalry to reconciliation and mutual support. They would truly be like ‘a wise man who built his house on rock’ (7.24-27).

Concluding Comment

Matthew concluded with the crowds’ astonishment at the authority with which Jesus taught (7.29). Whatever about the crowds’ discernment, for Christian disciples the authority of Jesus lies firmly in the truth of his resurrection. Jesus had lived what he taught. He had loved even his enemies, accepting the vulnerability and openness to victimisation contained in all genuine love. He could rejoice and be glad. He had faced into death, trusting in God. And God had raised the crucified Jesus. By removing the finality of death, God showed that trust, mercy and hope transcend human limitations. Though open to exploitation in the short term, they are the indispensable means of entry into the kingdom. This ‘healthy eye’ is at the same time a prerequisite for and a product of the on-going journey of conversion. It is the fruit of self-knowledge (which he would soon address) and a contemplative response to experience.

In the piety of the church God has often been tamed and made innocuous; the living God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3.6.14) is barely recognised in the ‘dear God’ of pious parlance. Therefore it does not suffice to speak of vague experiences of the divine, it is essential to speak of the God to whom the Bible bears witness, to be precise, of the ‘God of Jesus Christ’, that is to speak of God as he has been revealed in the face of Jesus Christ as a benevolent God, friend to mankind.

I LOVE THE story of the abbot whose monastery was slowly but surely losing all signs of life. In desperation he journeyed to the guru to seek counsel. The pleading woes of the abbot over, the wise man reflected and simply said ‘one of you is the messiah’. With those few words the world of the abbot was transformed and when back at the monastery he shared them with his fellow monks the whole life and style of the monastery changed too.

The genius of the prophet was to re-focus their attention to the fact that all that they sought was embedded in relationships. How easy it is for us to forget that clear scriptural direction given in phrases such as ‘love one another as I have loved you’ or ‘if we do not love our neighbour who we see, how can we claim to love the God we do not see’ and as often as we do it to one of the least of our brethren, we do it to all. The importance of relationships for life both within us and between us is obvious.

While we may bemoan the many glaring failures in relationships that mar our current human landscape, it is heartening to note that amongst the young, relationships are of the utmost interest and concern; the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of them is all important. The problem is not the lack of interest rather it is a lack of understanding and appreciation that permeates our culture. In a word, we who are called to be the bearers of wisdom, along with our youth are in dire need of education and formation concerning relationships and that means love. When the Beatles in June 1967 launched their hit song ‘All you Need Is Love’, they had it right and it is still right! When we open out the mystery further and claim that relationships which are forged in and through love are moved by possibly the strongest of all our God given drives we are beginning to draw an exciting picture. When we name that all important drive as our sexuality, we are starting to see some shape forming in a tantalising confusion around which too many of us can say little or nothing of worth.

It is against the above background that modern prophets within our Catholic Tradition such the English psychiatrist Dr Jack Dominian have reflected long and desperately on relationships under headings such as marriage, sex and love. From another continent the American Jesuit priest psychiatrist James J. Gill spoke to us of ‘the great gaps and distortions in people’s minds around sexuality’. He went on to say, ‘So many are victims of ignorance and dysfunctional myths that need not exist; … these distortions and ‘ignorances’ are causing great pain and awful behaviour and are a burden to the Church in its mission to evangelize’.

Recently another voice joined the chorus in the person of Dr John E. Perito, a man who is at the same time a committed Catholic, a spouse, a parent and grandparent and a medical psychiatrist who specializes in the knowledge of human nature and behaviour.

There are those, even in high places in our Catholic community who think that we can be immune from the present challenges that arise from these basic areas of relationships, love

BOOK REVIEW

and sexuality. For such as these Perito’s first book in 2003 was titled ‘Contemporary Catholic Sexuality—What is Taught and What is Practised’ and it firmly places our contemporary Church within ‘the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age.’ If we were not aware of it before, in that work we discover that many Catholics, in good faith, are unable to accept the Church’s current teachings on many topics central to relationships, love and sex and I suspect that it is this fact more than any other that is eating away at our Church’s wellbeing and mission. Whatever we might do and however we might do it, if we are not examining and addressing these questions we are playing outside the main game and doing no more than ‘playing’ if even we can be said to be doing that.

Traditionally prophets speak in poetic terms and inspire rather than instruct mechanically. Aware of this we cannot expect that they will have all the answers or meet all the objections but if we do disregard them, we do so at our peril.

Towards the end of 2008 John Perito published a long awaited second book entitled ‘Adolescent Sexuality. Too Much Too Soon. Spiritual and Sexual Guidance for Parents’. When it comes to topics such as this most of us need what we might describe as permission to discuss and a language to capture and deal with the matters that are involved. One need only reflect on the difficulty parents still face in speaking amongst themselves or with their children about something as basic as masturbation, fantasies, sexual diseases, sin and conscience. John Perito goes a long way in these directions as he writes for both parents and adolescents and he covers most, if not all questions they might have. For both his aim is to help them become both committed lovers and effective parents. His clear purpose is to educate, not simply to indoctrinate or train; and for him education is an ongoing process leading to lively development and freedom.

Along with all his competent contemporaries Perito situates sexuality within the context of love and love in the context of relationships; making love is synonymous with making a relationship. At that initial point he locates his criteria for the extensive discernment that has to be made concerning this integral part of our lives. He identifies himself clearly with Christ whom scripture proclaims as coming that we might have life and have it to the full. [John 10.10.] For Perito things are promoted or argued against depending on how they promote relationships and well-being.

Would that it were so simple! Unfortunately, as we have already noted, sexuality, doubtless due to its delicate nature has attracted to itself a plethora of taboos and dysfunctional myths over the years. For various reasons many of these no longer make sense or at least not in the same way now that sciences such as biology and scriptural theology have come of age. One needs only to note the many ritual purity laws which played a part in an earlier dispensation but no longer in the dispensation given by Christ, and yet many want to persist in retaining them! Some may look for some inherent value in a particular action aside from its role in sustaining life and/or loving relationships but other than sustaining life and loving relationships what could that inherent value be? In itself sex or virginity isn’t something that designates one as special or not, it all depends on the meaning of our doing or not doing.

Some time ago I heard a moral theologian reflecting on what would have happened if we had decided to deal with our appetite for food in a way similar to the way we deal with our sexual appetite. I cannot recall all of his many fascinating comparisons but I do recall these which I hope will convey what he was getting at. He speculated that if we treated food as we approached sex then any pleasure sought solely for its own sake would be sinful and we could expect that chewing gum would be forbidden as providing pleasure and satisfaction without any chance of nourishment, cookery
books would become pornographic and restaurants and such places outlawed where a main focus is clearly on playing around with food in order to make it as pleasant as possible.

Not only are there complications arising from the backlog of past and outdated insights, there is the complexity of modern life which is constantly throwing up questions which clearly outsmart earlier wisdoms. It is a particular blessing of Perito’s recent book that current issues are faced without fear or prejudice. To assist him in this task he has engaged a team of people to identify contemporary issues and also to identify the contemporary cultural position on these issues. The importance of these cultural positions which might also be referred to as community values is that they construct the environment within which we, especially the young, must live our lives. In the context of the Gospel parable which refers to both the wheat and weeds within the Kingdom we are mindful that this milieu embraces both light and darkness, truth and falsity; but our youth need to have it explored in the process of true discernment.

It is of particular value to have the wisdom of a wise and qualified person of integrity alongside the wisdom of the ages and the wisdom of the masses. This is what Perito’s book provides us with as the ‘gene pool’ from which we can form and help others form conscientious decisions. Education implies providing people with the pros and cons for making informed decisions. It goes well beyond and is more effective than simply telling them either to do or not to do which if done without appreciation and understanding is little more than another form of slavery! Assertion without convincing arguments is not good enough nor has it ever been.

God’s sexual gifts are amongst his most precious and it is paramount that we help our young to think positively about relationships and not just about sex, to promote love not fear and hope not despair; John Perito in writing his book clearly has this same dream.

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We all need to experience eros-love from those close to us. This is because it would be impossible to live the high demands of agape-love without some experience of already being loved however imperfectly. We need to feel loved, if we in turn are to give it.

NEW RELIGIOUS BOOKS BY AUSTRALASIAN AUTHORS

KEVIN MARK

Benedict XVI and the Search for Truth; Robert Tilley; St Pauls; PB $29.95 [9781921032264]; 287pp; 215x140mm; 2007

Guide to the thought of Pope Benedict XVI, arguing that there is continuity between his prolific theological writings as Joseph Ratzinger and his first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est. The book is based on an adult education course and seeks to be accessible to a wide audience. Focuses on the philosophical principles of Benedict’s thought and argues that fundamentally his is a quest for truth. First chapter includes a biographical overview. Endnotes; bibliography. Author received Divinity Honours and Masters degrees, and a PhD, from the University of Sydney. Converted to the Catholic Church in 1997 and is an accredited lecturer in theology at the Sydney College of Divinity and a lecturer in arts, philosophy and religion at Aquinas Academy, Sydney.

A Cross Too Heavy: Eugenio Pacelli: Politics and the Jews of Europe, 1917-1943; Paul O’Shea; Rosenberg Publishing; PB $35.00 [9781877058714]; 392pp; 225x150mm; 2008

Account by an Australian Jesuit, who taught theology for 33 years at the Gregorian University, Rome, of the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. He examines the reception of its teaching and considers how it should continue to be
received and implemented in the current century. Topics include liturgical renewal, moral theology, relations with other Christians and those of other faiths, and the role of theologians. The concluding chapter presents the author’s dreams and hopes for the future Church. Includes some autobiographical material. Appendices present selected Postconciliar texts; endnotes; select; bibliography; index of names. Author is now research professor at St Mary’s University College, Twickenham, England. Among his many books are *Retrieving Fundamental Theology* (1993) and *The Tripersonal God* (2004).

**So You’re Working for the Catholic Church: A friendly guide to the Catholic tradition;** Tony Doherty; John Garratt Publishing; PB $14.95 [9781920721589]; 56pp; 295x210mm; 2008

Guide to the fundamental beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church, presented in contemporary language intended to be accessible to adults not previously, or not currently, involved in the Church. This volume is intended for staff in Catholic institutions such as hospitals, schools and social welfare organisations. The book has since been republished with alternative titles, covers and prefaces (but otherwise the same) to reach additional audiences: *So You’re Seeking to Renew Your Faith* (ISBN 9781920721671) and *So You’re Sending Your Child to a Catholic School* (ISBN 9781920721664). The presentation is somewhat magazine-like, using colour photographs and illustrations throughout. Glossary; collection of quotations from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; listing of historical facts about the Australian Church. Author is a priest of the Archbishop of Sydney who coordinated the 1995 visit of Pope John Paul II, was Dean of St Mary’s Cathedral and Director of the Archdiocese’s Adult Education, and is currently a parish priest.

**Not under Bondage: Biblical divorce for abuse, adultery and desertion;** Barbara Roberts; Maschil Press (www.notunderbondage.com), dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB $24.95 [9780980355345]; 190pp; 230x155mm; 2008

Written within a Protestant perspective, looking for definitive teaching within the biblical texts, this study aims to understand under what circumstances the Bible permits divorce and whether a divorced Christian may remarry. A particular focus is the choices available to those who are Christian victims of marital abuse. Author explains the scriptural dilemmas of abuse victims, examines the scriptures and scholarly research, and argues that the Bible sets victims of abuse free from bondage and guilt. Includes 11 appendices on topics such as Augustine on his parent’s marriage; where Jesus agreed and disagreed with Shammai and Hillel; and a brief history of doctrines on divorce and remarriage. Endnotes; bibliography; subject index; scripture index. Author lives in Ballarat, Victoria, and herself experienced an abusive marriage.

**Taking God to Heart: A living spirituality;** Brian Gallagher MSC; St Pauls; PB $14.95 [9781921032905]; 78pp; 215x140mm; 2008.

Spirituality text arising from the author’s 25 years of ministry in spirituality and spiritual direction. Author sees it as ‘a reflection on how God seems to work in people’, giving ‘a context or framework for deeper appreciation of our experience of God’. Incorporates accounts of the author’s own personal spiritual experiences, as well as quotations, some at length, from a wide range of sources. Foreword by Peter Malone MSC. Author is a Missionaries of the Sacred Heart priest and founder of the Heart of Life Spirituality Centre in Melbourne, and The Cliffs Retreat in Shoreham, Victoria, where he currently lives. The publication of the book coincided with the 25th anniversary of the foundation of Heart of Life.

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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

April to July 2009

From Passion Sunday (April 5) to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 26)

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 of Year B, between April and July, 2009, from Passion Sunday of Holy Week, (April 5) to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 26) Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The readings over this period move us through the Season of Easter. After the celebrations of the key Feasts of Ascension and Pentecost—which conclude the Easter Season—and Trinity, and Body and Blood (May 24-June 14) the Sunday liturgical calendar moves us back into Ordinary Time, with OT 12 (June 21).

1. The First readings during the Season of Easter are a significant change from the usual. Usually these readings are drawn from the First (‘Old’) Testament. This Easter they come from the Book of Acts, Luke’s second volume that reflects on the vitality of the early Jewish-Christian community infused with the power of the Risen Jesus. These readings help us reflect on the meaning of Easter for our local church communities. They describe how followers of Jesus might live, confident of Jesus’ ongoing presence to them.

   • In the time after Easter, as we return to the Ordinary Time readings (Sundays OT 12-17), the lectionary picks up selections from the First Testament with a cross section of biblical genres: the prophets (OT 14, 15, 16), wisdom writings (OT 12) and one selection from the historical books (2 Kings, OT 17). We must continue to resist any tendency that harmonises these First Testament readings with the Gospel, or regards them simply as precursors to the Second Testament. Rather, we need to reflect upon them from the perspective of the Israelite people, their original audience.

2. The Second Reading is generally from the letter tradition of the Second Testament. These semi-continuous readings are usually from the letters attributed to Paul. In OT 12-14 the selection is from 2 Corinthians, a compilation of at least two other genuine letters from Paul and written around 57 from Macedonia. In OT 15-17, the selections are from Ephesians.

   • The letter to the Ephesians, written in the 60s by a disciple of Paul, reflects further on Paul’s mission and seeks to apply Paul’s
teaching to a new situation, while drawing closely on another ‘post-Pauline’ letter, the Letter to the Colossians. Our liturgical readings (Eph 1-4, Sun 15 to 17) offer the heart of the writer’s theology—conviction of God’s involvement in the world, through the church, and revealed through Jesus. Jesus’ role is also reflected on and proclaimed.

3. The Gospel: As noted in the last Compass edition, we continue into Year B and read from Mark’s Gospel, though John’s Gospel is preferred during Easter. Even within the Markan cycle, though, John reappears. The Markan portrait of the more human Jesus seems to be ‘filled out’ by John’s more ‘spiritual’ Gospel that emphasizes Jesus’ transcendence and divine origins. This is clear in the Jn 6 reading in OT 17. (Scholars would now seriously question this approach to have Mk’s earthy Jesus balanced by Jn’s more ethereal Jesus).

- Mark’s Gospel emphasises themes of misunderstanding, loneliness, struggle and failure permeate the gospel. These themes affect the way Mark portrays Jesus and the disciples. Struggle is a helpful theme in the contemporary Christian community that might be explored in this time of the liturgical year up to Ordinary Time 17, especially in the light of international, national and local events which can be named in the homily and reflected upon in the light of Mark.

- John’s Gospel proclaimed on the Sundays of Easter 4-6 focus our attention on Jesus, God’s glorified presence who is able to shepherd, invite us to abide with him and God, and experience deep joy. These are essential theological insights that can be celebrated through John’s portrait of Jesus.

Finally, a word about the festivals that conclude the Easter Season and lead us back into Ordinary Time: Ascension and Pentecost clearly complete the mystery of God’s action revealed in the Risen Jesus, now with God forever (Ascension) who sends God’s Spirit which empowers the nascent Christian Community (Pentecost). Rather than focussing on Pentecost as the ‘birthday’ of the Church, perhaps a more fruitful approach might be the empowerment of the Christian Community by God’s Spirit. The spirit enables the community to be formally constituted as God’s people, a theme that continues the Sinai event celebrated each year by the Jewish community on the feast of Pentecost. Pentecost also provides a moment to celebrate the way the Holy Spirit empowers our local faith communities with the charism of leadership, especially of the baptised.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

April 5—Passion: Mk 11:1-10. Jesus’ disciples welcome him into Jerusalem. Is 50:4-7. God’s servant is attentive and trusts God, despite rejection and suffering. Phil 2:6-11. One of the great songs of Holy Week: Jesus is God’s servant, who chooses to be like all human beings, and God exalts him. Mk 14-15. The climax of Mk, the passion story of Jesus’ suffering and ultimate abandonment. Theme—Abandonment. Jesus comes to claim his people as their leader and his leadership is one of suffering; Jesus’ who dies abandoned is able to identify with all who feel abandoned, desolate and lonely. Mk’s Jesus is not an exalted figure, but misunderstood and rejected. The passion story from Mk offers an opportunity to identify with Jesus in this week, and to be with those who experience abandonment and isolation in our world.

April 9—The Lord’s Supper: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14. The first Passover is remembered: God delivers Israel through the blood of the Passover Lamb. 1 Cor 11:23-26. Paul reminds the divided Christians at Corinth about what lies at the heart of celebrating the Lord’s Sup-
April 10—Good Friday: Is 52:13-53:12. This is the climactic ‘servant song’ celebrating the vicarious nature of the servant’s suffering, for the welfare of all. Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Jesus is compassionate High Priest, with God, who knows our sufferings and weaknesses. Jn 18:19-42. This passion narrative, unlike Mk’s, is a true celebration of victory over death. In fourteen dramatic scenes Jesus is presented as Lamb, judge, victor, source of Church’s life. Theme—Victory: Jesus, as the Passover Lamb who brings people to life, is victorious over death. Rather than a sombre or mournful liturgy, the readings encourage a confidence in God who is able to bring victory from death. This is a much-needed focus in a world preoccupied with war and retaliation.

April 12—Easter: Feast of the Resurrection: Mk 16:1-8. This is the most important gospel proclamation in the whole year: Mark’s Jesus is resurrected and the women are encouraged to ponder the place of emptiness, the tomb. Resurrection occurs in the most unlikely setting and moment—the place of death and hopelessness.

April 19—Easter 2: Acts 4:32-35. The power of the resurrection is evident in the fledgling Christian community of Jerusalem. 1 Jn 5:1-6. Faith in Jesus and his resurrection makes us ‘begotten by God.’ We are in tune with God and experience God’s life within. Jn 20:19-31. The resurrected Jesus offers his frightened disciples peace. He empowers them with authority to forgive sin. Theme—Forgiveness. The resurrected Jesus continues to breathe into his community today the spirit of peace and forgiveness. Where is this seen, identified and celebrated?

May 3—Easter 4: Acts 4:7-12. The power of the resurrection is evident in this act of healing by Peter and John. 1 Jn 3:1-2. We are God’s beloved and, like the risen Jesus, we shall see God as God truly is. Jn 10:11-18. Jesus is the good shepherd who brings all to unity. Theme—God Shepherds us: In the midst of our struggles and community tensions, God seeks to love, shepherd and bring us into communion.

May 10—Easter 5: Acts 9:26-31. Paul, now a zealous disciple of the risen Jesus, preaches ‘boldly’ though suspected. 1 Jn 3:18-24. We are called to love and live without guilt. We have a spirit of ‘boldness’ that is of God. Jn 15:1-8. We ‘abide’ (‘remain’, ‘dwell’) in communion with God and Jesus. We share God’s inner life. Theme—Abiding with God. Communion with God spills over into community life. God’s life abides with us. How does this faith community express tangibly God’s abiding communion with humanity, creation and within the church?

May 17—Easter 6: Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48. A watershed moment in the growth of the early Jewish-Christian community and moves beyond its Jewish roots to the non-Jewish (‘Gentile’) world; Peter baptises a Gentile Roman household. 1 Jn 4:7-10. Jesus reveals God’s love for us, to the point of death. Jn 15:9-17. God’s love for Jesus spills over into the hearts of his disciples so that they may experience God’s joy Theme—God’s Joy: An abiding spirit of joy may be difficult to identify in our world. God’s desire is for all to be happy. This ‘joy’ is celebrated and revealed at the heart of the Christian community. What are some identifiable signs of this?

of Jesus’ ongoing presence, which will come again in power. *Eph 4:1-13.* Jesus’ communion with God (‘ascension’) is the source of the ministerial gifts of the Christian community. *Mk 16:15-20.* This later ending of MK’s gospel emphasises the risen and ascended Jesus’ victory over evil and the confident proclamation of the Gospel. **Theme—Jesus’ Ongoing Presence:** Jesus’ presence is revealed in surprising and unexpected ways, less physical but no less real. Who in the local community reveal this presence?

**May 31—Pentecost:** *Acts 2:1-11.* Luke re-shapes the familiar OT Sinai story where God forms a new community. This community is freshly expressed through the action of God’s unquenchable and unifying Spirit. *Gal 5:16-25.* Paul expresses the signs which indicate the absence and presence of God’s Spirit. He encourages a life guided by God’s Spirit *Jn 15:26-27:* 16:12-15. The Spirit is our advocate to God. This Spirit is revealed in the charism of truth. **Theme—God’s Spirit:** God’s Spirit is present and active within and around us. Today is a celebration of this Spirit that helps to identify and acknowledge God’s ongoing action in human history. How is God’s Spirit active in the local community?

**June 7—Trinity:** *Dt 4:32-34, 39-40.* Moses reminds the Israelites about the nature of their God: creator, powerful presence and liberator. *Rom 8:14-17.* God’s Spirit enables our spirit to know God as the intimate One, named ‘Abba.’ *Mt 28:16-20.* These are the final words in Mt, of the Risen Jesus, encouraging the disciples to make disciples of all nations in the name of the triune God. **Theme—God’s Presence:** God is present in human history, among human beings and creation. This presence invites intimacy. How is this intimacy with God expressed in our local faith communities?

**June 14—Body and Blood:** *Ex 24:3-8.* Moses’ symbolic act with stones, burnt offerings and blood ratifies God’s communion with the Israelites. *Heb 9:11-15.* Heard by Jewish followers of Jesus, Jesus is portrayed as the eternal high priest mediating a new covenant with God on behalf of the people. *Mk 14:12-16, 22-26.* The gospel narrative of Jesus’ final meal with his disciples. **Theme—God dines with Us:** The Israelite meal was a symbol of kinship solidarity and communion. God’s meals echoed throughout history and especially practiced in the meal ministry of Jesus (highlighted in final meal with his disciples) symbolise God’s passion for humanity. God is on the side of us and creation.

**June 28—Ordinary Time 13:** *Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24.* God’s creative presence gives life and goodness. *2 Cor 8:7,9,13-15.* Paul encourages sharing for others in need, in the spirit of Jesus. *Mk 5:21-43.* Two intertwined stories about women healed and the faith that brings that healing. **Theme—God’s Presence:** Jesus is the revealer of God’s healing presence that restores and brings into community. Our liturgy allows a celebration of that presence still powerfully active in this community.

**July 5—Ordinary Time 14:** *Ez 2:2-5.* God declares to the exiled people that God is sending a prophet to them. *2 Cor 12:7-10.* Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ becomes his means to faith in God in his weakness. *Mk 6:1-6.* Jesus is
portrayed as God’s prophet rejected by his hometown. Theme—The Prophetic tradition. The role and importance of the prophet has always been acknowledged in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The prophet, exemplified in Mark’s portrait of Jesus, is one who speaks the truth, reveals God’s activity in human history and community, and experiences rejection. Who might be such prophets today in the local community?

July 12—Ordinary Time 15: Amos 7:12-15. Amos is the untrained and reluctant prophet who is urged to do God’s bidding, despite criticism from Israel’s religious leaders. Eph 1:3-14. A fine hymn summarizing Christ’s role in creation, and God’s desire to bring us into communion, to ‘adopt’ us. Mk 6:7-13. The disciples are sent on mission to preach the Gospel. Resistance to the message will be expected. Theme—Being a prophet. Continuing the theme from last week, the readings offer an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of baptism, as a call to be a prophet. Resistance, even rejected are expected. The reading offers an encouraging word in our struggle to discipleship fidelity.

July 19—Ordinary Time 16: Jer 23:1-6. God promises the people new and faithful shepherds, and especially a future king who will reign with wisdom. Eph 2:13-18. Jesus is celebrated as the source of social, political and religious unity. Mk 6:30-34. Jesus shows concern for his disciples and compassion on the crowds who seemed shepherdless. Theme—God’s Shepherd us. The image of a shepherding God who looks after us, no matter what, is so rich and necessary today. What are the implications of a community who really believes in the active presence of such a God?

July 26—Ordinary Time 17: 2 Kings 4:42-44. The prophet Elijah takes a few loaves, gives them to his servant, to satisfy the hunger of a large number of people. Eph 4:1-6. The writer urges unity amongst within the faith community. The source of such a bond peace comes from God’s Spirit. Jn 6:1-15. Jesus feeds the hungry crowd. Theme—God feeds our hungers. God desires to feed us deeply in our life’s journey. What are the struggles and difficulties that we face that invite us to open ourselves to this God who seeks to address our deepest needs?

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The Word is the basic force at work in conversion; a light in response to the many questions in the believer’s life; a guide to a proper and wise discernment of reality; an invitation not simply to read or speak the Word but to ‘do it’ (Lk 8:21); and finally, an everlasting source of consolation and hope. From this follows, as a certain logic of faith, the task of acknowledging and ensuring the primacy of the Word of God in the life of believers by receiving it as the Church proclaims it, understands it, explains it and lives it.

—Lineamenta for the Synod on the Word of God, 11.