MORALITY GOOD AND bad features in this issue of Compass. The sources of our moral principles and teachings are studied, and we are encouraged to reflect on sublime moral behaviour as well as deep depravity. Truly, we live in a highly complex world, a world of contrasts and contradictions. Human beings can rise to great heights or sink to deep lows.

We must wonder at the fact that God almighty allows all this to happen. God encourages the good, and we rejoice at that. But God at the same time allows the bad, and that is not so easy for us to understand. How can God, a good and loving God, allow innocent people to suffer so terribly? God encourages the good and allows the bad: it would be so much better, we might feel, if God were to encourage the good and obstruct the bad.

Although natural disasters, when bad things happen to good people, are not moral events insofar as no-one is judged worthy of blame, they do add to our perplexity. As we watch the distressing images of destruction, death and loss caused by the floods, fires and earthquakes in Australia, New Zealand and now in Japan, we ask the question again: how can a good and loving God allow all this destruction and misery?

Attempts at answering this question are ultimately unsatisfying. Nonetheless, they can have some weight.

For instance, when we reflect on natural disasters, we must accept the fact that God is the Creator of the universe, not a puppeteer continually readjusting his creation along the way. We read in the book of Genesis that God’s Spirit is at work in creation bringing order out of chaos (cf. Gen. 1:2: ‘The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters’). But the creation itself is a natural product of ongoing natural—cosmic, geological, and evolutionary—processes. These processes involve a lot of death and destruction as well as order and life and beauty.

Then when we reflect on the evil that people do and the misery it can cause, we need to keep in mind that this evil and misery result from the misuse of the freedom that our Maker has endowed us human beings with. The gift of freedom is a far greater good than the great evil and misery that sometimes—often—results from its misuse. The proper use of freedom can result in sublime moral goodness to the benefit of many people.

But still we are not satisfied and we ask why God almighty and all-loving does not obstruct some of the evil—moral and natural evil—that is visited upon innocent people. Surely it is within God’s power to do so?

At this point we might consider that we have run out of reasoned defences of God and God’s goodness. We have no more arguments to offer. We must bow before the mystery of God, which is a concession that our arguments are insufficient but not an act of surrender. God reveals himself in his creation and in his Word as divine mystery, infinitely more hidden than revealed.

And God has revealed himself especially and most completely—as John tells us in his Gospel—in Jesus Christ, God’s own beloved Son, dying on a cross at the hands of evil men. God all-powerful and all-loving, allowed and did not impede that from happening to his own Son. We are called to contemplate the mystery of Christ taking on the whole of our human condition including the evil and suffering that is visited upon us.

This is not a reply to the question, ‘Why does God permit evil and suffering, especially the evil and suffering experienced by innocent people?’ It is not a reply in discursive or reasoned argument. Rather, it is to align one mystery—the evil, from natural and moral sources that people suffer—with another mystery—the
evil that was visited on the supremely innocent Son of God. God almighty and all-loving does not impede any of it!

But morality is a feature of our everyday lives, not just the highs and lows. It has been a long period of Ordinary Time between the Christmas and the Lenten seasons this year. On the Sundays during this between times we worked our way through the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel readings, hearing Jesus’ teachings on how to live. ‘Do not be anxious and fret about what is of lesser importance; build on firm foundations; you have heard it said....but I say to you to be much more radical in your moral lives than that.....’.

These teachings of Jesus are about our everyday lives and how we should live them. Jesus is telling us that it is in the everyday events of our lives, the ordinary challenges, the encounters, ways of relating to others, that we meet God and respond to God.

We were told on one Sunday to ‘be holy as I your God am holy’. We might do well to take a fresh look at this holiness that God commands of us. We grew up with certain images of ‘holiness’. We have ‘holy cards’ and pictures and statues of saints depicting people in ‘holy’ postures—hands joined, rapt in prayer, with haloes round their heads. Such images present us with an other-worldly notion of holiness, not the everyday holiness that Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Such images tend to promote the dualism (disjunction of our ‘spiritual’ life and ‘secular’ life) that Pope John-Paul described as ‘one of the more serious errors of our age’ (see p. 4, infra).

Another feature of Jesus’ teachings on how to live is the fact that the instructions he gives us are usually non-prescriptive. He does not usually spell out the detail nor tell us what to do in black and white. Rather, he gives us guiding principles that we are to apply according to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are to use our own judgment. Perhaps we would prefer that it would be more cut and dried, but Jesus is encouraging us to maturity as moral beings.

Jesus is instructing us as people on a journey, a journey towards perfection. We have not yet arrived, we are not yet perfect, but he is challenging us to take the next steps in following him towards the goal of becoming perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. He is prepared to be patient with us, as we are to be patient with others and with ourselves.

As we go to print with this issue of Compass we are entering into the season of Lent, a special time for repentance, for turning to God—a special time of challenge to us to follow Jesus’ teachings on how to live.

As you take up this issue of Compass you may find that the first article, ‘Our Great Love Story’, leads us into the heart of Christian morality: the love of God for us and the response that love calls for.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.

[Jean-Bertrand] Aristide’s Christianity also tells us that Christ crucified is to be found among the poor and oppressed. This is the Christ who lies in the rubble alongside those who were crushed by falling buildings, who weeps alongside the man who lost his entire family, who aches alongside the women who endure the threat of rape every waking second of their existence. It is the Christ who commended the woman who anointed his feet as the first true believer, for she recognized the messiah in this peasant who was to be executed by the earthly powers that be.

SPIRITUALITY OF THE Heart is a spirituality of love—God’s love for us which finds expression and confirmation in our love for self, one another and for all of creation.

The Scriptures—both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament overflow with the revelation of God’s compassionate, faithful love for all of creation. This is evident in the covenants established with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and especially with Moses—‘I will be your God, and you will be my people’ is the constant refrain as these covenants are established, broken (by human kind) and re-established. And it is most evident in the person of Jesus, in his life, death and resurrection. While other less positive themes also emerge there is a consistent story of God’s fidelity even in the face of people’s persistent infidelity.

It seems to me that the particular version of the story we choose to tell about this incredible love affair that God has for all of creation is vital if it is to connect and resonate with people today. Some Christians tell the story as if their’s is the only version, not realising that there are many versions of ‘the story’ even within the Scriptures. Sadly, sometimes the story told is not even ‘good news’ at all. What follows is a spirituality of the heart story which is scripturally based and which is ‘good news’.

**Story**

It is all about story! Fr Thomas Berry, a Passionist priest who died in recent years, impressed me greatly when he wrote in his book, *Dream of the Earth*, that: ‘it is all a question of story. We are in trouble now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story about how the world came to be and how we fit into it is no longer effective. Yet, we have not learned the new story.’ (123)

Traditionalists can sometimes react negatively to emerging new stories. They can feel the old story they loved is being sentenced to oblivion because it has been judged to be wrong or in error. The emerging new theological story does not make such a judgment. The new story does not judge the traditional story to be wrong; the judgment rather is that it is simply no longer adequate for our times. Just as there was nothing wrong with the horse and buggy, the Remington type-writer or the Gestetner ink copier—they were simply superseded by better technology—so it is with some traditional theological stories.

The traditional stories we told about our origins, about God, human beings, the Church etc are no longer adequate because the world has moved on and these stories no longer engage the imaginations of people today. A theology with accompanying spiritual practices and language that assume a three-tiered universe including a flat earth with heaven above and the underworld (hell) below, no longer captures our imaginations today. If indeed the stories we tell are important then a story that includes these elements is inadequate being unable to carry the understanding of the universe we have today.

I find myself in agreement with David Abram’s comments about story: there are good stories and mediocre stories and downright bad stories. How are they to be judged? A story must be judged according to whether it makes sense. To make sense is to enliven the senses. A story that makes sense is one that stirs the senses from their slumber, one that opens the eyes and the ears to their real surroundings,
turning the tongue to the actual tastes in the air and sending chills of recognition along the surface of the skin. To make sense is to release the body from the constraints imposed by outworn ways of speaking, and hence to renew and rejuvenate one’s felt awareness of the world. It is to make the senses wake up to where they are. (D Abram, 265).

Good stories also invoke ‘dangerous memories’—these are personal or communal memories that have an endless capacity to disturb complacency and birth new life. When we return to these memories they challenge our compromises with what we should not forget, and they inspire recommitment and they revitalize. These are stories that can disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed. (Groom, 360). The Jesus story is a ‘dangerous memory’ story—it can be a comforting or a disturbing story. When no one is listening and potential hearers of the story remain in their deafness and blindness something is re-miss with the way we are telling the story and it is time to re-imagine it. A spirituality of the heart in my experience is one way of doing this. More of this shortly!

**Dualism and Sacramentality**

Before exploring heart spirituality explicitly I want to make a few brief comments about dualism and sacramentality—both are relevant for any discussion about spirituality including a spirituality of the heart.

Firstly, dualism: For much of its history Christianity had been plagued by dualistic ways of thinking. Such thinking makes sharp distinctions between apparent opposites rather than seeing differences as complementary and hence parts of a whole. A spirituality that engages people today needs to be holistic rather than dualistic. A dualistic way of thinking is especially harmful if it draws a sharp distinction between spiritual life and secular life. In *Christifideles Laici* (59) Pope John Paul II, quoted the Vatican II Council decree *Gaudium et Spes* (43), when he wrote:

> There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand the so-called ‘spiritual life’, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture … This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.

Secondly, sacramentality: in the introduction to his wonderful book, *Begin with the Heart: recovering a sacramental vision*, Daniel O’Leary writes:

> We need to set free the Catholic imagination and sacramental vision that has always characterised that tradition. Without catching the vision, the heart does not know where to go; but without the fire of imagination it doesn’t want to go anywhere, least of all to church! (13).

Our sacramental imagination tells us that one way of looking at life is to see everything we experience as a symbol behind which lies a greater reality, a reality that cannot be expressed verbally, intellectually or physically, but which is there nonetheless. In this vision all the world is a symbol pointing beyond itself to the uncreated, unseen God. It was this vision that inspired Gerard Manly Hopkins to write: ‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God.’

Karl Rahner, the noted Christian theolo-
gian, reputedly wrote that ‘the Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic or not a Christian at all.’ And, Daniel O’Leary writes;

We live in a world that is ‘mysterically ‘tone-deaf, where all the goods are in the shop window.’ The mystical imagination is not only as real as the scientific imagination; it reveals what science on its own could never tumble to—the many grace-drenched and spirit-laden layers of reality, even inside the law of gravity, that are not always readily available to the senses.’ (21).

Drawing on such luminaries as Rahner, Pope John Paul II, Albert Einstein, George Bernard Shaw, Hans urs von Balthasar, Augustine, Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil and others, O’Leary alerts us to the Catholic insight that grace is integral to nature and that all nature has the capacity to disclose grace and be a vehicle for it. (21). And, ‘with imagination you don’t have to travel far to find God—only notice things. The finite and the infinite live in the same place.’ (23)

The Celts concept of the thin place is a good example of this intimate connection between nature and grace: In every way the visible and the invisible were interwoven, as surely as the air we breathe and the food we eat come together to give life to our bodies. The invisible was separated from our sense perceptions only by the permeable membrane of consciousness. Sometimes that membrane could seem as solid as a brick wall. Sometimes it could seem very thin. Indeed, we speak even today of some places as being ‘thin places’, meaning that the presence of the invisible and the spiritual in those places is almost palpable. (Margaret Silf, Sacred Spaces: stations on a Celtic Way)

The foundation stone for re-imagining a new story for our time will be holistic in preference to dualistic and will encompass a world view where God is waiting to be experienced in everyone and in everything. Such a story will be both faithful to the tradition and it will also open our eyes to see that human experience is the threshold to God.

* * *

**The Story of the Universe**

While being beyond the scope of this paper, some understanding of cosmology is important in moving towards a new story. The cosmology found in our Scriptures and which underpins much Christian theology and spirituality is no longer adequate. The three tiered universe with heaven above, the underworld below and a flat earth surrounded by water is outmoded. In this cosmology God was above and intervened in human history; the earth was at the centre of the universe; and the human being was thought of as a ‘visitor’ on earth, enduring this life as a test before ‘earning’ a place to our true home, heaven.

The commonly accepted version of the story today is that our universe has been expanding and evolving for the past 13.7 billion years and life on planet earth emerged 3.7 billion years ago. The earth is not the centre of the universe; it is positioned on the other edge of one of the spiral arms of the Milky Way galaxy and there are millions of other galaxies; and, the earth is but one of countless billions of stars. God is not above or totally outside the process of ‘Cosmogenesis’ but is intimately part of it, not only creating and sustaining but also bringing all things to their fulfillment.

In this new story a God who intervenes (occasionally) in history disrupting life and nature becomes problematic as does an anthropology that sees the human being as separate from the rest of creation. We are learning to recognize the unity of the whole process and of the unbreakable bond of relatedness that allows us to speak of a ‘universe’.

In virtue of this relatedness, everything is intimately present to everything else in the universe. Nothing is completely itself without everything else…. The universe is a communion and a community. We are that communion become conscious of itself. (Berry, 91)

**The Jesus Story**

For several hundred years the Western Christian story has not concerned itself with cos-
ology. There are several reasons for this which are not my concern here. We can identify a shift from a ‘creation mystique’ to a ‘redemption mystique.’ (Berry, 129). The redemption mystique has narrowly focused on ‘the Savior, the human person, the believing church, and a postearthly paradisal beatitude.’ (Berry, 128). Further, within this redemption mystique the focus has been even more narrowly conceived, with a theory of the Christ-event built around sacrifice, satisfaction and substitutionary atonement.

This story draws on just one of ten different images that Paul uses as he grapples with the interpretation and meaning of the paschal mystery. In our age, Denis Edwards writes, we are in need of a viable alternative. (Edwards, 108). In proposing the need for a new theory (story) Edwards outlines some critical tests: it must be faithful to the God proclaimed in Jesus’ words and deeds, the God of boundless compassion and self-giving love. It will refuse to locate violence in God suggesting that God required Jesus’ death to appease God’s anger. Another critical test outlined by Edwards for any new theory is that it must be large enough to embrace all of creation and not just the human species. (Edwards, 108 -109). I will return to the story we tell about Jesus that is consistent with a spirituality of the heart at the end of this paper.

Bible Stories

Just as there are a variety of stories (theories) that open different windows onto the meaning of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection so too there a many different images of God presented in the Scriptures. Such variety is necessary because no one image (or all the images taken as a whole) can possibly reveal God. The story the Scriptures tell is an incredible love story; the God we encounter in Scripture is an ardently compassionate lover who despite being ignored, rejected, and spurned continues to love because God cannot do otherwise. Despite flirting here and there with other images of God (for example, God the judge who demands punishment as the price for justice) the human authors of the Scriptures eventually affirm that ‘God is love’ and ‘to love is to be in God.’ Love is the only pathway to the heart of God.

I am attracted by Moses’ experience on Mount Horeb; the well-known encounter with God in the burning bush (Exodus 3.1-6). God is revealed to Moses in a bush that is on fire but is not consumed. We are familiar with the phrase ‘hearts on fire’. A bush on fire but not consumed is a metaphor for a heart on fire. Of the six hundred and thirty seven times ‘fire’ occurs in the bible most refer to God’s consuming fire, the fire that does not consume encountered by Moses is a powerful symbol. The task that lay ahead of Moses was enormous—a bush that was not consumed, a love that endures, was the kind of support and assurance he needed. And, once on the journey one of the symbols of God’s faithful, guiding presence is the ‘pillar of fire’ (Ex 13.21, 22, 14.24).

We are very familiar with fire or flame as a symbol for ardent passion – the sacred heart symbol has a crest of flame. And Deuteronomy reminds us that God is a jealous God, a consuming fire (Deut 4. 24); Luke presents us with a similar image of Jesus as he anxiously approaches his final days:

‘I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.’ (12.49).

And then, at the end of his Gospel, in the well-known Emmaus story, Luke has the two disciples recall a different fire as they reflect on their experience of the Risen Christ on the road: ‘we are not our hearts burning within us’. (Luke 24.31). A spirituality of the heart evokes an ardent, passionate fire that is creative and cleansing and is not ultimately destructive.

God’s judgement delivered as consuming fire is a very familiar image of God. Hence the fire of Moses that does not consume is an astounding image. And, even though God as judge has been a favourite of preachers and evangelists there are many softer images which better accord with a spirituality of the heart. Such images include: father, mother, lover, shepherd, eagle and potter.
**Heart in Scripture**

There are over one thousand references to the word ‘heart’ in the Bible and only a rare few intend the heart as a physical organ. For the most part ‘heart’ is used in a symbolic, metaphorical way. In most of these references heart carries the sense of the whole person, the very essence, the real or true self, the person in their innermost depths.

**Hebrew Scriptures**

I begin this exploration of the heart in Scripture with reference to some soulful passages from the Hebrew Scriptures: the author of the *Song of Solomon* puts these words in God’s mouth:

> You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. (*Song of Solomon* 4.9)

How beautiful—God says: I am in pain because I am ever faithful, ever loving, always looking out for you and you are unfaithful, you ignore me, you turn your face away and, you ravish my heart! That is not a distant, judgmental God. We find this intimate, passionate love of God present in many other places—my favourite is Jeremiah’s complaint:

> O Lord, you have seduced me, and I was seduced; you have overwhelmed me, and you have prevailed … O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind … (*Jeremiah* 20.7, 12).

God the seductive one, the one who draws close and overpowers me (with love).

And again in the Prophet Hosea:

> How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? … My heart recoils within me: my compassion grows warm and tender. (*Hosea* 9.8)

This is the great theme of the journey of faith of the Hebrew people, of the followers of Jesus and of all people of faith: God’s constant, persistent outreach to us, urgent at times, constantly frustrated, but passionate and unfailingly faithful. It is a great love affair. Ours is a personal God calling us into relationship.

The God who calls us into relationship is clearly evident in the giving of the law to Moses—Christians tend to forget the opening verse to the Ten Commandments: ‘I am the Lord Your God’ …the version I learnt went straight to, ‘Thou shalt not …’, whereas the text actually says, ‘who bought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery’ (*Exodus* 20.2). That is, I love you, I am on your side. The commandments that follow are not a test, but are given for a people who already know that they are loved, cared for and protected. We don’t keep the commandments to earn this love, care and protection—it is already given. The commandments are the signposts for living as a loving and caring people; as a people of heart, as heart people! We have been very good at turning love into law—a spirituality of heart counsels resistance to this tendency.

As this great love story unfolds we are very familiar with what happens: despite God’s fidelity people have not reciprocated this love. This persistent infidelity is dealt with by all the prophets—Jeremiah expresses it with these words: ‘this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart.’ (*Jer* 5.23). Besides rebellious hearts we also find reference to ‘hearts of stone’ and ‘hearts turned away.’

The Psalms which are a source of many of the references to the ‘heart’ speak beautifully of what is required of us. Psalm 51, which a number of writers consider one of the most important prayers for a spirituality of the heart, is perhaps the best example. This psalm acknowledges the initiative for love flows always from God’s steadfast love and abundant mercy; it acknowledges our inadequacies in responding with steadfast love; and then, names what God desires: ‘You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.’ (We could sit for days with those words alone!). And then, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.’ (*Ps* 51.10). And finally,

> O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; If I were to give you a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice accept-
able to God is a broken and contrite heart. (Ps 51.15-17)

Psalm 51, then, gives us such evocative phrases as: secret heart; clean heart; broken and contrite heart.

This Psalm invites us to reflect on the movement from external observance to purity of heart; from the observances of laws and codes, rituals and various mandated acts, to nurturing an open, honest and loving heart. What is needed is not only external observance of the Law; that is not enough; a conversion of the heart, a new heart such that we live authentically from our deepest, inner most self so that who we are on the inside is who are in our day to day living. Such honesty is too much for us and yet we know that God sees and loves us in our inner self.

These sentiments find expression in the prophets. There are many passages that could be used as examples. Let Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak for them all:

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write in on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. (Jer 31.33).

And Ezekiel,

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

And then, Deuteronomy gives us the most beautiful, graphic summary of this new heart:

Surely this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it. Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross to the other side for us so that me may hear it and observe it.’ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.’ (Dt 30.11-14)

Christian Scriptures

In the Christian Scriptures Jesus is presented as a man of heart and, as his life and ministry unfold, he is presented as compassion personified. God is love and Jesus is love incarnate; his life exemplifies what is it is to be on earth the heart of God. John concludes the prologue to his gospel with these words: ‘No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son who is close to the Father’s heart who has made him known.’ Jesus is close to the Father’s heart; and then, in what I think among the most profound words in all of Scripture John writes:

As you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and loved them as you loved me... Father, the world does not know you, but I know you and these know that you have sent me. I have made your name known to them and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them. (Jn 17.21-23, 26).

We are learning in our day the incredible intricacy of the whole of the universe; we are learning now in our time about the intimate interconnectedness of everything—I am in you and you are in me! If the ultimate goal of love is union, this is perfect union; and, we are perfectly united, we are one. We forget that and hence we live as if it’s not true—that’s sin! We need to be reminded so that we re-member and so return to our source.

One of the classic texts of Jesus’ life giving love for us comes from John’s Gospel: ‘one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once blood and water came out.’ (Jn 19.34) The blood and water flowing from the side of Jesus (his life source) has come to symbolise Jesus, in an ultimate sense, giving his whole self to us, that is, opening the riches of his heart for us. The wounded side gives us open access to his heart as it were. When we gaze on the one whom they have pierced we see not just Jesus in the last moments of his life; we see rather his whole life, we recall how he poured himself out,
compassionately reaching out to everyone, especially those most in need of his embrace.

There are countless passages from the Gospels where Jesus is described as being deeply moved by people whom he met. Some examples:

- When he saw the widow he was moved with compassion for her (Lk 7.13)
- A Samaritan traveller was moved with compassion when he saw him. (Lk 10.33)
- Jesus, moved with compassion for the leper said .. (Mk 1.41)
- Jesus saw a large crowd and was moved with compassion for them .. (Mk 6.34)
- Jesus said: ‘I am moved with compassion for all these people …’ (Mk 8.2)
- Jesus was moved with compassion (for the two blind men) and he touched their eyes (Mt 20.34)

The heart of Jesus is a love-filled heart capable of being deeply moved by the plight of those with whom he lived. The early followers of Jesus recognised that, as they were drawn into relationship with him, they were also being challenged to love as Jesus loved.

And so, as we turn to our own response it is John who gives us the classic text for a spirituality of the heart:

‘In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us …’. (1Jn 4.10)

The initiative is God’s; our response is to love—John’s constant refrain is:

Beloved, love one another because love is from God and, if we love one another God lives in us and love is perfected in us. (1Jn 4.12).

The Good News is: ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.’ (Rm5.5). We are invited to believe that God’s love is freely given, we don’t earn it—God loves us while we were still sinners Paul tells us in Romans (Rm5.8). It is God who let the light shine out of darkness, ‘who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ (2Cor 4.6) God looks on us with love; our response is simply to return the gaze, to be in love too.

And so, in numerous examples, we hear that it is God who opens our hearts to listen to the word of God (e.g. Acts 16.14). Mary is presented as an example for us to follow: ‘she treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.’ (Lk 2.19). And Paul, recalling the words of Deuteronomy we noted earlier, ‘The word is near to you, on your lips and in your heart’ tells us we need to ‘believe with the heart’ (Rm 10.10). The most stunning text about opening our heart for the indwelling of the Christ’s love is this:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3.14-19)

Christ lives in our heart through faith. The Christ of love we encounter in our own hearts also calls us to reach out in love to one another and for all of creation. Christian life is relational—it is all about relationships—just as God loves us, so must we love one another. We are encouraged to have the same mind as Christ (Phil 2.5). Jesus’ life was devoted to proclaiming and ushering in the Kingdom of God—God’s dream for all of creation.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. (Luke 4.18-19)

And, in the Book of Revelation we are given a vision of a new heaven and a new earth:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
...and the sea was no more...‘See, I am making all things new.’ ...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. (Revelation 21.1-4, 5b, 6b–7)

In Christ there is a new creation. And, the commandment to love will be the sign post for how those in the new creation will live. In this new creation Paul presents us with an idyllic picture of what life in community will be like:

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3. 12-17)

The commandment to love is the summary of the great summary of what is required of a disciple of Jesus. It seems that at the time of Jesus there was considerable debate about which of the two commandments was the greatest:

Deuteronomy 6.4-5: Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Or,

Leviticus 19.18 says: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

All four Gospels have a version of Jesus speaking about the commandment to love. And, some Scripture scholars believe there is a development in understanding of this commandment from the earliest Christian traditions to those found in the latter text, the First Letter of John.

Matthew’s Gospel, even though it is not the first Gospel written, seems to have the earliest tradition of the great commandment:

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Mt 23.34-40)

In the Gospel of Mark we read:

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.’ Then the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ’he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength’, and ‘to love one’s neighbour as oneself’,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question. (Mark 12.28-34)

(Luke is similar to Mark, except Luke has a lawyer ask the question)

The Scribe earns very high praise from Jesus. ‘You are not far from the Kingdom of God’, coming as it does from Jesus, is the highest possible commendation. What the scribe sees, and helps Jesus to see, is that these two commandments are in fact one, just two sides of the same coin. The Scribe blends the two commandments together without any hierarchy so that, rather two commandments with one being first and the other second, there is
just one. To love God and to love neighbour are not two separate commandments as if one could obey one and not the other; they are inseparably one. And, it is the Johannine tradition that spells this out unambiguously.

In John’s Gospel we read:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ (John 13.34-35)

And, the final word, the most fully developed understanding of this, is found in John’s first letter:

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love … Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Those who say, ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 John 4.7-21)

When the disciples, Peter, James and John came down from the mountain of Transfiguration they saw only Jesus. When you and I look at one another what do we see? Well, you will see just me and I will see just you! A reflection on the Spirituality of the Heart invites us to see into the heart of each other and recognise in one another the indwelling presence of God; it invites us to look into the heart of all of reality and each and every element, and to see and embrace there the heart of God.

I return then to the story we tell about Jesus.

The Jesus Story

The story we tell about Jesus needs to be consistent with this rich scriptural tradition of love. It is a profoundly relational story. The God Jesus reveals is a God who is both personal and transcendent, a God of love, a God who is against all dehumanisation or disfigurement of God’s creatures, a God who is sympathetic to human suffering. Jesus’ life death and resurrection reveals, symbolises and exemplifies that God’s loving presence has always been present in creation. (R. Haight, 360) And, as he experienced his oneness with God, he learnt that unconditional, self-expansive love was the only way to experience the reign of God.

In Jesus, the self-diffusive creating presence of God is given a human face and God is now present in a visible, audible and concrete way. This is what is truly unique about Christianity. For Judaism and Islam, though Moses and Muhammad are receivers of revelation, God is not revealed in them as persons, but in the words of the Torah and Qur’an. And for Buddhism, the Buddha as person is not the revelation; rather, the Buddha’s teachings disclose the path to enlightenment and compassion. Christianity finds the primary revelation of God in a person. So John can write, the Word became flesh and lived among us. Jesus is what can be seen of God embodied in human life. Jesus in his very person (in his heart) shows us the heart of God. (M. Borg, 81). Jesus does not simply utter words about God; he himself is the uttered word. He is, in his humanity, the message he brings.

And, what is true for Jesus is also true for all humanity. ‘A new consciousness has enfolded the world. The human is now the home of the divine.’ (O’Leary, 82). God’s presence is accessible everywhere in everyone’s everyday experience—freely accessible, freely available. No intermediaries are needed. There is no place, no anywhere, that is not infused with God’s presence.

What Jesus did was to reveal the holiness of every aspect of each of our lives. ‘He ended the dualism that saw grace as a kind of divine icing on a human cake. He revealed that creation and humanity are graced from the very beginning.’ (O’Leary, 82). In Jesus’ life, death and resurrection the mysterious love and meaning that is hidden in the heart of each person and in all of creation is broken open.
The Christian response is not simply to follow Jesus’ example; nor is it to discern the values by which he lived and to live by the same code of conduct. In his first encyclical Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and, a decisive direction. (Deus Caritas Est, 1)

Christian life is first and foremost relational, it begins with a movement (a conversion) in one’s own heart and it responds with a compassionate embrace of all of creation, the meeting place of the Holy One in our midst.

In his book, Walking the Way Of Jesus: an essay in Christian Spirituality, Eugene Cuskelly MSC writes that the story we tell about Jesus needs to be like the one seamless garment, it needs to be consistent with the central core of our faith. (17) And, what makes us Christians is that we ‘have learned to believe in the love that God has for us.’ (1 Jn 4.16)

The story we tell about Jesus, the explanation of his suffering and death, how he ‘saves us’ needs to be consistent with an all-embracing, compassionate God. Explanations that focus narrowly on Jesus’ suffering and tortuous death as being required by God for salvation are not consistent with a loving God.

In his most recent book (How God Acts) Denis Edwards addresses this issue:

Twenty first century Christians are in need of a theory of redemption that can offer a viable alternative to traditional theories such as those that have been built around sacrifice, satisfaction, and substitutionary atonement. (108)

He informs us that Paul uses ten different images drawn from biblical tradition and that this variety is necessary because no one image or concept is sufficient to express the overwhelming action of God in Jesus. Roger Haight also addresses the issue of the pluralism of Christologies and soteriologies found in the New Testament, noting that they really are different and that a different story about how Jesus saves emerges in each of them. (Haight 152 f)

In arriving at an acceptable theory for today Edwards outlines some critical tests:

A theory will need to be ‘faithful to the God proclaimed in Jesus’ words and deeds, the God of boundless compassion and self-giving love.’ And, ‘it will need to be large enough to embrace all of creation.’ Further, ‘it will refuse to locate violence in God but will reveal redemption as the act of the God proclaimed in the words and deeds of Jesus.’ (108)

A God of love finds nothing pleasing or good in ‘the tragic affair of Jesus’ painful journey to execution’ (Haight, 345) God did not send Jesus to die a cruel and excruciatingly painful death. That Jesus died this way was not a requirement from God. A lecturer I heard recently said, to wish anybody to suffer in that way is ‘a mortal sin’. It is Jesus’ whole life, including him remaining loving even to death that reveals how we are to live in a loving way. Jesus lived his life committed to the end. It is not the death of Jesus in itself that is pleasing to God. God cannot be construed as being pleased with death. Rather, resurrection, life and salvation correlate with the positive, loyal dedication of Jesus’ freedom to God’s cause to the end. (Haight, 159) The Good News is not that Jesus died an excruciatingly tortuous death but, that God raised him up, that out of death came life.

Old metaphors like Jesus paying the ransom for sin; saving us by the blood of the cross and this being the price he had to pay for our redemption are inconsistent with a God of love, a God who is infinitely loving and compassionate. We pass from sin to life by believing in God’s love for us and for all people and for the world that God made—and then letting that love rule our lives. The sin that separates us from God is the failure to believe in the wonderful, transforming love of God.

Christian salvation is relational; it is the experience of encountering God in Jesus Christ. ‘Christian salvation is no more and no less that the meeting with God in Jesus the Christ.’ (Haight 333) Jesus’ contemporaries, not God, demanded his death on the cross. The God we meet in Jesus is all-embracing, com-
passionate love. Jesus remains faithful to expressing this love even through his suffering and death. ‘It is not suffering in itself that is salvific, but Jesus’ commitment, obedience and fidelity through it.’ (Haight 341) Jesus then enables us to believe in God’s love for us and as such he makes God present in a saving way. And, he not only revealed this to us but he showed us how to live a loving life, he is ‘an exemplar of what it means to be human.’ (Haight 361).

Jesus shows us perfectly what it is to be on earth the heart of God. Of all the statements from Christian commentators, preachers and theologians, about why he came, the purpose of his life, the one that most closely relates to heart spirituality is: he shared our humanity so that humans would know their divinity—the divine one became human so that human ones become divine! And so we are called to be one heart and mind with Jesus—to be the radically free, compassionate, all inclusive lover that he was. In the sure and certain knowledge that we are loved unconditionally fear of failure is overcome. As we gaze on the One whom they have pierced we learn it is our vulnerability that opens us to both recognise our need to love and to receive it. ‘There is crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in.’ (Leonard Cohen)

Paul’s description of love (1 Corinthians 13) is one of the best descriptions of the God of love revealed in Jesus and of how we are to live with one another as a people loved by God.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

A spirituality of the heart is all about love; the love God has for us present since the beginning of creation but made known in the Scriptures and brought to full realisation in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus not only makes known God’s all-embracing compassionate love, he is also the perfect example of what it is to be a loving human being. Following the example of Jesus we enter our own heart and discover there God’s love; and, confident and deeply immersed in God’s love for us we are invited to go out and be on earth the heart of God.

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IN PART ONE of this series of three linked articles, the changed approach to understanding the doctrine of the Trinity was explored through the work of two Catholic theologians, Walter Kasper and Catherine LaCugna. By putting emphasis on the saving work of God in the world (rather than the life within Godsself) and on the relational dimension of the meaning of ‘person’, these authors showed how the Trinity can start to be seen as the perfect communion with implications for how we can lead our lives. (See Compass 2010, no. 4, pp. 24-28.)

This second article identifies twelve particular attributes from this re-vitalised understanding of Trinity and considers them from the perspective of their likeness to the marital relationship. Through these twelve attributes, it will be shown that, in their marital relationship, a man and a woman can together image the Trinity, albeit in a limited human way.

This awareness then will lead in the third article to a deeper contemplation of marriage as vocation, God’s call to married couples to use their individual and couple gifts as followers of Christ in the work of salvation. Various perspectives of marriage as vocation will be developed into an understanding of how this vocation can be lived in the life and image of the Trinity. As well as imaging Trinity, the married couple not only can follow this perfect example of unity and community as a model but also is called to participate actively in this trinitarian life.

Speaking of marriage and the family, John Paul II states: ‘In this entire world, there is not a more perfect, more complete image of God, Unity and Community. There is no other human reality which corresponds more, humanly speaking, to that divine mystery’ (West 2003).

While there are limitations in the extent to which the marital relationship directly corresponds to the Trinity, it is possible to identify many parallels between the two forms of relationships. In the following paragraphs, attributes of trinitarian life are identified from the reflections in Part One and considered from the perspective of their likeness to the marital relationship. These particular attributes are not meant to be seen as either exhaustive or necessarily discrete from each other, but are meant to assist in showing how the marital relationship can be seen as being in the image of the life of the triune God.

1 Love

The Trinity is founded on love. For Kasper, the statement ‘God is Love’ (1 Jn 4.8, 16) is trinitarian; only because God is love can God self-communicate to us as love (Kasper 1984, 248). Our life is meaningful only when our love mirrors the love of the Trinity (Hogan and Le Voir 1992, 73). The Holy Spirit, as the spirit of love of the Father and of the Son, transforms the love of man and woman into part of trinitarian love, the very being of God (Roccheta 1996, 17). For Morton and Barbara Kelsey, ‘the heart and centre…of any life is love; and love is fed by the spiritual life, which, in turn, is deepened by the very love it feeds’.
They see a strange intertwining between human love and spiritual love in that we cannot sustain the demands of human love without being in touch with God as Divine Lover and yet, without human love, spiritual love will wither (Kelsey and Kelsey 1986, 241-2). By physically surrendering their bodies in love, the married couple becomes a physical image of God (Kelsey and Kelsey 1986, 76). Our sexuality is but one of the many ways God shows love for us; we in turn are expected to be channels of God’s love to others (Kelsey and Kelsey 1986, 244).

2 Self-Giving and Receiving

The love consists of self-giving and receiving. Just as in the loving relationship of the trinitarian persons, so too in marriage there is ‘a going out and a waiting in expectant joy to be filled by the response of the Other’ (Gallagher, Maloney, Rousseau and Wilczak 1983, 8). From the time a couple first ‘falls in love’, there is a strong sense of the need to be with, and do things for, each other; this is exemplified in outings together and surprise gifts. While this romance phase often continues within the marriage, there usually comes an additional, even deeper response born out of the lifelong commitment to each other and full acceptance of the other, faults and all. This loving response can be expressed in the willing giving of time at inconvenient moments – choosing to be the one to attend to crying children in the middle of the night—or forgoing deep personal desires, such as career opportunities, for the sake of the other. And yet the paradoxical outcome is that the more each of the spouses gives of themselves to the other, the more they also receive, and in this knowledge and realisation they feel more loved and inspired to give even more in return.

Married couples also have the wonderful experience of physically being able to give themselves to each other. The depth of sensation of using the body as the gift of self to the other far exceeds any momentary thrill of mere sexual gratification for one’s own pleasure which can be experienced between a man and a woman who have not committed themselves to each other in marriage. Through the deep experience of giving and receiving love to and from each other, the couple also comes to approach a sense of the boundless love of God for us—and within God as Trinity.

3 Freedom of Choice

Just as love is a choice of wills of the divine Persons in the Trinity and in creation, so too the consents of the spouses is an irrevocable choice which constitutes marriage and reflects God’s love within the Trinity (Hogan and Le Voir 1992, 78-9). While marriage has not always involved freedom of choice (with issues of property transfer, political gain or social class often overriding in the past), men and women in contemporary society have more freedom in their choice of whether to marry and whom to marry. For each couple, this choice is probably a gradual process made with varying yet increasing degrees of certainty before being verbally expressed in mutual consent both privately at the time of proposal and publicly in the wedding ceremony.

Choosing a marriage partner is the most life-changing decision most humans ever make; while there are some indicators which may point the way as to the likelihood or otherwise of a successful outcome, there are no guarantees. Despite, or even because of, these risks, it is important for each spouse that this choice is made in freedom; their consent to

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each other is consent to share an unknown future which will necessarily involve adjustments, changes and growing together as they progress through their faith and life journey (Leal 1996, 16-17).

4 Persons in Relationship

Our creation in the divine image is not just as individuals but also as persons-in-relationship sharing the same nature; man and woman are two ‘incarnations’ of human nature, created for each other (Butler 2003, 38-9). It is in their relational lives and in living as Christ did that both men and women can image God, despite women having different body parts to the human Jesus (LaCugna 1991, 314). In marriage especially, man and woman can complement each other in a mutual and reciprocal way by making decisions together and sharing roles which, rather than being defined simply on gender basis, may change according to prevailing circumstances, interests and skills (Butler 2003, 38-9). These interactions in their shared life require a willingness at times to take on less pleasant roles and to be flexible. This shared-life pattern is an expression of the couples’ love and mutuality; it emanates from and contributes to their ongoing marital relationship.

5 Equality

The persons in the relationship are equal; there is no hierarchy. True complementarity, as distinct from patriarchal complementarity, ‘requires complete mutuality, equality and reciprocity of persons’ (LaCugna 1991, 314). In any form of true community – and especially so of the Trinity and of marital relationship – the focus is on the other, not oneself; persons relate as equals in personhood, regardless of talents or rights (LaCugna 1991, 258). And yet this is not to suggest that everything is shared on a fifty-fifty basis, as in a business partnership for instance, for this would imply that each must seek or ensure their ‘fair share’, thus focussing on oneself and hence working against the essential notion of self-giving. Instead, the spouses in marriage discuss together and then decide as equals as to the best outcome of any decision for them as a couple. What may initially seem on the surface to be a difficult decision because of the different potential outcomes for each spouse will often in the end not be so, if the focus is on the other rather than on oneself.

6 Unity

The love forms a unity—a communion of love. In the Trinity, there is love so perfect that the result is perfect unity, one God, and this perfect communion of love is ‘the highest and most influential model for the sexual union between man and woman’ (Dennehy 1981, 11). But marriage is much more than just physical unity. Human sexuality is significant in that it takes us beyond ourselves toward another and affords the potential of genuine communion among persons who are equals (LaCugna 1991, 314).

Mary Anne McPherson Oliver sees a growing recognition of ‘the human phenomenon of coupledom as the locus of a spiritual organism comparable to that of the soul for the individual and the spirit for the community’ (Oliver 1995, 26). This new entity comes into existence when the couple first realise that they are mutually chosen and continues to be formed and shaped during the couple’s life together (Oliver 1995, 33). In sacramental terms, the presence of the Trinity, already bestowed on the individual through grace at baptism, is effected in the Christian marriage in a new manner, as a joint communion of both spouses and their participation in trinitarian love (Roccheta 1996, 17).

7 Differentiation

Within the unity there is a differentiation, a uniqueness. As it occurs in the Trinity, the love between man and woman unites them without
destroying the uniqueness of each (Dennehay 1981, 11). The spouses genuinely foster and encourage this uniqueness of each other and grant each other the freedom to develop according to their own potential and God-given gifts (Gallagher et al 1983, 16-17). Yet in the marital relationship there can be tension between dependence and independence, and the challenge for each couple is to determine the balance of interdependence that enhances both of the spouses and their love (Whitehead and Whitehead 1983, 227-8). For Paul Tillich, ‘unity in communion is only possible in perfectly centred persons who have no desire to destroy the uniqueness of the other. One cannot establish superiority over another without destroying him or her as a person’ (Patton and Childs 1998, 135).

8 Intimacy

Within the unity, there is profound intimacy. In the Trinity, this intimacy is described as perichoresis. Gallagher et al. contend that marital intercourse—‘two whole persons seeking to attain union through self-sacrificing love’—does not merely express or symbolise intimacy with God; they also affirm that this ‘is trinitarian intimacy, the couple’s intimacy with the three divine persons’ (Gallagher et al 1983, 12). While intercourse is not the only form of marital intimacy, it is often central to a couple’s maturing in this virtue; through risking closeness in this way, the spouses learn to let down their defences to each other in other ways as well. Intimacy in marriage involves an overlapping of space, a willingness to be influenced and an openness to the possibility of change; it invites each spouse beyond the self, but only with a strong and flexible sense of self can the invitation be accepted. Mature intimacy includes a sense of autonomy and an awareness of continuing responsibility for oneself; if the capacity for closeness is not rooted in a sense of self-adequacy, the resultant intimacy will not lead to mutuality but to symbiosis (Whitehead and Whitehead 1983, 226-7).

9 Permanence

While the trinitarian relationships are eternal, the marital relationship is ‘forever’ (or, at least at the time of promising this, it is intended to be so). The irrevocable commitments of the spouses in mutual self-surrender reflect the unbreakable fidelity of God within the Trinity and to those whom God loves outside it (Hogan and Le Voir 1992, 79). And yet the human reality is that some marriages do fail even though the marriage vows of each spouse were taken in all sincerity and with best intentions. In a specific marriage, each spouse is only able to make and live out the particular commitment to the other, despite flaws and limitations, by drawing on intimacy resources; without the resilience of intimacy, fear of what commitment may demand over the long run can overcome the urge toward union. Mature commitment is the fruit of married love, not its initial seed. In commitment, identity finds its final form and, through commitment, the relationship of love becomes a marriage (Whitehead and Whitehead 1983, 229).

10 Fruitfulness

Just as in the Trinity where the Father and Son bring forth the Spirit by their love, so too marital love is open to another who proceeds from the mutual love of the husband and wife (Gallagher et al 1983, 13-14). Carmody expresses this aspect even more directly: ‘Healthy Christian marriage is divine love taking flesh so concretely that people fuse sexually and create new life’ (Carmody 1985, 172). But the creativity of marriage, as in the Trinity, is not limited to generativity. Evelyn and James Whitehead see that the creative result of a marriage—children, shared purpose or a life project—has a life which comes from the couple but is more than the couple, and may well die unless it is nurtured properly. These dual aspects of fruitfulness—the capacities to
generate life and nurture it—first find expression in the relationship itself and then in the care of the children of the marriage (Whitehead and Whitehead 1983, 234-5). Finally, fruitfulness also encourages the couple to be able to let go, to hand on the future to those of the next generation and to give to them the space to create. ‘While the survival of the species depends on couples’ creativity and fruitfulness, the future is always necessarily beyond them and their control’ (Whitehead and Whitehead 1983, 245-6).

11 Transcendence

Transcendence is the outward focus of fruitfulness. In the Trinity, God’s superabundant love necessarily pours itself out; so too in married love human beings naturally give forth to others (notably their spouse and family) the love they have received from God and nurtured in their spiritual life (Sandor 2004, 168). Just as the love relationship of God in the Trinity reaches out beyond this to humanity, so too the married couple can allow their love for each other (and for God) to extend outward into other loving communities (Gallagher et al 1983, 15). Transcendence extends the couple’s fruitfulness beyond the family boundaries. As is the case for individuals, marriages and families are not meant to be only for themselves. The couple’s contribution to the faith community and to wider society is as much a part of human fruitfulness as is procreation (Whitehead and Whitehead 1983, 236). This contribution can occur through the use of one’s own gifts, with the loving support of the other, or through their unique togetherness.

12 Transformation

Not only do the couple contribute to civic and faith communities, but also they have the power to transform them:

As two spouses open themselves to God’s personalised energies of love in their love, they have the strength to believe the transfiguring power of God, who wishes to accomplish the same unification of the world as a whole. …They move together and individually into a broken world to cooperate with Christ in the world’s transformation by loving service (Gallagher et al 1983, 17).

This power of transformation is generally underappreciated by the couples themselves, by society and by the church. Through the deep love they have shown each other and from their learned experience of forgiveness and acceptance in their relationship, the mature couple has gifts to offer over and above any individual skills and attributes they may also have – and it is especially the acquired couple gifts through grace which are needed to transform the world towards the love and peace desired for us by God.

Concluding Remarks

Through these twelve attributes, it can be seen that, in their marital relationship, a husband and wife can together image the Trinity both in its immanent (inward) and economic (outward) dimensions. Even more significantly, the breadth and depth of the marital love relationship can best be articulated as the most powerful human expression of the love relationship of the three divine persons, despite the human limitations of this.

While the full extent of this image is perhaps not always fully appreciated or applied, the realisation of this likeness is not altogether surprising when considered in the context of God’s plan for the salvation of humanity and the role of Spirit-filled couples as instruments in it. This growing awareness then will lead in Part Three to a deeper contemplation of marriage as vocation, God’s call to married couples to use their individual and couple gifts as followers of Christ in the work of salvation. Various perspectives of marriage as vocation will be developed into an understanding of how this vocation can be lived in the life and image of the Trinity. As well as imaging Trinity, the married couple not only can follow this perfect example of unity and community as a model but also is called to participate actively in this trinitarian life.
For the baptised there is an even more profound dimension to this sacredness. For the baptised, marriage is a sacrament. A sacrament is a sign. This loving communion that exists between a husband and wife is the clearest sign and indication available of the extent to which God loves the human family. That’s why the scriptures use so many marital images to describe God’s relationship between God and God’s people. Just as married love is a commitment to grow in intimacy, to permanence and to fidelity in good times and in bad, so God’s love for us is all these things.

Yet, our understanding of marriage as a sacrament goes even further than this. Not only do a couple mirror or reflect God’s love, they embody the presence of Christ is a unique way. They are tangible signs of what it means to be a Christian. In short, the sacrament of marriage reveals to us the intimate relationship we share with Jesus. We are his beloved.

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TRADITION AS A SOURCE OF MORAL THEOLOGY

TERENCE KENNEDY C.Ss.R.

This essay is divided into sections each with a number of distinct points.

I. Philosophy and Culture

1. Tradition was the chief cause of conflict between conservatives and progressives both in religion and politics in the period of modernity.
2. Enlightenment philosophers (Descartes, Locke, etc.) rejected tradition as incapable of making the premises and assumptions that supported it clear and evident.
3. Many contemporary philosophers, however, recognize that such clear assertions depend on tacit or background knowledge and information. Tradition was retrieved (Möhler, Newman, etc.) because it performs a double task: epistemologically, it functions to justify our beliefs and assertions; socially, it is the life force that generates and regenerates communities. When these two aspects are wedded they carry a society’s cultural inheritance forward, recreating it in ever new forms into the future.

II. The Second Vatican Council.

1. This situation provided the setting for Vatican II to rethink the relation of Scripture and Tradition in its Dogmatic Constitution Dei Verbum on Divine Revelation. The Council fathers broke though the impasse that had divided Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation and which baroque scholasticism had ‘set in concrete’ by distinguishing Scripture and Tradition as partim-partim sources of God’s revelation. Geiselmann1 reopened the discussion by pointing out that Trent said ‘et’ and not ‘partim-partim.’
2. The result was what Max Seckler does not hesitate to call a ‘paradigm shift.’ It turned our previous theological conceptions ‘upside down’ so that they have to be redefined and then realigned within a new constellation of meaning. There is now only one source, the Verbum Dei, God’s self-revelation to us through the two channels of Tradition and Scripture. The order of these terms is inverted since the Church preaches and communicates Scripture as Tradition. The Church is the subject of Tradition as she transmits the written record of the Locutio Dei as normative for her life and action. The magisterium’s task is to preserve and authentically interpret Scripture and Tradition under God’s Word. In the Church’s life Tradition, Scripture and magisterium are inseparably linked as principles of coherence and unity. This new paradigm of revelation retrieved mostly from Scripture and the Fathers of the Church renders the question of Scripture’s material sufficiency rather irrelevant.
3. Dei Verbum no. 8 describes the concrete process of transmission and the development of doctrine.

The Tradition that comes from the Apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is growth in insight into the realities that are being handed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes about through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their heart (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with the right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth. Thus as the centuries go by, the Church is
III. The Theological Explanation of Tradition

1. Tradition is an inner moment in the very process of revelation as God’s self-communication to us. Congar has suggested a model. The origin of Tradition as distinct from individual traditions lies in the Father’s handing over of the Son and the Son’s subsequent acceptance of betrayal (traditio in Latin means handing over) into the hands of sinful men. This two-fold act is productive, as Aidan Nichols explains. Revelation is ‘linked to a masculine divine symbolism, is received and transmitted into the Church’s tradition whose ultimate subject is the Holy Spirit and which Congar conceives in essentially feminine terms.’ The Church is the realization in time of the self-communication of the triune God. The entire Church as the communio of all who live this faith, whether lay or clerical, is the mediating subject of Tradition which she passes on not just as a teaching, but as a reality, the reality of Christianity itself. Moral theology’s intentionality is primarily directed to this. It is interested in life, lived reality, experience and the Church’s praxis. These provide its object of study.

2. Tradition is an ecclesial reality that has a sacramental structure, ‘disclosed through created signs.’ Congar asserts that it ‘presupposes an action of the Holy Spirit in a living subject, and this subject is the Church, the people of God and the Body of Christ.’ The mystery hidden in God is manifest in time. And this manifestation is revelation that transmits God’s life and knowledge to us through his self-giving. Tradition ‘is the Church, salvation and tradition again, paradoxis being the content of saving knowledge and practice which the Church transmits and by which it lives.’ It involves God’s awakening our free co-operation through his graceful initiative. Ultimately it means the missions of the divine persons in our times. They stir up the response of faith and love to God’s freely chosen self-communication.

3. ‘The two hands of God,’ as St. Irenaeus would say, are forever actively fashioning human history into the story of salvation. The divine missions have consequences often overlooked in moral theology. First, after the Council of Trent the grace tract was moved from moral to dogmatic theology. No moralist denies grace but the discipline lacks a systematic account of the Spirit’s action in history transforming the human heart and destiny. Second, the renewal since Vatican II has wisely introduced the idea of Christocentrism into moral theology. Unfortunately, this has often been of a type inspired by or at least similar to Barth’s contention that the dogma of Christ’s perfect humanity, the human face of God, makes the moral decisions to be taken immediately obvious. In this model faith replaces rational moral deliberation. This deprives Tradition of its deepest and most truly human and historical dimension whereby it lives in, and has to be worked out through, human deliberation and decision-making in real worldly time.

IV. Sources and Melchior Cano’s ‘Loci Theologici.’

1. A renewed notion of revelation involves, according to Max Seckler, redefining our conception of theology and its sources. He believes Cano was seriously misunderstood as
trying to defend an epistemology of dogmatic reasoning against sixteenth century Protestants. Instead, Cano cast Aristotle’s idea of topos in an original way. A locus is not an axiom from which to derive a system but a domicilia, housing both the knowledge and the living realities from which theology draws life and nourishes its existence. He saw Scripture not in terms of propositions, dicta probantia, but as where God’s revelation could concretely be identified. Individual propositions arise by inventio and iudicium from these sources. This global conception applies to all ten loci. Each is constituted as an autonomous subject with its own method and hermeneutic.


3. They all interact in a holistic open system that points to the mystery that cannot be fully grasped or exhausted. Theology is the science of faith, understanding dependent on God’s revelation through Tradition. Seckler maintains that Tradition is composed by the loci. In so far as they describe the essential structure of the Church that transmits the content of revelation forming a communio between God and humanity. This sacramental reality witnesses to God’s acting through the Spirit in Christ. For Seckler the loci theologici reflect a theology of communio and vice versa.

4. Congar emphasized the importance of the monuments of Tradition that make it accessible so that the Church can benefit from it in a practical way. Among other monuments he added the liturgy, styles of life and popular piety that lead to sanctity and the perfection of charity, and great creations of culture in literature, art and architecture as evidence of the vitality of the faith.

V. Sources and Moral Theology.

1. Seckler argues that all branches of theology share the inseparable unity of Tradition, Scripture and magisterium as points of reference as well as the other loci sketched by Cano. Each theological community—dogmaticians, moralists, etc.—forms a distinct ecclesial subject that determines how the discipline can incorporate these sources. And thus different intellectual traditions and sciences evolve in theology.

2. Moral theology is interested in all aspects of human behaviour as enlightened by faith. The old dispute over the moral systems proved that its sources cannot be limited to Scripture, the Fathers and the magisterium. It must pay close attention to society’s real state so as to do its work. Moral theology concerns how Tradition touches and is assimilated into culture through people’s decisions in conscience. It helps form conscience not in the abstract but according to Tradition’s claims in this time and in this situation. For us that means taking the ‘signs of the times’ seriously not only as sources of moral knowledge but as generating new loci that enrich moral theology in its service of Tradition. The critical criterion is to discern how far the proposed loci witness to revelation as transmitted by Tradition. The system of the loci is radically open to the invention of new sources and so to the development of moral doctrine.

Conclusion.

The above considerations show that moral theology needs to undertake a more widely ranging dialogue with fundamental theology and to ensure a better and deeper reception of the Council, especially Dei Verbum. This should help to clarify many outstanding questions about its status as a theological science.
NOTES

3 See his chapter on Congar in his From Newman to Congar, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1990.
4 Matter relevant to this section can be found in Yves Congar. Theologian of the Church, edited by G. Flynn, Peeters, Louvain 2005, particularly John Webster’s ‘Purity and Plenitude. Evangelical reflections on Congar’s Tradition and Traditions,’ 43-65.
5 See John Webster, Barth, Continuum, London 2004, especially 129, 160-161.
6 See his Tradition and the Life of the Church, Burns and Oates, London 1964, chapter IV.
8 See Paolo Prodi, ‘La storia umana come luogo teologico,’ in Il Regno Attualità, 20(2008), 706-716. Prodi identifies what appears to be the underlying problem in discussions on Tradition, the overlooking of history, even its suppression, as a locus theologicus necessary to make theology the science of salvation history.

This talk was given at the Moral Theology Congress, ‘From the Council of Trent to the Future.’ Trent, 21-24 July, 2010.

Moral theology is a term used by the Roman Catholic Church to describe the study of God from a perspective of how man must live in order to attain the presence or favor of God. While dogmatic theology deals with the teaching or official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, moral theology deals with the goal of life and how it is achieved. So, the goal or purpose of moral theology is, simply stated, to determine how man should live.

Moral theology studies and examines such things as freedom, conscience, love, responsibility, and law. Moral theology seeks to set forth general principles to help individuals make the right decisions and deal with the details of everyday living in a way that is in accordance with the Church’s dogmatic theology. Moral theology is essentially the Roman Catholic equivalent to what Protestants usually refer to as Christian Ethics. Moral theology deals with the broad questions in life and attempts to define what it means to live as a Roman Catholic Christian. Moral theology seeks to define and address things such as the different methods of moral discernment, the definitions of right and wrong, good and evil, sin and virtue, etc.

-from http://www.gotquestions.org
THREE INCIDENTS LIE behind this article. The first two I recount below.
The third, prompted by these events, was a reading of *Via Pulchritudinis* (The Way of Beauty) published by the Pontifical Council on Culture in 2006. In the light of these, I would like to offer some reflections. They converge in the experience of moral beauty.

**Softly Subversive**

Thomas Buergenthal is an American judge at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. In his memoir *A Lucky Child*, he tells of his childhood spent in the Polish ghetto, a labour camp and then in Auschwitz as a ten year old. He recounts one of the events that still haunt him. A group of Czechs trying to escape are caught and, once in the hands of the Gestapo, sentenced to death. The gallows are set up in front of the barracks and the Germans force the prisoners to act as hangmen. Reviewing the book, Jason Steger captures the incident with one prisoner who

...finds his hands shaking so much he can’t handle the rope; the condemned man turns to him kisses his hand and eases his head into the noose. It outrages the Gestapo officer, who boots away the chair on which the wretched man stands. But it is an act that gives the prisoners a sense, however small, of putting one over their captors.¹

The courageous yet gentle sensitivity of the man in the face of death towards the distraught ‘executioner’ is both moving and admirable. The scene’s resonance, its example, the mystery behind the prisoners’ courage—all affected Buergenthal profoundly. What stood out, in retrospect, was its subversive nature. He points out:

The dignity and humanity the young prisoner demonstrated moments before his death—and the disdainful refusal of the other condemned men to plead for their lives—no doubt served over time to reinforce my conviction that moral resistance in the face of evil is no less courageous than physical resistance, a point that has unfortunately been frequently lost in the debate over the lack of greater Jewish resistance during the Holocaust.

**Hope in Horror**

The second incident occurred in Perth in June 2010. A friend sent this email. I quote it as written, to capture best its immediate impact on the audience.

Last night, my sister-in-law rang and asked me to accompany her to Immaculée Ilibagiza’s address, the woman who survived the Rwanda massacre by spending three months in a shut toilet room (3 feet by four) with eight other women—while she overheard her tribe being hacked to death.

The University of Notre Dame hall (where she spoke) was packed to overflowing (over a thousand people came). People even sat outside in the cold to listen.

She was riveting. In a humble heavily accented voice, she told us how she taught herself to speak English while trapped in the toilet so that she could tell the world what God said to her if she were to survive. ‘I asked God to show himself whether he existed.’

God did—by way of the soldiers who hunted to kill her not opening the most obviously closed door in the house—where they were hiding!

God is real. He hears me when I speak. He answers me. I am not special. I am no different than you. I could not stop hating the rebels, but I surrendered to God and God showed me how to love them. I saw that they were my friends.
and they didn’t know what they were doing.

God asked me to forgive the killers (they killed her family and every single person in the village and destroyed her home, so her whole life was annihilated) and tell people we are here for a short time to love and forgive.

She went back to her village with joy and hugged the man who had killed her brother. She was shy but full of strength in what she had to say and had a great sense of humour about God’s ways.

She communicated her suffering with extraordinary articulateness. At times, she may as well have been reading from a textbook on a pattern of call to mission.

During her ordeal, she understood what the words the apparition of Mary of Kibeho meant, she argued with God, she suffered a kind of melt-down, she was restored by slowly reciting the Rosary in her heart twenty-seven times a day, she prayed the Lord’s prayer slowly omitting ‘forgive our trespassers’ so that she would not lie to God as she felt God was closer to her than to herself. Her main request was asking God to kill her enemies—until she came to a state of surrender, then God began to act in her.

The few people whom I’ve spoken to about her address expressed what I felt—she spoke for two hours but it flew by and it was as if she’d only just begun and we wanted to hear more, much more…

**Moved by What Matters to Us**

In using these stories in a seminar for school staff, over two hundred were engrossed in the hearing as I was in the telling. Why is that? We are drawn into them because they are human interest stories. Moreover, they tell of ordinary people doing extraordinary things faced by the most degrading and repulsive settings of evil. Despite differences in taste and temperament, what binds us together emotionally as we hear, tell or read these incidents? We are moved by them. They are stories not only about goodness but about something beautiful.

Charles Taylor reminds us that it is through our emotions that we become attached to those great goods that inspire our lives. We accept such overarching values because we are affected or moved by them. The moral quest begins here—being drawn to value certain goods and states. Taylor suggests that, without emotions, we ‘become incapable of understanding any moral argument at all.’ Von Balthasar brings a further perspective to this. It is beauty that preserves the connection between truth and goodness. It is beauty that ensures the attractiveness, the desirability of the good that moves us and hence our moral response is awakened.

In hearing or reading these two stories, there is aroused, as with a work of art or the experience of creation, an interior emotion which ‘silently arouses astonishment and leads to an “exit from the self”, an ecstasy.’ Authentic beauty tends to lift us out of ourselves, to touch us in such a way that we are moved from ordinary, routine existence (time flies, time stops, we want to hear more) towards something that is more than oneself. It is a moment of self-transcendence. But, I would suggest, in these instances, it is a movement of moral self-transcendence. How is that so?

**Moral Beauty**

Psychological research indicates that moral beauty has the unique capacity to arouse the moral emotion of elevation. When human beings are observed demonstrating moral virtues
in their behaviour there is triggered

A distinctive feeling in the chest of warmth and expansion; it causes a desire to become a better person oneself; it seems to open one’s heart, not only to the person who triggered the feeling but also to other people.\(^5\)

In other words, there is gratitude—and more. Moral beauty is about goodness precisely as luminous, attractive and resonant. It brings an increased openness towards life and towards others, the urge to follow the example of the ‘moral exemplar.’ Umberto Eco echoes this, but in the broader context of the history of beauty, when he notes

…when we consider a virtuous deed to be good, we should like to have done it ourselves, or we determine to do something just as meritorious, spurred on by the example of what we consider to be good.\(^6\)

Susan Ross sees beauty’s expansiveness in terms of its ‘intrinsic generosity.’ With a de-centring of the self is the link between goodness (virtue) and beauty in that ‘the ability to appreciate beauty comes from a generous heart; indeed beauty itself enlarges the heart.’\(^7\)

There is an accompanying humility. We cease to be the centre of attention. Through the beautiful thing we encounter ‘our own vision is expanded.’\(^8\) Again, Ross reminds us that neither creation nor the perception of beauty is extrinsic to human good and its authentic realisation. With insight, she speaks of the depths of beauty.

Real beauty does not exclude; rather, it invites. Real beauty does not ‘count up,’ but rather flings its gifts to anyone who asks. Real beauty invites exploration and depth; it does not shut the door prematurely to the questioner. Beauty is always ready to give more.\(^9\)

Returning to our two stories, we can detect three things in how we are affected by them: a ‘being held’ by their momentum and emotional intensity; an identification with the ‘actors’ in the stories; a movement beyond the self that is transforming—in reverberations for the listeners, in our imaginations and in how we perceive and respond to the world.

These three qualities suggest another consideration. Such events resemble miniaturized forms of the dramatic process, condensed realisations of the emotional dynamism inherent in a good play or film. Through identifying with the characters and participating in their world, dramatic catharsis involves a recognition of who we are that marks a transforming moment of self-knowledge. Aristotle argued that recognition and self-recognition characterize the spectator’s engagement in all art and not just tragedy. Von Balthasar notes that drama responds to one’s need to see oneself within something that ‘transcends and gives meaning to the limited horizon of everyday life.’\(^10\)

I suggest that these life stories are distilled ‘dramas’ of human goodness, permeated with feelings of pity and terror but also hope since the actors, in some way, rise above their tragic circumstances. Hearing the story, like watching a play, has a similar dynamic and outcome. Through an experience of participation (of being ‘caught up’), the reader or listener is transfixed, self-transcending and transformed. We feel ‘elevated’, better people in meeting Thomas Buergenthal or Immaculée Ilibagiza and sharing their stories. We have had an experience of moral beauty.

**Primordial Moral Awareness**

Such incidents disclose another aspect. Given our human situation, it is not possible to recover primordial moral consciousness in a pure state. In other words, to know what it feels like to have the basic sense of right and wrong detached from the cultural and historical overlays that are part of human existence.

However, perhaps we get a glimpse of it in specific events as with Thomas Buergenthal or Immaculée Ilibagiza. At such times, moral sensitivities are repelled by evil done to human beings, even though, it may be difficult to explain or justify our instinctive response. Or it may be revealed in one individual’s courageous dignity in confronting evil and suffer-
ing. It prompts a moment of self-transcendence—in the person and the observer.

Helpful here is the discussion of the foundations of conscience in *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II speaks of it as ‘the primordial insight about good and evil, that reflection of God’s creative wisdom which, like an imperishable spark, shines in the heart of every man’ (59). Behind this notion of basic moral awareness as a participation in divine wisdom, the (then) Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger points to the Platonic notion of *anamnesis* (with its biblical overtones) which expresses itself in a moment of recognition of the truest self. The Platonic (and biblical) notion of *anamnesis* is captured in the

...spark of love...that something like an original memory of the good and the true (both are identical) has been implanted in us...(which)...is not a conceptually articulated knowing, a store of retrievable contents. It is so to speak an inner sense, a capacity to recall, so that the one whom it addresses, if he is not turned in on himself, hears its echo from within. He sees: that’s it! That is what my nature points to and seeks.11

The shared experience of moral beauty brings a recognition of who we are called to be. It also points to our common bonds in responding to those in whom authentic humanity is revealed at its very best. *Via Puchritudinis* reminds us that beauty is a transcendent, like truth and goodness. It characteristically opens our hearts from the particular to the universal and ultimately to God.

**A Common Humanity**

Such moments, then, are about recognition but also about *revelation*. They tell us the truth about our common humanity. They can point to the possibility of altruistic love. Yes, the man about to die on the scaffold at Auschwitz kissing the trembling hand of another prisoner, or Immaculée Ilibagiza able to forgive those who had slaughtered her family. But there is an even deeper mystery. It is captured in the actions of someone such as solicitor Brendan Keilar in 2007. A father of three, he was shot dead and a backpacker was seriously injured when they rushed to help Kaera Douglas, who was being dragged from a taxi in William Street in Melbourne during the morning peak hour.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer pondered such phenomena in a paper *The Foundations of Morality*. ‘How is it that a human being can so participate in the danger of another, that forgetting his own self-protection, he moves spontaneously to the other’s rescue?’ Schopenhauer’s reply is that this instinctive response wells up from the very core of our being. ‘It is a metaphysical impulse that is deeper than the experience of separateness. You realize you and the other are one.’12 This is at the heart of Aboriginal cultures. Bernard Lonergan would say it is the mystery of inter-subjectivity. Or as Ruth says to Harry in the drama *Spooks*, ‘Yes, “all men are equal”—that’s why we shed tears for people we don’t know’

**Jesus—the Beauty of God**

The other revelatory aspect concerns divine Revelation. It has a bearing on the specific instances we have discussed of moral beauty, firstly, in how they mediate the divine glory and secondly, in their universal implications.

First, our Christian faith tells us that truth, goodness and beauty are embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. For von Balthasar, the point on the horizon towards which truth, goodness and beauty can only direct our gaze, is made visible in Jesus. Nevertheless (and relevant to the moral dramas that anchor our discussion), he considers there are forms of worldly beauty which radiate the divine presence, which reflect the glory of God. A principal instance of this is the ‘human neighbour.’ For von Balthasar, this is one of those forms that ‘elicit a moral response.’13

Second, for both William Spohn and von Balthasar, Jesus is the ‘concrete universal of
Christian ethics’, the one whose person blends the highly general and the highly particular. Spohn’s concern is to probe how, through faithful imagination, Jesus’ story becomes paradigmatic for our moral perceptions, dispositions and identity. Ultimately, we are called to be gradually transformed into the image of Christ in his beauty.

Von Balthasar has a complementary approach that has direct bearing on the two incidents as distilled forms of the dramatic process. For him, Christ as the concrete universal is the tragic figure who does what Greek tragedy could not have done—overcomes the divide between the realms of the philosophic and the tragic, between the universal and the contingent. He is the one in whom the stage is open for the human person as a finite, historical creature to have his finitude ‘granted eternal (absolute) meaning.’ The radiant beauty of the crucified and risen Lord is redemptive precisely in that, in Him, is manifested meaning’s ultimate horizon, namely, ‘God’s all embracing trinitarian love.’ As a motto from the Life’s Healing Journey retreat puts it ‘Where He is most disfigured, there He is most glorified.’

**By Way of Moral Beauty**

In conclusion, it is timely to recall Aquinas’ comment: all that is true and good, whatever its source, comes from the Holy Spirit. These reflections have shown how appropriately this can be applied to beauty.

There are those who come to God, not by the road to Jerusalem nor the way to Athens, but at the point where they meet. They can encounter the hidden God at the intersection of the sacred and secular, where grace has a luminous presence and radiates life in moments of moral beauty. For those who are attentive and follow the call of conscience, there is a de-centring of the self. Being touched by moral beauty brings a renewed admiration and inspiration about our best selves, about what is authentically human. Those who seek what is true, good and beautiful in sincerity of heart may, as Lonergan suggests, ‘love God in their hearts while not knowing him with their heads.’

From the angle of faith, such points of disclosure are traces of the Crucified and Risen Jesus present and working through his Spirit. This is the suffering Servant, the One whose disfigured features cause astonishment, the one who will be lifted up and exalted. In Him, evil’s ugliness is set against a broader canvas, its disharmonies resolved in a higher register. Moral beauty is both subverted and disrupted by absorbing and transforming evil through the embrace of divine love. We are called, in the Risen victim, to be transfixed, transcendent and transformed. We can leave the final word to Gerard Manly Hopkins in ‘As Kingfishers Catch Fire’

*For Christ plays in ten thousand places,*
*Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his*
*To the Father through the features of men’s faces.*

**REFERENCES**

2 The University’s Vice-Chancellor, Celia Hammond, summed up the impact on the audience by pointing to Immaculee’s faith, spirit and ‘inner beauty throughout and after this ordeal which is, quite simply, awe inspiring’ in University of Notre Dame Australia media release ‘Amazing story of a survivor of the Rwandan genocide’, 30.6.2010.
The two creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 present beauty as a universal vocation and right. In these stories every human has a calling and a right to share in the beauty of creation’s bounty. But in Exodus God sends Moses to bring the beauty of the Sabbath and the Promised Land to the poor, landless, and enslaved Hebrews. In Scripture the poor have a special claim on beauty because they have been robbed of their ‘fair’ share of creation’s fat bounty.

The poor have a special claim on beauty for two reasons: because they are mired in so much unjust ugliness and because they have created so much of the world’s beauty. Their first claim to beauty comes from the fact that they have been robbed of their fair share of creation’s beauty and forced to live and work in the ugliness created and deepened by this theft. Their second claim arises from the fact that their sweat and sacrifice have created so much of the very beauty from which they are excluded.

IN CHAPTERS FIVE to nine of the Gospel of John, the author examined some of the psychological and theological attitudes and behaviours that led the Jewish establishment to close their minds to Jesus and ultimately to crucify him. Some of the same factors can be found behind the inadequate response, at all levels of the Church, to the recent phenomenon of sexual abuse of children by clergy and religious. An examination of the Gospel may provide clues that help us understand the crisis more thoroughly and to respond more effectively.

*A Lesson for Today’s Church*

Sexual abuse of minors by clergy and Church personnel is certainly sinful. Indeed, it is more than sin; it is a compulsive pathology. Equally importantly, it is a problem that involves more than the offenders. The abusers all belonged to a proud religious institution in which hierarchy, clergy and laity are all interconnected. The institution failed to respond with spontaneous compassion to the innocent victims; it overlooked them. Certainly, many in the system, from superiors to persons in the pews were ignorant of the abuse. Among those who knew, the first response, for a variety of reasons, was to defend the institution by keeping the matter quiet. Offending clergy, in comparison to their victims, were treated respectfully. Confidentiality prevailed.

When victims or their families went public, the Church as a whole—laity as well as clergy—deeply resented the ensuing publicity. Many were unwilling to believe the accusations. Those who went public were regarded with hostility and tended to be shamed and branded as disloyal.

People have become wiser since the events. Apologies and offers of compensation have been made to victims. Calls to repentance have been directed to the offending clergy and, in some cases, to their negligent superiors. However, repentance is hardly likely to address pathology. Can pathology be recognised more effectively, and potential offenders identified and treated? Does the clerical state itself in some way attract potential offenders? Shaping an adequate response is the task of everybody in the Church.

More insidious and more difficult to address can be listed the unwillingness or inability of respected institutions to see the obvious; the instinct to defend and to close ranks; the obsession with secrecy and defending the good name (‘seeking the glory that comes from men’ (Jn 12.43; 7.18)); the spontaneous hostility towards those who rock the boat.

This article will review, not so much the abusive behaviour of the offenders, as the so far confused and inadequate response of bishops, priests, religious and laity to the underlying problems.

*Situating the Question*

What convinced the Jewish leaders, including conscientious Pharisees, to crucify Jesus? Why did so many ordinary people collude in their decision? Was the High Priest Caiaphas different from any contemporary national leader in his realistic judgment that ‘it is better to have
one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed’ (Jn.11.50)?

For the Gospel’s author, emotions were possibly sharpened by his community’s experience of virulent opposition from conscientiously motivated Pharisees at the time when the Gospel was written, sixty or so years after some of their predecessors had murdered Jesus.

As disciples today cope with the on-going fallout to the sexual abuse, inevitably questions arise that have still to be adequately addressed. How come the blindness? How come the failure in compassion? How come the complicity in secrecy at all levels of the Church, from Pope to loyal laypeople? The Gospel of John warns us not to be surprised.

A partial answer to these questions lies in the power entrenched in the customary attitudes and behaviours of all human social groupings that share a common unity and similar vision, from nations at one end of the spectrum to smaller voluntary groups at the other. They tend to develop a mini-culture of their own, with their special ways of interacting and their own hierarchies. Some are more formally institutionalised than others. Among them can be named such intermediate bodies as churches, clergy, media, police forces, trade unions, along with the military, legal, medical and educational professions, and many more. When interacting within such systems, people tend to think, feel and act differently from how they might were they alone—particularly if they hold positions of responsibility or influence.

Before examining the Gospel material in detail, it is important to recall the literary technique used by the author. The Gospel as a whole is a prolonged meditation on the significance of Jesus. It draws on memories of his historical life, seen through the prism of sixty years of reflection and prayer, under the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth. Though expressed in the form of discourse/dialogue/discussion between Jesus, disciples, various opponents and a cast of incidental characters, the words are the words of the Gospel’s author. In time, the Church accepted the Gospel as a faithful expression of its sense of Jesus.

Systemic Sin in the Gospel of John

Chapter five. Chapter five of John’s Gospel began with an account of Jesus healing a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. The presenting problem was that Jesus worked the healing on the Sabbath. His action was seen by ‘the Jews’ as a violation of Sabbath. Their reaction could have been otherwise. It could have been astonishment, leading to recognition of the presence and action of God. It could have been caution.

However, both astonishment and caution would have disrupted the comfortable status quo, called for a painful change of mindset and raised issues of power and authority.

In the current crisis, why were the offenders more readily believed than the victims? Why have offenders eventually been disowned but no critical examination yet made of the culture in which they were formed and which managed their subsequent behaviour?

In the discourse that followed Jesus’ action, Jesus sought to justify his conduct. He cited the precedent already set by God. Contrary to the comment made in Genesis that ‘on the seventh day God rested’ (Genesis 2.21), God obviously continued to operate and to create, even on the Sabbath, giving life to the new-born and judging those who died. Jesus claimed that his action reflected, and indeed revealed, the one whom he called his Father, a
God who consistently gave life and who likewise ratified and honoured into eternity (judged) people’s life choices for or against love. ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’ The author ominously noted, ‘for this reason the Jews were seeking…to kill him [Jesus], because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God’ (5.17-18). Jesus’ attempt to justify his action further challenged the accepted mindset. His opponents persisted in ignoring the undeniable evidence of the healing rather than expanding their restricted but comfortable sense of God. By his healing action and his justification of it, Jesus re-defined God and asserted his personal identity. Because of their accustomed mindset, according to which the Sabbath was unquestioningly respected, many Jews were instinctively unwilling to explore Jesus’ challenge of special and unique relationship to God. They chose the psychological response of avoidance, even to the extent of the violent alternative of murder.

In the current problem, continued re-offending often led merely to new appointments. More challenging responses to the problem were avoided, even at the price of further violations.

After noting the determination of some to kill Jesus, the Gospel continued with a long discourse that developed in greater detail the themes already introduced. Jesus reflected and revealed the heart of God. Like his Father, Jesus gave life. His integrity became the touchstone by which people determined their future destiny, choosing to entrust themselves to him and his values (‘believing’) and thereby choosing ‘life’; or rejecting him and opting to remain enmeshed in the violent and destructive ways of the world. In this sense, Jesus ‘executes judgment’ (Jn 5.27).

Unlike disciples, Jesus’ opponents chose to remain ensnared within the closed ideology of their religious system. They were blind and unresponsive to the generally respected witness of the Baptist (5.33). They were unwilling to draw the consequences of Jesus’ unprecedented healing action and of the attractiveness of his integrity and authority.

As well, though claiming loyalty to their scriptures, their ideological stance desensitised them to the authentic interpretation of those scriptures (5.46-47). In a somewhat similar way, a Church that proclaimed a preferential option for the oppressed failed to apply that option to the case of the victims.

Chapter six interrupted the flow of the argument, though its general thrust was not entirely inappropriate. While focussing on Jesus as ‘the bread from heaven’ (6.32), it developed the theme of Jesus giving ‘life’ to all who would successfully break free from the constrictions of the safe and the familiar, and open themselves to the mystery of Jesus (6.40). At the same time, it highlighted the problem of the struggle to true faith, even of disciples (6.66). To believe in another involves some degree of surrender of control. The inertia natural to any institution makes such yielding difficult.

**Chapter seven.** The argument resumed in chapter 7 (verse 14), where discourse changed to discussion. After a brief reflection on the witness of Moses and other scriptures justifying Jesus’ attitude to Sabbath, Jesus openly challenged the Jews’ decision to kill him, and accused them of thereby breaking the law. He insisted that they ‘not judge by appearances’ but ‘with right judgment’ (7.24). This is a crucial observation of the Gospel’s author. While people remain under the influence of their ideologies, they see only what they want to see.

Escape from the power of fixated social and religious attitudes would come about through the deliberate cultivation of ‘right judgment’, the judgment of conscience. ‘Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own’ (7.17). Doing so would require readiness to break free from the power of group acceptance (what the Gospel calls the pursuit of human ‘glory’ (7.18)), and to enter into one’s true self. It is...
the way of self-knowledge, and is the fruit of ‘abiding’ in Jesus. It is the indispensable way to see reality and to escape the instinctive response of hostility.

Perhaps something more than self-knowledge is required in the present situation—an openness to learn from the developing insights into how human groups function, precisely as groups.

At this stage of the discussion the author deliberately differentiated the various actors involved: the ‘Pharisees and the chief priests’, the ‘crowd’ and, later, ‘those who believed in him’. An effect of the differentiation was to indicate that the spontaneous, virulent and virtually unanimous hostility shown by the leaders was not the only possible response to Jesus.

The Pharisees and the chief priests were the powerful ones, those with most to lose when the social and religious structure came under siege. At the time of Jesus, the priests had sought control by resisting change; the Pharisees by guiding it. For both groups, control was paramount. In this case, their predictable response to take control was to flex their muscles and to send ‘temple police to arrest’ Jesus (7.32).

When confronted with the ambivalent attitude of the temple police and of the crowd, the leaders sought to discount and disempower them by resorting to ridicule, branding the crowd as ‘accursed’ (7.49). Significantly, chief priests and Pharisees normally distanced themselves from one another. The presence of a common threat gave birth to an incongruous union.

Political leaders know well the power of demonising minority groups as a way to achieve a semblance of social unity—whether the scapegoats be prisoners, asylum seekers, Muslims or whatever. In the current problem of abuse, victim advocacy groups have often been strongly criticised.

One of the Pharisees, Nicodemus, broke ranks, reminding the leaders that to condemn Jesus without a hearing was against their law. Their response was not to examine his objection, but to close ranks more tightly, to insult him and thereby to isolate him (7.52).

Church personnel who have spoken out publicly in support of victims have risked being similarly judged as disloyal.

In the background, the Gospel examined the process unfolding among the crowd. Some discounted Jesus, branding him as ‘having a demon’ (being out of his mind) (7.19). The accusation relieved them of the need to listen carefully to what he was saying. Others tried to discern the legitimacy of Jesus. Some of them, on the basis of his signs, even believed in him as either the ‘prophet’ or the ‘Messiah’ (7.31, 41-3)—labels drawn from the tradition, but not the result of contemplative attention.

Throughout the discourse, the Gospel presented Jesus persisting with his call to conversion: ‘On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink’” (7.37-8).

Jesus’ call is highly significant. The prerequisite to faith is ‘thirst’, thirst for more, thirst for the transcendent—justice, truth, compassion, God. It was the experience of the first disciples: ‘What do you want?’ ‘Where do you live?’ ‘Come and see’. ‘And they came and stayed’ (1.38-39). It was the experience of the Samaritan woman: ‘Give me some of that water that I may never be thirsty’ (4.15). Faith presupposes a sense of incompleteness, a dissatisfaction, a certain restlessness, a search. It is never an exercise solely of detached reason. Only those who truly commit themselves in love know the deeper truth of another.

The Pharisees and the chief priests lacked this thirst. Complete and satisfied within the closed walls of their beliefs and practices, they were certain that they had the answers. They had made their law, not a way to God, but a substitute for God and for the contemplative knowledge of God. Their questions, even the gentle voice of conscience, were drowned in their certainties. Inner thirsts were dangerous.
Questions were dangerous. The system had to be protected.

Perhaps a consequence of the Church’s increasing confidence in its own infallibility over the past century and a half has been the felt need to look sinless as well. At every level of Church life, it has been difficult to admit, not only the sins of individuals, especially those in positions of trust and leadership, but the fallibility and imperfection of everyone. As institution, the Church’s structures of accountability and transparency are clearly inadequate.

Chapter eight. The drama resumed in chapter eight (after the interpolated text dealing with the woman caught in adultery) with Jesus’ claim to be ‘the light of the world’ (8.12). As with his invitation to the thirsty, his offer of light made sense only to those who realised they were in the dark, and were still seeking. Repeating the accusation that he had made earlier: ‘Do not judge by appearances’ (7.24), Jesus charged the Pharisees who objected to his claim that they judged ‘by human standards’ (8.15). A little later he warned the Jews: ‘You are of this world’ (8.23). Their judgments were clouded by the belief systems to which they were in thrall.

Looking More Closely at Systemic Sin

At this stage of the interaction, the Gospel explicitly introduced the issue of sin: ‘you will search for me, but you will die in your sin’ (8.21,24). The discussion became more explicitly theological. Escape from sin(s) would be the fruit of faith in Jesus. Though the literary genre was a scripted interaction between Jesus and Jews, the author was theologising for the sake of his readers. Throughout the Gospel, his concern was to challenge and to nourish the faith of his community – to lead them ever closer to Christ. The power of sin operating in the Pharisees and the chief priests, and still operating in the community’s Jewish opponents, could likewise operate within the Christian community itself.

Any human grouping, any institution, is particularly open to the deceptive power of sin. Why did good bishops instinctively act to defend the reputation of the Church rather than protect the victims? Why did fellow priests keep silence about suspicions or reservations they may have had regarding offenders? Why did loyal laypeople seek to silence advocacy groups and the media when they first publicised the abuse? Why did the Church as a whole not side with the victims but, instead, doubt their stories and discount the depth of the harm they suffered?

The discussion continued, but this time Jesus addressed, perhaps surprisingly, ‘the Jews who believed in him’ (8.31)—effectively, the members of the author’s community and, by extension, his readers across the centuries. ‘If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’ (8.31-2). The indispensable way to break free from the deadening, blinding power of any faith system is to draw closely to Jesus and to continue in his word—as the first disciples had done, who ‘went and stayed with him’ (1.39). The one way to know the truth of Jesus is the way of love. And only love can lead from notional alignment to personal transformation.

In the Gospel narrative, those ‘who believed in him’ resented the inference that they were not already ‘free’. They cited as their justification, not their personal relationship with Jesus and their careful attention to his word, but their place within the proud tradition of Judaism. As ‘descendants of Abraham’, they claimed to be slaves to no one. Jesus’ response was to point out that, until they learnt to ‘continue in his word’, they would be little different from their fellow Jews who sought to kill him. They were still captive to their unquestioning confidence in their faith tradition.

Though they claimed Abraham as their ‘father’, they were certainly not taking after him. Abraham was not a ‘company man’. He was a
man who thirsted for more, who abandoned his familiar homeland and his people in answer to a mysterious call from a God whose face he had not seen but whose voice he had heard calling faintly in the depths of his spirit.

Their resistance to notice and to respond to the God calling in their depths, along with their instinctively resistant ‘group thinking’ towards Jesus, meant that they were following a different ‘father’. The Gospel identified that father as the ‘devil’.

For the author, their unanimity in attitudes of hostility and blindness to the obvious were assurance of the influence of the devil. Effectively, their mind-set identified the sin of the world. ‘You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies’ (8.44).

The Gospel ‘upped the ante’—and perhaps appropriately. In the whole sorry story of abuse, there seems to be a power at work greater than blind dynamics influencing human interactions. There is confusion and resistance to probe more deeply. Though the priority of victims’ needs has been recognised; though offenders have been condemned and called to repentance; though steps have been taken to ensure that potential offenders are not ordained; though a handful of negligent bishops have been rebuked, yet the clerical culture itself has not been reviewed. The existence of other possible problems seems to be denied at the highest level.

As long as they remain unredeemed, social and religious institutions are seedbeds of recognised, repressed and unowned mutual hostilities. The Gospel would say their potential is ‘murderous’, either actually or metaphorically, though their members manage to maintain a state of psychological denial. To the extent that people deceive themselves, the Gospel would say that they are ‘liars’. Institutions retain a fragile unity by channelling their hostility towards outsiders, offenders or dissident insiders. Within social systems, mechanisms of hostility, denial and deception are contagious.

They can be redeemed only when compassion and forgiveness replace hostility; and when true unity is achieved, not by the rejection of a common enemy, but by the contemplative, loving acceptance of individuality and difference. The Gospel saw this realised through committed relationship to Jesus, adherence to his ‘word’, discovery of the deepest desires of the heart and sensitivity to the quiet voice of God echoing in personal conscience.

How can people break through deeply embedded denial and deception? Jesus hoped that his own innocent execution and his reconciling resurrection would provide the necessary shock and incentive: ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he’ (8.28). Later in the narrative he would express a similar hope: ‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself’ (12.32).

Has it been too easy to grow used to crucifixion?

Perhaps predictably, the response of Jesus’ opponents was continued denial, expressed, this time, in exclusion: ‘You are a Samaritan and have a demon’ (8.48)—or, in other words, ‘You do not belong to us and are obviously out of your mind’. Jesus quietly responded: ‘Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad’ (8.57). Abraham heard the call of God to an unknown future; he moved away from his familiar and constricted homeland—and responded wholeheartedly to God’s promise, about to be realised in the redeeming work of Jesus.

As if to illustrate the murderous dynamic inexorably at work, the Gospel observed: ‘They picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple’ (8.59). Lynch the ‘outsider’—and prove the point!
To conclude this section of his narrative, the author masterfully presented a dramatic enactment of the operation of sin as he had outlined it in the preceding chapters. The story began with Jesus’ gift of sight to a man who been ‘born blind from birth’.

In the common estimation the man was different, deficient. As such he was excluded, branded a sinner and forced to the margins of society: ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ (9.2). Jesus used the occasion to redefine sin and to show it exemplified, not in physical blindness but in collective moral blindness.

In the present situation confronting the Church, might Jesus identify sin, not simply in the deeds of the offenders, but also in the unexamined collective culture of the whole Church?

As with the healing of the man who had been ill for thirty-eight years—which had occasioned the earlier discussion about the sin of the world—so, too, Jesus performed this intervention on a Sabbath. Despite the obvious witness of what was more a creative than a healing action of Jesus, some Pharisees concluded: ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath’ (9.15). However, not all concurred: corporate unity was at risk. When questioned once more, the man stated that Jesus was something more than a healer—he was a ‘prophet’ (9.17).

Under pressure to deny the obvious, the Jews sought confirmation of the man’s blindness from his parents. The parents affirmed his blindness as a fact, but sought to distance themselves from the whole event. In light of the practice adopted by the Jewish mainstream by the time of the Gospel’s composition, the narrative observed: ‘His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue’ (9.23). As has been noted previously, human groupings invariably seek to maintain threatened unity by ostracising dissidents.

In a pathetic effort to remain in denial of the obvious, the Pharisees insisted: ‘We know that this man is a sinner’ (9.25). Given their closed minds and their unshakeable trust in their ideology, they automatically assumed they ‘knew’—because Jesus had not observed the Sabbath in the way they expected. The man, on the other hand, simply underlined the fact of his healing. Obstinate unwilling to face the clear evidence, they questioned him again about the way that the healing had been performed. In a wonderful display of humour, the man mocked their obtuseness, and proceeded to remind them that such creative activity could prove only that Jesus was ‘from God’ (9.33). Unable to answer his logic or deny reality, they resorted to labelling him a ‘sinner’, and ‘drove him out’ (9.34). Criticise and exclude from community the uncomfortable maverick—anything to remain in denial and to avoid the need to change!

When asked by Jesus if he ‘believed in the Son of Man’, the healed man affirmed his readiness, and went even further, addressing Jesus with the post-resurrection title of Lord: ‘Lord, I believe’. And he worshipped him’ (9.38). The blind man’s status as the one victimised enabled him, from his position as victim, to see the truth that the Jewish leaders, from their position as upholders of the institution, were unable to grasp.

Over the course of the story, the blind man had moved from physical blindness to true religious insight. His confession of faith occasioned Jesus’ comment: ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind’ (9.39). In replying to the Pharisees who challenged the latter part of his comment, Jesus said to them: ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see’, your sin remains’ (9.41). Sin takes practical shape in blindness; it nourishes exclusion; it is hostile—springing, as the Gospel would have it, from the original Principle
of Evil who was ‘a murderer and a liar from the beginning’ (8.44).

**Searching the Gospel to find a Solution**

According to the Gospel of John, systemic sin is the deeper sin, the origin of other sins. How can it be met?

While people need systems in order to interact socially, they need to learn to base genuine community on love, mutual respect and openness to difference, not on ideology and accepted customs (5.10); nor a common enemy (7.32); nor the exclusion of dissenters (7.47-48; 9.35). They need to face everyone’s propensity to sin, and not to deny it or to cover up. Jesus hoped that his shocking death and unexpected resurrection, his being ‘lifted up’, would serve to alert people to the sinfulness embedded in human groupings (8.28; 12.32).

People need to call each other respectfully to accountability, as did Nicodemus (7.51). They need to speak the truth without fear (8.32). They need courage to risk rejection and to let go of ‘the glory that comes from one another’ (5.54). It is too easy to be convinced that ‘we know’ (9.25), that ‘we see’ (9.41). People need to help each other, somehow, to recognise both personal and institutional blindness.

To do this successfully they need perpetually to be alert to, and consciously detach themselves from, the psychological and social forces that inevitably operate within any organised group. They need to become aware of their own instinctive hostility towards those who are different. They need to learn to know themselves. How?

According to the Gospel, this can happen only as they listen to the word of Jesus illuminating their hearts. They need to ‘remain in his word’ (8.31) and grow close to him if they are to break free from the pervasive social power of sin: ‘if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed’ (8.36). As disciples of the innocent Victim, they need to learn to stand in the shoes of victims everywhere and try to see reality through their eyes—deliberately, fearlessly (as did the blind man so successfully in the Gospel story). The only adequate response to the blindness of the world is to learn to stand in the shoes of Christ, the crucified one, ‘the light of the world’ (8.12). To succeed requires effort; it calls for imagination; it demands unrelenting discipline.

**Further Reading**


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**Since the world cannot be saved from the outside,**

- we must first of all identify ourselves with those to whom we would bring the Christian message—like the Word of God who Himself became a man;
- next we must forego all privilege
- and the use of unintelligible language,
- and adopt the way of life of ordinary people in all that is human and honorable. (Indeed, we must adopt the way of life of the most humble, if we wish to be listened to and understood);
- then, before speaking, we must take great care to listen not only to what people say, but more especially to what they have it in their hearts to say. Only then will we understand them and respect them, and even, as far as possible, agree with them.

—Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, para. 87
A THEISM IS A world view that rejects the idea of God. Non-theism rejects the importance of the choice ‘to God or not to God’. The Oxford Dictionary (2009) noted that atheism combines the Greek ‘a’ (meaning ‘without’) and ‘theos’ (meaning ‘God’). Humanism and Buddhism provide two different examples of systems of belief that do not rely on a God as a basic premise, although adherents differ in the extent to which such an idea is fundamental. Some Buddhists, for example, prefer the term non-theism, since the Buddha would not be drawn on the question of deity one way or the other. While both claim independence of divine agency, they have variant perspectives on the relative importance of humans in the scheme of life, the function of the mind and its emotions, the limits of nature, and even the importance of the God question itself.

Humanism

Humanism is a rational belief system. The label is a 19th century construct, however renaissance ‘humanists’ were inspired by the 5th century BCE Greek philosopher, Protagoras (Cline, 2009). He sought natural explanations, valued free inquiry and placed humans at the centre of moral and social concerns. As a belief system, it has contemporary expressions in various Humanist Manifestos (Bragg, 1933; Kurtz, 1973; IHEU, 2002).

According to the British Humanist Organization (www.humanism.org.uk, 2009), Humanists believe that people can live good lives ‘without religious or superstitious beliefs’, by making the ‘best of the one life we have, by creating meaning and purpose’ and by taking ‘responsibility for our actions’ and working ‘in mutual respect for the common good’. It noted that Humanists ‘make sense of the world using reason, experience and shared human values’.

For the Humanist, morality is not based on any doctrine or sacred text. It is derived and measured by utility (Singer, 1981). In other words, what is ‘good’ is that which contributes to the greatest communal human welfare. Humanists balance individual freedoms and an Epicurean delight in the good life with social responsibilities and justice born of a commitment to human rights and equity.

Humanist reverence is reserved for the natural world. For the Humanist, the primary function for the mind is to weigh up empirical evidence in pursuit of scientific truth that can be methodically examined. The humanist’s mind is thus a tool to perceive the world as it actually (materially) exists. Humanists therefore have a belief in a structured universe that can be perceived. This belief system has no need of, nor rationale for, the existence of a deity. It explicitly denies God’s existence and charges religions with abetting ignorance.

Regarding nature, the Humanist’s world is bound by the senses. With no belief in anything beyond sensory limits—no soul, no spirit, no afterlife—there is no realm of the super-natural. Whatever exists must be, by its nature, natural. Mystical experience is akin to madness. Humanists argue that everything has a scientific explanation. Regarding emotion, Rifkin (2008) noted that Humanists do not let
emotions dominate cognitions. The heart resides below the head. Secular humanists speak of sublime experiences such as ‘the grandeur of the universe, the wonder of being alive, the mysteries of existence’, but ‘the resplendent does not entail the transcendent’ (Rifkin, 2008, p. 57). Eller (in Rifkin, p. 58) argued that, what some call spiritual experiences are rather ‘ultra-human’... ‘the best, the strongest, the most profound human experiences, (are) human nonetheless... (and that) we impoverish ourselves when we credit these soaring feelings and capacities ... to realms ... unknown, and almost certainly unreal’.

Buddhism

Like Humanism, Buddhism also has a rational outlook. Established in the 6th century BCE, in northern India and based on the teachings and practices of Gautama Sakyamuni, it has a variety of contemporary forms. Its basic aims: to understand suffering; abandon its causes; experience its cessation and develop a path for self and others to a state of being beyond suffering, present (in many versions of Buddhism) as psycho-philosophy rather than religion. Emotion (both positive and negative) is considered simply one of the many distractions and obstacles to the enlightened state beyond suffering.

The Buddhist’s mind is both a tool for perception and the source of creative being itself. Buddhists believe that the world is constantly in creation and that the mind and the senses participate in this process, and therefore the world cannot be studied purely objectively (as Humanists aim to do). Where Buddhism and Humanism concur is on the importance of individual practical experience. Buddhist morality is highly self-referent. In a very Humanist approach, the Buddha himself undertook an empirical enquiry into the nature of consciousness to establish Buddhism’s fundamental tenets. According to Mishra (2004, p. 29) the Buddha was ‘more of a trenchant thinker and psychologist than a religious figure’.

Buddhism sees no need for an Abrahamic-style God. However, some forms of Buddhism may be considered quasi-theist. For example, Surya Das noted that ‘the Ultimate in Buddhism and the Ultimate in theistic religions may just be two sides of the same thing’ (2009, np). Buddhists neither deny nor confirm the existence of God, but find the whole argument an irrelevant distraction, since (in their belief) no being outside of oneself can reduce suffering. Harvey (1990, p. 36) claimed that Buddhism sees no need for a creator. He commented that Buddhism ‘postulates no beginning to the world and regards the world as sustained by natural laws’. Bikshu (2008) noted that, Buddhist teachings are non-theistic as opposed to atheistic. There is no reference made to God’s existence or otherwise. However, the notions of God and consciousness sometimes merge.

Buddhists differ from Humanists in the recognition of a higher order of consciousness and a broader function for the mind – one that lies beyond the sensory-limitations of rational empirics. There is reference (especially in Mahayana Buddhism) to a super-mental principle, variously referred to as ‘divine presence, infinite wholeness and all-inclusive completeness’ (Surya Das, 2009). The Dalai Lama referred to this principle as ‘clear light’. He noted (2005) that this light can be perceived at the moment of death and that practised monks can remain voluntarily in the clear light state for several days after death without their bodies decomposing.

Sogyal Rinpoche (1992, p. 46) claimed that the nature of mind is that which ‘Christians and Jews call God, Hindus call the Self, Shiva, Brahma and Visnu, Sufis call the Hidden Es-

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sence, and Buddhists call the Buddha nature’. He displaces ‘God’ with consciousness, since ‘Mind is revealed as the universal basis of experience—the creator of happiness … and suffering, the creator of what we call life and what we call death’. In this sense, the Buddhist ‘mind’ becomes untouched by concepts of theism or atheism since it is the very arena in which such conceptions and arguments take place. While Humanists are, first and foremost, thinking beings, the act of conscious thinking makes the Buddhist a creator-being.

Regarding morality, the Buddhist’s ethic appears to stretch wider than the Humanist’s, to encompass all creatures and to not view humans as the most important. The Buddhist notions of karma and reincarnation (where a being can return as any kind of animal) urges a holistic view of ecosystems and a sense of responsibility for all beings. In this, Buddhists generally differ from the one-life Humanists. However, in some streams of Buddhism the doctrine of rebirth is recognised as a cultural accretion, rather than a central Buddhist tenet.

**How does Atheism counter Paley’s ‘design argument’ for the existence of God?**

Vice President of the British Humanist Association, Richard Dawkins, had little to say of Buddhism in his book *The God Delusion*, other than that it might be viewed as a ‘herbivorous memeplex’ (2006, p. 200). He denounced any position other than that which argues strongly against the existence of God and placed karma and reincarnation in the fairy-tale category.

Dawkins claimed that ‘life’s improbability’ provided the strongest logic against God’s existence. He went so far as to say it ‘comes close to proving that God does not exist’ (p. 113). This argument relies on the incredible odds against life existing at all on a ‘speck of debris from the cosmic explosion’ (p. 117). It postulates that good design would not have left such a narrow margin for error and as such could not have been produced by an omnipotent being. Dawkins claimed that this lack of finesse reduced the omnipotence of God—perhaps to zero.

Dawkins positions natural selection as the only plausible, ‘workable alternative to (the) statistical improbability (p. 120)’ of life on earth. By emphasising the implausibility of both deity and chance, he opens the way for an alternative - the likelihood of a systematic process for life (evolution by natural selection). As such, Dawkins highlights the lack of a need for a divine creator. Lennox (2007, p. 262) noted that Dawkins’ view of life’s origin requires no intelligence - that it arises ‘by the spontaneous accidents of chemistry’.

Australian scientist, Robin Williams (2006) extended this argument by pointing out the apparently clunky solutions that life has produced via evolutionary experimentation. For example, Williams took issue with the upside-down design of human nasal passages which he claimed resulted from the recent development of an upright posture. He noted nature’s upside-down koala pouches, human hernias, bad breath, tail bones and appendixes and the less than ideal co-location of sexual and waste-removal functions. In Smith (2006) he claimed these flaws provide a case against intelligent design which argues that certain biological features (such as the eye or wing) are too complex to have evolved by Darwinian increments.

Both Dawkins and Williams claimed that with modern science, humans no longer need God as an explanation to life’s wonders. Not only that, but life’s weird and wonderfuls show that there must not be a central intelligence agency.

**What are the strength and weaknesses of the non-God argument?**

Theists counter Dawkins’ improbability argument by flipping it - by saying that the incredible occurrence of life is so astounding that it must therefore have a controller. This is the classic 18th century ‘Design Argument’ of Paley, a Christian theologian. He positioned the question of God’s existence in the scenario of a person finding a watch. In contrast to the simple, natural rocks and grass of the forest
floor, such a complex machine must have a maker. He likened the watch to the complex systems in the natural world, including humans and argued that the grand order and purpose of the cosmos oblige us to believe God exists. However, this argument assumes order must have purpose. Scottish philosopher David Hume, (writing prior to Paley) had already raised objections to this leap of logic (see Crowder, 1993).

Modern ‘Intelligent Design’ proponents (such as Behe, 1996 and Dembski, 1998) claim that natural selection is God’s way of enabling design, a kind of deist auto-pilot. Evolution itself explains some apparently unintelligent design. For example, Smith (p. 2) noted that koalas evolved from wombat-like marsupials with backwards-facing pouches so that digging did not sand-blast their babies and that inverted koala pouches did not indicate that God was heartless to small furry critters. Evolution as God’s remote seems a reasonable idea – though it raises the question of which forces are now in control, the natural or the divine? It seems that any attempt to answer is purely speculative.

Crowder (1993, 1994) critiques the theist side of the Design Argument on account of its inductive reasoning and in deference to Hume’s questions regarding its mechanistic (the watch) analogy, its exaggerated scope (a watch is on a different scale to the universe) and its problematic hint of infinite regress (who made God?). Crowder noted other issues raised by Hume’s analysis. For example, even if the Design Argument concluded in favour of God, there is no rationale for what kind of, not how many Gods. The questions of ‘deist?’ or ‘monotheist?’ or ‘polytheist?’ or ‘pantheist?’ are no closer to being answered. Crowder (1994, p. 54) concluded that the Design Argument ‘still points us to a shadowy cosmic architect, not a creator’.

British theologian Keith Ward argues faithfully for God, but takes an almost Buddhist (psychological and holistic approach) to refuting Dawkins’ improbability argument. Like Sogyal Rinpoche, he appears to equate the creator to consciousness. Ward claimed that:

…ultimate mind is the actual basis of all possible states… uniquely self-existent, … It can be spoken of as omniscient, in the sense that it conceives or generates all possible states, knows what they are and knows that there are no more than it conceives… it brings whatever is actual into existence from the realm of possibility. Nothing that comes into being can have more power than ultimate mind, since the latter is the source of all actuality’ (2006, p. 132).

Ward presents consciousness as self-evident proof that ‘something must exist eternally and necessarily’. Interestingly, he defines God as ‘mind-like’, rather than ‘being-like’.

In reviewing Ward’s The Big Questions in Science and Religion, McGrath (2009, p. 235) noted that the God hypothesis ‘seems to be at least as good as the available alternatives, though this alone will not intellectually compel anyone to believe there is a God’. According to Ward (2006, p. 242), science has not made religion obsolete but rather offers a way for both religion and science to engage in conversation about possibilities undiscovered. He claimed that for such dialogue to benefit humanity, both theist and atheist must set aside their certainties.

**Conclusion**

Atheism has various strands and underlying rationales. Buddhism and Humanism provide some insight into the logic of those who do not rely on the existence of a creator God. There are strengths and weaknesses in their arguments. Regarding Improbability, I tend to think with Hume, but not Dawkins. The awesome complexity of life need not demand a deity. Nor does it rule out. The intricate dance of natural selection through the ages explains many things, but gives little reason for human love, mystical experience or the fortifying nature of faith. However, these innately human traits ought not be simply yoked to meta-human forces. As many of the Eastern traditions suggest, great power and insight might be attained by human endeavour.
In a similar vein (lacking absolutes), perhaps evolution falls short of absolute proof that there is nothing more than biology. Or perhaps we have yet to discover everything that biology has in store for us. The theory does little to explain the original emergence of self-replicating cells or the majesty of its carbon building blocks.

As the Drummond character in the famous Monkey Trials play *Inherit the Wind* noted: ‘Darwin moved us forward to a hilltop, where we could look back from where we came. But for this insight, this knowledge, we must abandon our faith in the pleasant poetry of Genesis’ (Lawrence & Lee, 2000, p. 60). Accepting Genesis as poetry does not mean abandoning avenues for discovery in the unexplored realms, where the polemics of nature and spirit, science and religion, physics and consciousness might have something to teach us.

Either way, it appears that the need for a definitive answer on the possibility or implausibility of God cannot rely on any factor that carries the weight of proof. After all, ‘When we speak about what we call God, no-one has the last word’ (Armstrong, 2009). It seems that a viable alternative may be to sit for a while in a Buddhist state of enquiry and simply witness how the Mind stirs up such interesting dilemmas for us to be distracted by.

**REFERENCES**


The Institute of Counselling—‘The Sydney Archdiocesan Institute of Counselling’—was established in 1969. This book is a history of the Institute itself set against a long background of Catholic Church tradition together with an account of the environment in which the Institute is currently situated.

Counselling in the Christian tradition from the earliest centuries was pastoral care in monastic communities and in the confessional. Early in the seventeenth Ignatius Loyola and Francis de Sales pioneered spiritual direction for all, not just cloistered men and women, who sought to live the devout life. Thus counselling supported the development of the active apostolate in post-Reformation Catholicism.

The post-Enlightenment development of the secular disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis were viewed with great wariness by the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth.

The Institute of Counselling was established in the Sydney Archdiocese in the early post-Vatican II period. We are given colourful portraits in this history of the principal Archdiocesan representatives and the determined pioneers of the Institute and the story of their interactions.

A new ministry emerged. Courses were developed along with group therapies and skills training. The Institute developed ‘a wanted course that gave what it promised’ (p.48). In the early days it was wanted especially by members of religious congregations who sought assistance in coping with the new Church environment after Vatican II. The aim of the Institute was not the renewal of religious communities but the enrichment of individuals so that they could live in their communities. (p.120).

Gradually the demographic of participants changed, the Institute has been formally linked with the Catholic Theological Union, but through it all it remains a unique ‘agency of the Church’.

The concluding paragraph of the book captures the spirit that has always animated the Institute:

Begun in hopeful times, the Institute has ministered to perennial needs. It has lasted because what it does and stands for matters to the people who have been part of it – students, helpers, staff. It has been true to the vision of its founders. Many have taken fresh heart from it—may their story encourage still more. (p.178)

—Editor

(The book can be purchased from John Garratt Publishing, Pauline Book and Media Centre, Gleebooks and the Institute of Counselling. Price $29.95 concession $25.00 plus $5.00 per copy p&p.)

MORE BOOKS ON SAINT MARY

The beatification of Mary MacKillop in 1995 saw the release of many new and reissued publications, and this has also been the case with her 2010 canonisation. Following is a guide to MacKillop-related books. The list below follows that given on p. 2 of Compass 2010, no. 4.

Other Studies


Sainthood in Australia: Mary MacKillop and the print media. Sheila McCreanor; Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, , dist. by St Pauls; PB $32.95 [9780957997608]; 312pp; 2001. Detailed sociological study of the cultural presentation of MacKillop by the print media.

Building the Kingdom: Mary MacKillop and social justice. Geoffrey Hull;

**With Grateful Hearts! Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph in Queensland, 1870-1970.** Margaret M. McKenna RSJ; Sisters of St Jospeh of the Sacred Heart; PB $35 [9780646529455]; 378pp; 2010.


**Giftbooks**

**The Gift of Mary MacKillop.** Colleen O’Sullivan RSJ; Lynne Muir (illustrator); John Garratt Publishing; HB $22.95 [9781920721480]; 128pp; 2007.

**The Little Gift of Mary MacKillop.** Colleen O’Sullivan RSJ; Lynne Muir (illustrator); John Garratt Publishing; HB $9.95 [9781920721497]; 8pp; 2007.

**Imaging Mary MacKillop: With whisperings from Mary.** Patricia Snudden; St Pauls; HB $17.95 [9781921472688]; 72pp; 2010.

**For Younger Readers**


**Saint Mary MacKillop: Friend of Jesus.** Judith M. Steer RSJ; Dorothy Woodward RSJ (illustrator); St Pauls; HB $17.95 [9781921472688]; 48pp; 225x165mm; 2010. *Illustrated biography for children aged 7 to 11 years.*

**Never See a Need Without Doing Something About It: Inspirational stories from the life of Mary MacKillop.** Joan Goodwin RSJ (author/illustrator); St Pauls; PB $9.95 [9781921472817]; 40pp; 280x210mm; 2010. *Workbook for children aged 10 to 12 years.*

**Letters from Mary: The story of the life of Mary MacKillop.** Joan Goodwin RSJ (author/illustrator); St Pauls; PB $9.95 [9781921472800]; 40pp; 2010. *Workbook for children aged 8 to 9 years.*

**Mary MacKillop: The Children’s Saint: Colouring and puzzle book for small children.** Joan Goodwin RSJ (author/illustrator); St Pauls; PB $9.95 [9781921472831]; 40pp; 2010. *Workbook for children aged 5 to 7 years.*


**The Mary MacKillop Children’s Prayerbook: By the children of Australia.** Lynne Muir (illustrator); John Garratt Publishing; HB $19.95 [9781920682118]; 120pp; 2010. *Collection of 80 original prayers by children aged 5 to 12 years.*

**Education Resources**

**LearningLinks to Mary MacKillop: Teacher resources for the religion classroom.** Maurice Ryan & Jan Grajczonek; Lumino Press; PB $29.95 [9781921538032]; 48pp; 2009.


—Kevin Mark

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Kevin Mark manages the Australasian information in the Global Books in Print database and is former religious publisher for HarperCollins Publishers.
PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the readings for Sundays between April and July, from the Fourth Sunday of Lent to the Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

1. The first readings in Easter focus on the story of the earliest followers of Jesus, as portrayed through Luke in the Book of Acts. Each of the selections over Easter picks up important stories enabling our present-day communities of disciples to reflect on the importance of the Easter event. These stories include the Samaritan or Gentile ‘Pentecost’ event (Easter 6) which expands further on the action of the Spirit, Jesus’ ascension to God forty days after Easter (Ascension), and the Pentecost story itself (on Pentecost Sunday), a climactic celebration of the Easter Season.

After Pentecost, the first reading selections in the Solemn Feasts of Trinity and Body and Blood help to explore the theological and liturgical significance of these feasts, with their emphasis on the nature of God (Ex 34—Trinity) and God’s wilderness nurture of Israel with food and drink (Body and Blood). These two central theological truths, of God’s nurturing life of communion and friendship eternally shared with humanity, remain key for faith communities searching for identity and hope in a Church and world that struggle.

When we return back to the readings of Ordinary Time on July 3, we will see how the first reading for these Sundays in Ordinary Time covers a wide range of First Testament literature, with a particular focus on the prophets. In each case, the theme of the gospel has determined the selection of this reading. It is useful to be reminded (and to celebrate) the First Testament readings in their own right. They are stories of Israel’s experience of God. They remain foundational for contemporary disciples of Jesus.

2. The second readings in the Easter Season come from 1 Peter, written not by Peter himself but by a Christian leader in Rome concerned about the pastoral care of Christian in Asia Minor. The letter comes from one who holds an overseeing pastoral role amongst these Christians. It indicates a ‘Petrine trajectory’ of care found in the Bishop of Rome. The letter addresses religious people experiencing turmoil and confusion in their day-to-day lives. The writer seeks to encourage his addressees and remind them of their baptismal life. For this reason 1 Peter is appropriate for reflecting on the implications of our baptismal commitment in this Easter season.

When we move into Ordinary Time, the second reading is predominantly from Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapters 8. These semi-continuous selections cover some of the most profound insights into Paul’s theology of God, the Spirit and the life of the Spirit into which Christians are called through Baptism. These selections in this time of the Liturgical year
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(from OT 14 to 18—throughout the month of July) are rich and powerful. They offer an opportunity for each of our local faith communities to celebrate what is at the heart of Christian living and affirm the ongoing action of God’s spirit today, despite apparent signs to the contrary.

3. The Gospel readings over the Easter Season continue the celebration of Easter Sunday. They help us affirm the ongoing presence of the Risen Jesus in our midst. Easter 6, for example, continues a theme from previous Sundays of preparing for the coming of Jesus’ Spirit. The Ascension Gospel of June 5 is a summary of Matthew’s Gospel. In a simple, climactic scene, the Easter Jesus empowers the disciples to teach and make disciples of all peoples. In light of this, Pentecost becomes a liturgical highpoint. The Spirit’s presence breathed into the community by the Johannine Jesus (Jn 20) confirms God’s empowerment of the disciples.

When we return to Ordinary Time on July 3, after the Solemnities of the two previous Sundays, we also return to Matthew’s Gospel. As we remind ourselves that this gospel is addressed to Jewish followers of Jesus in the later part of the first century, we note how Jewish themes permeate these gospel readings. The selections from Mt 7 to 14 enable us to experience the figure of Wisdom revealed in Matthew’s Jesus: He teaches, calls into discipleship, nurtures and empowers. It is this figure that is important for a world searching for wisdom today, and a Christian community seeking how to form itself as an authentic revealer of God’s presence to this world.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

April 3—Lent 4: A 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13
The anointing of David, the unexpected and unrecognised one, as king. Eph 5:8-14. Living in the light of God. Jn 9. Another great story: the gradual insight into Jesus of the man born blind. Theme—Light & seeing: This Sunday can help us name the ways that we deeply see, interpret and know our lives and world. Today’s gospel invites us to come to the source of light, Jesus.


April 21—Holy Thursday. Ex 12:1-8,11-14. The Passover meal of deliverance. 1 Cor 11:23-26 Paul remembers Jesus’ last meal with his friends before death. Jn 13:1-15. Jesus’ act of foot-washing is a symbol of service and solidarity Theme—Leadership: Jesus is the one who leads us to God. Leadership is the cry of our Church, world, community. Who reveals to us the most authentic values of human existence?

of suffering emitted by creation and human beings. God is victorious over death.

April 23 & 24—Easter: Mt 28:1-10. The Risen Jesus brings joy to the women who come to the tomb Theme—Joy. In a world and among people that seem so sad and preoccupied with survival, the Easter message is central, offering a renewed vision: He is Risen!


May 8—Easter 3: Acts 2:14, 22-28. Luke summarises Peter’s Pentecost sermon in terms of the Gospel’s story about Jesus. 1 Pet 1:17-21. The writer proclaims the vision that God has for all who are baptised Lk 24:13-35. Two unfaithful disciples experience the presence of the Risen Jesus in the ‘breaking of bread,’ the moment of Eucharistic communion. Theme—Jesus’ Presence. Jesus continues to be present to all, especially when darkness, blindness or personal issues seem to cloud life’s journey. The weekly Sunday Assembly becomes, among other liturgical experiences, the place of our encounter with the Risen Jesus.

May 15—Easter 4: Acts 2:14, 36-41. Peter appeals to his attentive audience to be converted to God. 1 Pet 2:20-25. Jesus is the model of how to be with God in the midst of life’s suffering. Jn 10:1-10. Jesus is the sheepfold gate who allows access to God and protection for his community. Theme—Jesus, the Gate: We seek safety, security and protection. Jesus offers us a community where we can be at ease with God. What are some of the ways in which this happens in our Sunday Eucharistic Assembly and in the lives of those who gather for this Liturgical experience?

May 22—Easter 5: Acts 6:1-7. Seven are appointed to minister to the practical needs of the Jerusalem multi-cultural community of Jesus followers. Luke shows how ministry must be flexible, inclusive and respectful of all. 1 Pet 2:4-9. All those baptised form a holy priesthood and spiritual household. This is an important text that celebrates the priestly act of all God’s people, not just a select few. Jn 14:1-12. Jesus is the way, truth and life for troubled people. Theme—Call of the Baptised. Our community that gathers each Sunday is precious. It is God’s ‘royal priesthood,’ blessed and beloved by God. Baptism empowers us all to ministry, especially in a Church once preoccupied only with the ministry of the ordained. Baptism is at the heart of future ministry and lay ecclesial leadership.

May 29—Easter 6: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17. Philip preaches to the Samaritans. Peter and John visit them and pray that the Samaritans will receive the Holy Spirit. A second Pentecost now takes place amongst a non-Jewish people! 1 Pet 3:15-18. Reverence for God is at the heart of the Christian life. This enables the believer to act with integrity especially in times of difficulty or false-accusation. Jn 14:15-21. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. This ‘Advocate’ will be with his disciples. Theme—Release of God’s Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit permeates every human being and atom of creation. This empowerment guarantees God’s Spirit in directing the future of our churches.

June 5—Ascension: Acts 1:1-11. Luke’s community grieving for the physical return of the earthly Jesus is encouraged in its ongoing life. Eph 1:17-23. Jesus is central in God’s plan and God’s communion with us. Mt 28:16-20. This is the climax and summary of Mt’s Gospel. Theme—Fidelity and Confidence. The Ascension feast reminds us of God’s continual presence with us in our church, local and personal struggles. We can be confident of the future, despite the challenges we experience.

June 12—Pentecost: Acts 2:1-11. God’s Spirit empowers and unites the fragile Jerusalem community of Jesus’ disciples. 1Cor 12:3-7, 12-13. The many gifts evident in the Christian community are the signs of the ongoing
activity of God’s Spirit that brings about commu-
nion. Jn 20:19-23 Jesus breathes his Spirit of forgiveness and peace on to his frightened disciples. Theme—Courage: In times of fear or anxiety, our celebration of this Pentecost reminds us we are empowered by God’s Spirit.

**June 19**—**Trinity**: Ex 34:4-6.8-9. Moses declares the essential truth about God: God is merciful. 2 Cor 3:11-13. God is a community of lovers into which disciples are called. Jn 3:16-18. God’s love for us is revealed in Jesus. Theme—God’s life: The Trinity is an essential truth of God: a communion of Persons, in love. We are called to share this divine communion of friendship. We reflect God’s trine life to the world, as others reflect God’s inner life to us through friendship.

**June 26**—**Body and Blood**: Deut 8:2-3.14-16 Moses reminds Israel how God cares for them through food and drink in the desert. 1 Cor 10:16-17. Eucharist is communion in the one body. Jn 6:51-58. Jesus is the living Bread of God. Theme—The Sunday Assembly: At a time when we think about new ways of liturgical life as priest numbers decline, the Sunday Eucharistic Assembly becomes more important than ever. Here we celebrate God’s life with us and our communion with all who gather, and those who feel excluded.

**July 3**—**Ordinary Time 14**: Zech 9:9-10. God as King will come to deliver, protect and offer peace. Rom 8:9.11-13 We possess God’s Spirit who empowers our daily lives. Mt 11:25-30 We are invited to come to Jesus who wants to be with us in our daily struggles. Theme—God’s Comfort. Many people today feel the burdens of life. Our faith community gathered in this Sunday Assembly reflects a gentle God who seeks to offer support and comfort to those who struggle. How is this happening practically at a local level?

**July 10**—**Ordinary Time 15**: Is 55:10-11. God’s Word is eternally effective. Rom 8:18-23. The whole of creation is caught up with humanity in the inward search for God and the release of God’s spirit of renewal. Mt 13:1-23 This is the ‘Great Parable’ chapter of Mt’s Gospel: God’s Reign is present mysteriously and unexpectedly. Theme—God’s Presence. To dispirited people the invitation to contemplate a God who is present, active and mystery is an essential truth. It uplifts, converts, strengthens and offers a fresh perspective.

**July 17**—**Ordinary Time 15**: Mt 13:1-23 Solomon is blessed for seeking wisdom and discernment rather than wealth. Mt 14:13-21. Jesus’ compassion moves him to feed the hungry crowd. Theme—God’s love. The second reading could serve as the basis for a prolonged meditation on God’s love for us. This theology needs to be reclaimed when voices around seem to say speak contrary words.

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