ONE OF THE most important documents produced by the Second Vatican Council in terms of its far-reaching effects was the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (1965). In this document the Council taught that divine revelation is primarily God’s self-communication, and only secondarily, and as a consequence, is it a communication of truths. In order to appreciate the significance of this teaching we need first to reflect on how the notion of Divine Revelation had become diluted down the centuries. The Church had been forced to protect its teaching and sometimes even its reason for existence against hostile currents of thought and philosophies from the earliest times, and in the stress of battle the full meaning of divine revelation had been lost to view. Especially the rich personal, dialogical notion of revelation as God’s self-disclosure was forgotten.

In the early centuries of the Church, under the influence of Greek philosophers it was proclaimed that the truth the philosophers were seeking is the Logos (truth) incarnate, Jesus Christ. In the context of Latin philosophers revelation was explained as illumination, an inner light which enables us to believe (rather than what we believe). The medieval Christian philosophical theologians explained revelation as truths, knowledge—the truth which God communicates. Revelation became identified with the content of revelation, the truths which are necessary for our salvation. Revelation was often referred to as the ‘deposit’ of revelation, understood as a fixed number of statements or propositions, such as one finds in the Church’s creeds, summaries of the truths Christians accept in faith.

At the Council of Trent when the main purpose was to defend the Catholic faith, especially against attacks from the Reformers, the sacraments, tradition as well as Scripture, the authority of pope and bishops, the ministerial priesthood became primary concerns. A defensive-ness entered into Catholic teaching and preaching and catechesis which obscured the more fundamental inter-personal communication between God and the Christian believer.

Under seige from the anti-religious attacks of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century rationalism during the Enlightenment, which asserted the total autonomy of human reason and rejected the very possibility of revealed knowledge the Church proclaimed and defended the Bible and Church tradition. But the Church’s response was rational, highly deductive and non-historical. Vatican Council I continued in this rational vein, defending the faith, but predominantly the discourse was about truths and teachings. The biblical basis of the teachings was not developed, nor was revelation considered as a personal self-disclosure by God.

The Modernist movement tended to overreact to the rationalistic tendencies, and as a consequence the notion of divine revelation was in danger of being reduced to human experience. There was a tendency to downplay the supernatural character and content, the divine origin of revelation. The Modernist movement was severely dealt with by Church authorities. Pius IX’s Syllabus of Errors (1864) was an uncompromising rejection of the ‘modern mind’. Modernism was condemned by the Holy Office (now ‘The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’) in the document Lamentabili (1907), and in the encyclical of Pope Pius X, Pascendi (1907), while anyone taking on special responsibilities in the Church was required to swear the Oath against Modernism.

With the pontificate of Pius X the condemnations reached their peak. Clearly, the dialogical character of divine revelation was not given any consideration—the Church’s attention was elsewhere.

Something of the anti-Modernist feeling was still reflected in the encyclical, Humani Generis of Pius XII (1950). But meantime the scholars had been moving on, especially the
bibal scholars, who were developing a scientific approach to Sacred Scripture called ‘higher biblical criticism’. The early distrust of these new methods in biblical scholarship were put aside in the encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu of Pope Pius XII (1943) and responsible use of the new methods of biblical criticism was encouraged.

**The Second Vatican Council**

The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (1965) produced by the Second Vatican Council was a break-through and a true liberation from all the former controversies and their effects on Church teaching. But this breakthrough was itself the result of a major change in direction in the Council. The first draft of the document on Divine Revelation that was presented to the Council fathers for consideration was still affected by the anti-Modernist mentality. The draft was fighting past adversaries and was full of condemnations. Its defensiveness reflected the text-book material in seminary courses of the time. Many of the Fathers came to the Council with that mentality.

But the mood in the Council chamber had changed. The message in Pope John’s opening speech to the Council had been heeded: the Council was to lead the Church to abandon its defensiveness, move from condemnations (anathemas) to compassion, and present the Catholic faith in new and positive ways. Also the debates on the schema or draft for the document on the liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* had set a new course: the Council was all about the Church’s own life and the sources of it.

The first draft of the document on Divine Revelation did not reflect that new mood and consequently was heavily criticised in the Council. After an intervention by Pope John that cleared the way to overcome some procedural obstacles the majority view of the Council fathers was allowed to prevail, and the first draft was rejected. A new commission was set up to prepare a new draft that would reflect the mood of the majority of the Council fathers.

And so the Council produced the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*. In this document the Council emphasised that revelation is above all God’s self-communication, and is not to be reduced to a communication of truths.

At the beginning of the final session of the Council the Synod of Bishops was established to continue and apply the work of the Council in all areas of the Church and to bring it to maturity. The Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, the subject of the next article by Mark Kenney, is one of the fruits of the on-going work of that Synod of Bishops. *Verbum Domini* is the document produced by Pope Benedict following the synod on the Word of God. In a number of the articles that follow Mark Kenney’s we are presented with descriptions of some past and future approaches to defending and/or communicating the Catholic faith.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

All God’s self-revelation in so many ways down the history of salvation is recorded for us to read, hear proclaimed, ponder and pray about in the Sacred Scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament. God’s revelation of himself culminates in the person and ministry of Christ, the Word of God become man. ‘Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he has created the worlds. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being...’ (Hebrews 1:1-3). And in John’s Gospel we read: ‘No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known’ (Jn 1:18). It is in the Son, the person of Jesus Christ, Word of God, that the Father communicates his whole self. In Jesus God has become incarnate, and ‘We saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth’ (John 1:14).
A LITTLE OVER a year ago on 11 November 2010, Pope Benedict XVI issued the apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini.* This document was the response to the synod on the Word of God which took place in Rome two years earlier from 5-26 October 2008. Since *Verbum Domini* appeared, only a few journal articles have emerged that address it. Three of these provide summaries of the content and themes of the exhortation. One article treats the pastoral aspects of the document. The most recent publication, a book, presents a summary of the proceedings of the synod on the Word of God followed by an explication of the exhortation. Since these works provide summaries as well as discussions of the major issues of *Verbum Domini,* rather than repeat these, this article will concentrate on a single issue of the document: the interpretation of Scripture. The reason for selecting this particular issue is that it was the only topic on which the Pope personally commented during the course of the synod. During his comment, he also requested that this issue be incorporated into the final document on the synod. In his reflection, the Pope stated that the Vatican II document, *The Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* 12, called for two methodologies to be used in the exegetical process. The first is historical criticism and the second is a theological process that includes three aspects. First, the unity of the Bible must be kept in mind. Second, the passage being interpreted must be seen in the context of the living tradition of the Church. Third, the analogy of faith must be observed. The Pope believes that the first exegetical principle has been well practiced through the use of the historical critical method; however, the second method, the theological method, has not been adequately utilised in exegesis. In order to correct this imbalance, numbers 29 to 49 of *Verbum Domini* directly address the issue of the proper exegesis of Scripture. The remainder of this article will explore how *Verbum Domini* expresses Pope Benedict’s understanding of exegesis. This will be developed in the following way. First, the ‘two senses’ of Scripture will be discussed. This will be followed by an examination of the two exegetical methodologies found in *Dei Verbum.* Third, there will be a presentation of Pope Benedict’s interpretation of *Dei Verbum* 12. The article will conclude with the Pope’s application of the twofold exegetical method as found in *Verbum Domini.*

The Two Senses of Scripture

We begin with the two senses of Scripture because this is basically where Christian biblical interpretation began in the early Church. The early Christians saw Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament but they wondered how the Old Testament spoke about Jesus. Did it refer to Jesus in a literal sense or did it refer to Jesus in some other way? This question led to the development of the two senses of Scripture: a literal sense and a more-than-literal sense that is frequently called the spiritual sense of Scripture.

The literal sense is the meaning of the text which the human author directly intended and
which the written words conveyed’. The spiritual sense is not so easy to define. Basically, it is a meaning that goes beyond the literal meaning and which was not originally intended by the human author. Such a definition is open to a variety of interpretations. Pope Pius XII’s encyclical, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, and the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document of 1993, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, define the spiritual sense as the Christological meaning of the Old Testament. The spiritual sense arises from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and is part of the living tradition of the Church.8

The history of biblical interpretation can be summarised in terms of the use of these two senses of Scripture.9 Although both senses are essential for a proper interpretation of the Bible, at various times, one has held preference over the other. During the patristic period (2nd-8th centuries) up until the scholastic period (14th and 15th centuries), the spiritual sense dominated. One of the most popular forms of the spiritual sense in both periods was the use of allegorical interpretation in which aspects of Scripture were given meanings outside the biblical text. For example, the city of Jerusalem was understood as the Church of Jesus Christ. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the literal sense of Scripture became prominent and the historical critical method was developed in order to arrive at a better understanding of the literal sense of the Bible. The 19th and 20th centuries continued to emphasise the literal sense but within the last 50-60 years there has been a renewed interest in the more-than-literal sense of Scripture. This has been seen in the development of new methodologies such as narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, psychoanalytical criticism, canonical criticism, and advocacy exegesis which includes liberation and feminist studies.10

This brief outline of the two senses of Scripture has been provided because it forms the basis of Pope Benedict’s vision of the future of biblical interpretation as expressed in *Verbum Domini*. He believes that the balance between the two senses of Scripture has become distorted and needs to be corrected. This balance was expressed in *Dei Verbum* and he is calling for a better application of the interpretive directives of *Dei Verbum* in order to restore the proper balance between the literal sense of Scripture and the spiritual sense. The article now turns to an examination of *Dei Verbum*’s understanding of how exegetes can study the two senses of Scripture while maintaining the unity between them.

**The Interpretation of Scripture in Dei Verbum**

The section concerning biblical interpretation in *Dei Verbum* is quite short; yet it addresses both senses of Scripture. In order to determine the meaning intended by the human author, the exegete must pay particular attention to the literary forms used by the writer. In addition, ‘due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.’11

Even though the historical critical method is not mentioned by name, it is evident that the document is referring to this methodology. The Council purposely avoided mentioning a specific methodology in order to leave the door open for exegetes to use any appropriate methodology in determining the literal meaning of the biblical text.12 *Dei Verbum* only cites the elements that are always essential to uncover the literal sense of Scripture.

*Dei Verbum* then addresses the criteria nec-
ecessary for determining the spiritual meaning of the Bible. First, the exegete must place the biblical text within the context of the entire Bible. For example, Deut 24:1 permits divorce but in Mark 10:1-12, Jesus prohibits divorce. Second, the interpreter must take into consideration the living tradition of the whole Church. This criterion includes several sources: the teaching office of the Church (the magisterium); the teaching of the fathers of the Church; the use of the Scriptures in the liturgy and in prayer; and the testimony of the saints. A third and final criterion is that the biblical interpretation must be in harmony with the elements of faith. This means that the biblical interpretation must be in agreement with the doctrine of the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI’s Insight into Biblical Interpretation

The intervention that Pope Benedict gave at the synod on the Word of God regarding biblical interpretation expressed certain growing concerns that he had with the direction that biblical exegesis was taking. He believed that exegetes had fulfilled quite well the directive of Dei Verbum regarding the exegesis of the literal sense of Scripture in using the historical critical method. For the most part, however, exegetes had failed to apply the three criteria for interpreting the spiritual sense of Scripture.

On 27 January 1988 in a lecture entitled ‘Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today’, given in New York City, as Cardinal Ratzinger, he presented his misgivings as to the current direction of biblical exegesis. As much as the historical critical method had contributed to biblical exegesis, the method had a number of limitations that prevented it from being the only method that could be used in biblical interpretation. Most importantly, the method is based on a philosophy that automatically excludes faith and the supernatural from the exegetical process. Historical criticism claims to be an objective approach to scriptural interpretation; yet, each person who employs the method brings his or her own agenda to the text. The historical critical method divides the biblical text into many parts and fails to see the unity of the Bible. In attempting to arrive at the original sources of the biblical books, many hypothetical theories are produced that complicate the interpretation of Scripture rather than clarify it. In view of these shortcomings, the historical critical method, by itself, is inadequate for the exegetical process.

Cardinal Ratzinger explained that a two-fold methodology is necessary for an adequate exegesis of Scripture: an historical approach as well as a theological approach. Despite its inadequacies, the historical critical method remains necessary for exegesis but must also be supplemented with other interpretive aspects that include the tradition of the Church as found in patristic and medieval thought.

A clear description of Pope Benedict’s understanding of comprehensive exegesis can be found in the Forward to his book, Jesus of Nazareth. The Pope refers to his methodological process of biblical exegesis as the ‘hermeneutic of faith’ which is simply the application of the exegetical process as outlined in Dei Verbum.

The first step in exegesis is historical criticism. The Pope emphasises the importance of historical criticism:

…the historical critical method—specifically because of the intrinsic nature of theology and faith—is and remains an indispensable dimension of exegetical work. For it is of the very essence of biblical faith to be about real historical events. It does not tell stories symbolizing suprahistorical truths, but is based on history, history that took place here on earth...

If we push this history aside, Christian faith as such disappears and is recast as some other religion. So if history, if facticity in this sense, is an essential dimension of Christian faith, then faith must expose itself to the historical method—indeed, faith itself demands this.

Historical criticism is capable of addressing the literal meaning of the Bible. Other
methods are necessary to access the spiritual meaning. The first of these is canonical exegesis which views the Bible as a unity. It was mentioned above that one way of seeing this unity is in the development of themes and theology as in the specific example of divorce in the Bible. For Pope Benedict, however, the true unity of the Bible lies in the person of Jesus. It is the Christological dimension that unites the Old and New Testaments, a dimension that can only be appreciated through faith.23

In reading *Verbum Domini*, it is impossible to miss the number of times the Pope makes reference to the fathers of the Church and the medieval doctors of the Church.24 This reflects another important principle that Pope Benedict sees as essential to theological exegesis – taking into account the living tradition of the whole Church which includes the fathers of the Church as well as the medieval writers. The importance of the patristic witness is found in its contribution to the development of early Christian thought. The early fathers developed the canon of Scripture, formed the first creeds and developed the form of the liturgy.25 All of this plays a vital role in the interpretation of Scripture. Whereas the fathers of the church introduced the spiritual meaning of Scripture, the medieval period developed this sense by refining it into three categories: the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical.26

Together with the doctrine of the church that has developed down through the centuries, patristic and medieval exegesis forms the living tradition of the church which is essential in interpreting the Scriptures for the present age. This is what the historical critical method cannot do. The expertise of historical criticism lies in finding the meaning of Scripture intended by the authors when they wrote - this is the literal meaning. Historical criticism is unable to provide a meaning for the Christian community of today. This task is the work of theological exegesis which includes the three aspects of the unity of the Bible, the living tradition of the church and the harmony of theology. Theological exegesis arrives at the spiritual meaning of Scripture which transcends the literal meaning.

This, briefly, is what the Pope calls the ‘hermeneutic of faith’ and how it functions in the interpretation of Scripture. This forms the basis of how he envisions the exegetical process in *Verbum Domini*. We now turn to the document itself.

**Biblical Interpretation in Verbum Domini**

*Verbum Domini* is divided into three sections: the Word of God, the Word in the Church, and the Word in the World. Its teaching on exegesis is found in the first section and extends from numbers 29 to 49. Number 29 sets the tone for all that follows: ‘Interpretation of sacred Scripture requires full participation on the part of exeges in the life and faith of the believing community of their own time.’

Numbers 32-34 present a brief summary of the development of Church teaching concerning biblical interpretation. It cites three of the most important documents on Scripture: *Providentissimus Deus* by Pope Leo XIII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* by Pope Pius XII, and *Dei Verbum* from Vatican II. The benefits and the necessity of historical critical exegesis are brought forward but the twofold interpretive approach of *Dei Verbum* is emphasised. Exegesis must be as concerned with the theological dimension as it is with the historical dimension. The following number 35 warns against the danger of neglecting theological exegesis. The result can be an exegetical method that denies the divine element in Scripture. In order to prevent this from happening, *Verbum Domini* advises that more than one hermeneutical methodology be employed in exegesis. Although historical criticism is necessary, it is imperative that other methods be adopted to ensure that a proper and total exegesis of the Bible takes place (number 36).

The document suggests that a better balance between the historical and theological interpretations can be achieved by following the example of the fathers of the Church who were able to recognise the literal and spiritual
VERBUM DOMINI AND THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

senses of Scripture (number 37). In defining the literal sense, the exhortation quotes the Catechism of the Catholic Church: the literal sense is ‘the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture, and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation’. Based upon the literal sense, the patristic and medieval exegetes developed the three categories of the spiritual sense described above: the allegorical sense, the moral sense, and the anagogical sense. In defining the spiritual sense, Verbum Domini refers to the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s definition: ‘the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it…’

Number 38 explains that ‘the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text’. This means that different interpretive methods are needed to arrive at the literal and spiritual meanings of Scripture. The historical critical method is a method to obtain the literal meaning that the author intended to convey. Number 39 describes one method in achieving the spiritual meaning of Scripture and that is by seeing the intrinsic unity of the whole Bible with the person of Jesus as the basis of that unity. The patristic writers expressed this Christological unity of the Bible in terms of typology. In typology persons, events, or things in the Old Testament are seen as the prefiguration of persons, events or things found in the New Testament. At the same time, the persons, events, or things in the New Testament are seen as the fulfilment of the persons, events, or things in the Old Testament. An example of typology is found in Rom 5:14 where Paul calls Adam a type of Jesus who was to come.

This is the basic teaching of Verbum Domini regarding biblical interpretation. The remaining seven numbers (42-49) of the section concerning interpretation discuss some of the issues and implications of biblical interpretation in the life of the Church.

a) Number 42 speaks to those biblical passages that are particularly difficult to interpret, especially those ‘dark’ passages that contain elements of violence and immorality. These require an expertise in the application of historical-literary methods of interpretation.

b) Verbum Domini addresses the problem of fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture in number 44.

c) A hermeneutic of faith, i.e. a hermeneutic that includes both historical and theological aspects, also has pastoral implications. It should foster a close working relationship among pastors, exegesis, and theologians (number 45).

d) Number 46 explores the importance of biblical interpretation for ecumenism, including the translation of Scripture into various languages.

e) Number 47 emphasises that in the preparation of candidates for the priesthood, it is essential that both aspects of biblical interpretation, the historical and the theological, be included in the curriculum.

f) The final two numbers, 48 and 49, call attention to the lives of the saints whose lives dedicated to the living out of the Gospel present a unique, living interpretation of the word of God.

Closing

Throughout the history of the Church, the relationship between the two senses of Scripture has been at the heart of biblical interpretation. Dei Verbum presented the two methods of studying and reflecting upon these two senses: the historical method and the theological method. Pope Benedict’s contribution to biblical interpretation in Verbum Domini is the presentation of the two senses of Scripture as necessary, complementary aspects of the one process of interpretation that are never in opposition to each other. Furthermore, the exhortation attempts to present very practical ways in which both senses of Scripture can be both studied and prayed so that the word of God may be of greater value to the individual Christian, and thereby, help build up the community of Christ.
NOTES

1 Verbum Domini can be found at the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/ apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html (the paragraphs are not numbered in this text). This paper will cite the following edition in which the paragraphs are numbered: Pope Benedict XVI. (2010), Verbum Domini. St. Paul’s Publications, Strathfield.


5 For the complete text, see ‘Intervention of Pope Benedict XVI at the synod of Bishops on Tuesday, 14 October: Modern exegesis necessary for a living faith today’. L’Osservatore Romano (weekly edition in English). #43. Wednesday, 22 October 2008. 13.


9 The size of this paper cannot adequately treat the richness of the history of biblical interpretation. The interested reader is directed to the following works; AJ Hauser and DF Watson, eds. (2003), A History of Biblical Interpretation. Vols. 1 and 2. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids; and H Wansbrough. (2010), The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Brief History of Biblical Interpretation. T&T Clark, London.

10 Okoye (Scripture in the Church, 78-83) provides a comprehensive list of current exegetical methodologies along with a description and evaluation of each. This list is based on the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s document, The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church. (1993), Pauline Books and Media, Boston.

11 Dei Verbum, 12.


15 Ibid. 2, 15.

16 Ibid. 8.

17 Ibid. 2.

18 Ibid. 2.

19 Ibid. 5.

20 Ibid. 22.


22 Ibid. xv. On page xvi, the Pope reiterates the importance of the historical critical method in exegesis. 23 Ibid. xix.

24 Okoye (Scripture in the Church, 128) cites 61 references.


26 The allegorical sense has already been discussed. The moral sense interprets Scripture in terms of the spiritual life of the individual believer; therefore, once again using Jerusalem as an example, Jerusalem would be interpreted as the human soul. The anagogical sense refers to future heavenly or eschatological realities. Using this third spiritual sense, Jerusalem is the heavenly city that will be manifested at the end time. For more information pertaining to the three aspects of the spiritual sense of Scripture, see Brown, ‘Hermeneutics’, 1153-1162, and Fitzmyer, The Interpretation of Scripture, 91-97.


28 The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, page 85.

ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

The Postcolonial Challenge of Identity and Theology

EDMUND CHIA

LET ME BEGIN by acknowledging the challenge of addressing a topic such as Asian Christianity. Firstly, we all know that Asia is not only a huge continent but one which is very diverse in many facets as well. Secondly, we are also aware of the diversity within Christianity, both in terms of the variety of its denominations as well as the different schools of theological thought within and between them. To be sure, there is no such thing as Christianity. Like all religions, Christianity can only be spoken of in the plural. Hence, I have to admit from the outset that the generalizations employed in this paper might appear reductive. These include what I shall be calling Asian Christianity. I hasten to add, though, that for now it is more appropriate that we speak of ‘Christianity in Asia’ rather than ‘Asian Christianity.’

The focus of this paper, however, will be limited to the Christianity which developed through the era of colonialism, thus ruling out those which predate the colonial empires, such as the Syriac Christians of the Malabar coast in Kerala who trace their origins back to St. Thomas, or those which came into existence independent of the colonizers, such as the Korean church which was basically imported by local Koreans from China, or some of the younger churches such as the Church in Mongolia, which was established only in the last few decades.1 The thrust of the presentation will be on how the experience of colonialism has impacted the development of Christianity in Asia. This will then be reflected against the challenges posed in the postcolonial era where a postcolonial epistemology is helping to redefine Christian identity and theology in Asia. To that end reference will be made primarily to the Roman Catholic Church as given expression through the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences.

Christianity in Asia

Even as there is a 500-year history of Christianity in Asia it might be more appropriate to say that it is not so much a history of Asian Christianity as it is Western Christianity played out on Asian soil. To be sure, Asian Christians held on to so much of the characteristics of their mother-Churches that local churches in Asia were like little English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, or Spanish churches. One could even say that churches in Asia were ‘colonies’ of European churches. It comes as no surprise then that Asians in general looked upon Christianity as a foreign religion. In my own national Malay language Christianity is often described as the agama orang putih (literally: white man’s religion). This sentiment remains even until today since in most countries the vestiges of European Christianity lingers on. It is in this respect that we speak of ‘Christianity in Asia’ and not so much ‘Asian Christianity’ for Christianity in Asia hitherto could not yet be described by the adjective ‘Asian.’

This is compounded by the fact that other Asians see even the Christianity as practiced by their Asian neighbors living in their own backyards as foreign. Architecturally there are still churches which continue to be built in
accordance with baroque and gothic styles. Symbols used in church liturgies are in the main vestiges of European and especially Roman imperial powers. Think of the vestments which priests put on and the attire which religious sisters and priests wear, as well as the way leaders of the church are addressed: His Eminence, His Excellency, My Lord, Superior General, Reverend Mother! Think also of how the piece of white wafer used at Holy Communion looks to Asians, who must be bemused when further told that it indeed is the body of a person who lived some 2,000 years ago. In most countries the wine used for liturgy has to be specially imported from Europe, much the same way as missionaries were imported to serve the churches and Western funds were brought in to support local projects. It is no surprise then for Asians to think that any Anglo-looking person walking the streets of Asia is a Christian missionary. Furthermore, when someone becomes Christian they adopt totally alien names such as James, Peter or Margaret, in place of more recognizable local names such as Kee-Fook, Budiman or Miyamoto.

Is it any wonder then that the percentage of Christians in most countries in Asia has remained in the single digit? Christianity’s foreignness makes it an entity Asians do not warm up to easily. In short, Christianity has not really made inroads into most of Asia (save for the Filipines and East Timor) the way many of the other major world religions have. For example, Islam, which initially was foreign to Southeast Asia, has now become part of the landscape of much of the Malay archipelago. Buddhism, which hailed from the Indie subcontinent, has integrated itself into the sociocultural matrix of much of East Asia and the Mekong Valley. Christianity’s foreignness, on the other hand, makes it not only alien but also alienating. At the conclusion of the 1998 Synod for Asia, Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, had this to say:

> It is indeed a mystery why the Savior of the world, born in Asia, has until now remained largely unknown to the people of the continent (art. 2).

**Colonial Christianity**

Of course it doesn’t help that Christianity was actually spread to Asia in concert with the colonial expansionist program. It is therefore inevitable that the Church is associated with the imperial powers who, in the eyes of Asians, came primarily for the conquest of their lands. The Cross of Christ was therefore seen as coming alongside the swords and guns as well as the looting barrels in what the Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris calls the ‘unholy alliance of the missionary, the military and the merchant.’ Just as the imperialists’ aim was the plunder of the resources of Asia, Christianity was also viewed as coming to plunder the souls of the peoples of Asia.

The late Indian theologian Stanley Samartha illustrates this situation appropriately by drawing an analogy to the arrival of a helicopter in Asia. When descending upon Asia—from above, of course—Christianity came with all its power, grandeur and might. The helicopter mission then blew away all that was on the ground to pave the way for the European Church to land. It didn’t matter what the native cultures and religions stood for or had to offer; they were to be wiped out. There was no way Christianity would tolerate these heathen and pagan cultures and religions, let alone respect or be nourished by them.

Christianity had to be transplanted onto Asia, where it was expected to take roots and
bear the same fruits as it did across the European continent in the first century and Latin America in the second. There was only one fate for the adherents of other cultures and religions in Asia; they were to be converted. There was almost no sensitivity to how the local population felt about the imposition of this foreign culture and religion. But this was basically the attitude and theology which Asian Christians were brought up to believe for most of the 500-year history of Christianity in Asia.

**Asian Religious Revivalism**

Things began to change, however, in the mid-20th century. The year 1945 is often regarded as the watershed for this transition. With the end of the Second World War and the Pacific War in Asia and with the subsequent dismantling of colonialism the indigenous peoples of former colonies began to rise up not only against political oppression but also in search of their own indigenous identities. In the words of Samartha:

Deep down, it is a struggle for identity, a quest for spiritual resources in the fight against injustice. The rejection of religious pluralism, the refusal to recognize that neighbors of other faiths in the world live by their own cherished beliefs and values, is a more serious form of injustice than the merely economic. 3

Thus began what was to become a search not only for indigenous identities but also for the resources which help give shape to these identities. The Asian religious traditions factor significantly among these resources. It is no coincidence that the expulsion of Christian missionaries alongside the imperial governors in many countries in Asia was followed by a revival in the Asian religions. This happened all across Asia, thus bringing the religions to the consciousness of the global communities. It was then that peoples in the West began to take notice of Buddhism in Sri Lanka or Thailand, Hinduism in India or Nepal, and Islam in Bangladesh or Indonesia. In some instances this resurgence swung the pendulum to the other extreme (as a form of catharsis against the many years of oppression and suppression during the colonial era), resulting in the more extremist forms of these religious traditions coming to the fore. This continues until today and it will be several decades more before the catharsis simmers.

This movement of revivalism or resurgence in the religions did not to go unnoticed by the local Christians in Asia. Influenced by the mood and spirit of the times, they, too, began the quest for their own identities, one which could be at once truly Christian as well as truly Asian. Among the more significant issues in this quest was Christianity’s relation with other religions. This was by no means an abstract theological issue to be discussed but one which had dire and concrete consequences on the lives of Asian Christians. This is because most Christians in Asia have roots in these other religions or continue to have family members, for example, spouses, parents, and children, who continue to adhere to them. While in the past they were informed by a theology which speculated that all their loved ones were destined to hell unless they were baptized, the quest for a truly Asian Christianity opened up new horizons for a theology which was not only more respectful of the other religions but also enabled them to be perceived in a more positive light.

**Contextualizing Christianity**

In view of this quest it was realized that Christianity in Asia was sorely in need of an authentic process of contextualization; one which takes seriously the world of Asia, in particular the plurality of its cultures, the diversity of its religions, and the distress of its poor. Using Stanley Samartha again, one can describe the nature of this authentic contextualization by depicting Christianity or the Church as a bullock-cart. A vehicle indigenous to Asia, the bullock-cart portrays a form of Christianity which is at once truly native and local as well as modest and humble. Coming from below
and in touch with Asian soil, a bullock-cart
Christianity is certainly more in touch with the
people, religions and cultures of Asia. It is
therefore more acceptable to the people of
Asia. Just as it is necessary for the bullock-
cart to be in continuous contact and friction
with the ground for it to move forward, Asian
Christianity too must be in continuous contact
and friction with the other people and religions
of Asia. Contact and friction are therefore the
modes by which the evangelizing mission of
the bullock-cart Christianity is actualized.

Dialogue, therefore, is the process by
which the Church makes contact with the con-
textual realities of Asia, especially its cultures
and religions. This process is as much for the
purpose of enabling Christianity to become
more authentically local as it is for the pur-
pose of enabling the people of other religions
to better acquaint themselves with Christian-
ity. Through this process of dialogue Christi-
anity could hopefully become more acceptable
to the people of Asia and be even regarded as
one of Asia’s own. It is then that we can say a
local and contextual theology has developed
from what would rightly be called Asian Chris-
tianity.

What are the elements of this dialogue? What are the constituents of an Asian theol-
ogy? To respond, reference is made here to
the wisdom of Aloysius Pieris, one of Asia’s
foremost contextual theologians. In his semi-
nal article ‘Toward an Asian Theology of Lib-
eration’, Pieris writes:

Any discussion about Asian theology has to
move between two poles: the Third Worldness
of our continent and its peculiarly Asian char-
acter. More realistically and precisely, the com-
mon denominator linking Asia with the rest of
the Third World is its overwhelming poverty.
The specific character defining Asia within the
other poor countries is its multifaceted religious-
ness. These two inseparable realities constitute
in their interpenetration what might be design-
nated as the Asian context, the matrix of any
theology truly Asian.4

That Asia is poor is beyond dispute. It is
therefore in need of the liberation which Jesus
Christ offers and which Christianity can bring.
In other words, Jesus and the Church are nec-
essary in Asia, not so much because the ma-
ajority of Asians are not Christians but because
they are suffering and poor. This is an essen-
tial task of the contextualizing Church in Asia,
a process which has been variously referred
to as inculturation in Roman Catholic circles.
To that end Pieris points out that inculturation
‘can never be induced artificially. The Chris-
tian tends to appropriate the symbols and mo-
res of the human grouping around it only to
the degree that it immerses itself in their lives
and struggles. That is to say, inculturation is
the by-product of an involvement with a peo-
ple rather than the conscious target of a pro-
gram of action.’5

In the context of Asia, inculturation is ef-
fected, first of all, through the dialogue with
Asia’s poor, in view of facilitating their inte-
gral liberation. Secondly, because the other
religions have their own views of what libera-
tion and salvation mean and because the ma-
ajority of Asia’s poor owe their allegiance to
these other religions, the process of
inculturation, which entails the Church’s dia-
logue with the poor, must also include the dia-
logue with the religions. In short, inculturation,
interreligious dialogue and the process of in-
tegral liberation are mutually involving min-
istries, all of which are integral to the evange-
lizing mission of Christianity in Asia.6 This is
what the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Con-
ferences (FABC) refers to as the Triple dia-
logue, i.e., the dialogue with the poor, the cul-
tures, and religions of Asia.

Towards a Church in Asia

This is about the only way by which Chris-
tianity in Asia can discover its identity and
acquire its authority. It has to consciously
submit to the challenge of the other reli-
gions and the challenge of the poor. In Bib-
lical terms, unless Asian Christianity is
baptized in the ‘Jordan’ of Asian religions
and confirmed by the ‘Calvary’ of Asian poverty, it will remain foreign and unacceptable by the majority of the people of Asia. Such is the process of inculturation and such is the challenge which Christianity knows it has to accept if it wants to become an authentically local religion in Asia. Realizing this, the Asian bishops are of the mind that:

the primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local Church.... The local Church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenouse and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions (FABC I, art. 9, 12). Implicit in this is the transformation of Christianity’s image and ways of functioning so as to embrace what the Asian bishops call the New Way of Being Church. This ‘new way’ of ‘being’ entails a relinquishing of the Church’s image of power and wealth in favor of a Church which is meek and humble and involved in the lives and struggles of the people of Asia. It is the shedding of the ‘helicopter’ image of Christianity in favor of the ‘bullock-cart’ image, where Christianity is identified with the religions, cultures and poor of Asia. When that happens, Christianity would have integrated itself into the Asian cultural fabric and be recognized and accepted as one of Asia’s own. When that day comes, Christianity would have moved from being merely a Church in Asia to becoming a Church of Asia. It would no longer be a European Church in Asia but truly an Asian Church serving the people of Asia.

NOTES

3 Stanley Samartha, *op cit.*, 2.
5 Ibid., 38.

*The new evangelization does not mean a ‘new Gospel’, because ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever’ (Heb 13:8), but rather, a new response to the needs of humanity and people today in a manner adapted to the signs of the times and to the new situations in cultures, which are the basis of our personal identity and the places where we seek the meaning of our existence. Consequently, a ‘new evangelization’ means to promote a culture more deeply grounded in the Gospel and to discover the new man who is in us through the Spirit given us by Jesus Christ and the Father.*

—*Lineamenta for the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelisation.*

13
THE TURBULENT YEARS OF DOCTOR RUMBLE

ALAN GILL

Shortly before the 1928 International Eucharistic Congress in Sydney, someone called at St Mary's Cathedral and asked what a 'eucalyptus congress' was. As a result, congress organisers arranged for a priest, then little known, to appear on radio station 2UE and explain what the congress was all about. In this way was launched the astonishing public career of Dr Leslie Rumble, the world's first regular priest-broadcaster, author, and for nearly half a century the English-speaking world's most outspoken apologist for the Roman Catholic faith.

Dr Rumble, who was 83, died last Sunday. Overseas, he was Australia's best known Catholic cleric. He shunned personal publicity yet was, in his heyday, as much of an international figure as Archbishop Daniel Mannix, with whom he once clashed.

At Dr Rumble's Requiem Mass on Tuesday, Father E. J. Cuskelly, superior general of his order, who is visiting Australia, confessed that he told colleagues in Rome: 'I belong to the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart: you know—Dr Rumble's crowd'.

That early radio program, intended to run four weeks, was turned into a Question Box (its actual title) which lasted four years. It was then transferred to the newly established 2SM—owned by the Sydney archdiocese—where it continued for a further 36 years.

Dr Rumble's Radio Replies were re-printed and slightly expanded in Church newspapers and in four book versions (the latest issued only two years ago) which achieved the staggering circulation of more than seven million copies.

There were no 'separated brethren' in the era in which he rose to fame. Protestantism (linked with freemasonry and modernism) was a 'damnable heresy'. Catholic mayors were told from the pulpit that they had committed mortal sin by attending non-Catholic civic services, and Jesuit theologians pondered whether the soul of a 'good Hindu' could achieve eternal salvation.

In return, Protestant controversialists depicted the Roman Catholic Church as a neo-fascist global conspiracy, a 'scarlet woman,' whose cathedrals (including St Mary's) were built on the proceeds of gambling and donations from brewers.

Question Box on 2SM was answered by The Protestant Faith on 2CH (owned by the NSW Council of Churches). The two programs shared, astonishingly, the same transmitter and technical staff.

Archdeacon T.C. Hammond, a low church Anglican, was chosen to be Dr Rumble's radio adversary. He called the Roman Church 'the great whore'.

The Rev Vernon Turner, director of the Christian Broadcasting Association and a veteran broadcaster on 2CH, told me: 'The two programs were put out at different times because 2CH listeners liked to hear Dr Rumble and vice-versa. It was like a boxing match and was great fun.'

Mr Turner, a Presbyterian minister, said most Protestants considered Dr Rumble the more gifted of the two men:

I regard him as the outstanding apologist for the Roman Catholic Church as it was before Vatican II, when everything was seen in black and white. His failure was an inability to break away, in later years, from the rigid system which had spelt out with all the delicacy of a bulldozer that Rome was always right and the repository of all truth.
THE TURBULENT YEARS OF DOCTOR RUMBLE

Dr Leslie Rumble MSC,
Australia’s Radio Priest,
Defender of the Catholic Faith

Dr Rumble was born in Sydney of low church Anglican parents and attended what he later described as an ‘anti-Catholic’ State school. He was commended by a teacher for writing a poem which went:

There was a priest, a wretched beast,
Quite subject to the Pope.
He’d cast his spell and threaten hell,
But never would use soap.

While a teenager his parents became Catholics but he refused to follow their example. (According to one version of this event, his parents had him re-baptised and re-confirmed against his will, but he refused to accept his own ‘forced conversion’ as valid.)

Three years later he changed his mind and moreover announced his intention to become a priest. In the meantime, his parents reverted to Anglicanism, at which point he took it upon himself to re-convert them. He successfully accomplished this task shortly before his ordination in 1924.

For most of his years as a writer and broadcaster, he also served as the first official press spokesman for the Sydney archdiocese. He never shirked a question, but adopted a hair-splitting approach which both exasperated and delighted friend and foe alike.

He defended State lotteries and the legalisation of poker machines, and criticised the ‘puritan element’ as well as the ‘Godless secularism’ of Australian society.

In later years many of the causes which he had eloquently championed were downgraded or abandoned. These included Catholic censorship (the notorious *Index of Forbidden Books*) and the view that supremacy of conscience was a Protestant ‘error’.

In his final book, *Questions People Ask*, he attempted to reconcile declarations of the 2nd Vatican Council (notably that on authority, conscience and religious liberty) with his own apparently contradictory viewpoints. In the book he adopted occasional casuistry that was ‘Rumbleism’ at its best.

Dr Rumble had a marked sense of humour and appeared to enjoy argument for argument’s sake. Radio listeners sometimes doubted whether some of his theological judgments were intended seriously.

A horse-racing enthusiast who liked the occasional flutter (a pursuit which his opponents regarded as a typically Romish vice), he gave the following answer to a questioner who wished to know if it was a sin for the jockey to pull a horse in a race.

His explanation: ‘You can’t pull him ... but you don’t have to push, don’t have to ride him out. If you don’t want to extend him fully, well and good. A jockey is entitled to ride to instructions, an owner to set a goal and a trainer to make his preparation for the race he has in mind’.

Another popular story concerns the time that a religious column by Dr Rumble, intended for the now defunct *Tasmanian Catholic Standard*, appeared in the sports section of the *Hobart Mercury*. Both journals were printed in the same building, and galleys of type had been wrongly sorted. Dr Rumble greatly enjoyed the unexpected extra publicity, but his opponents viewed the affair as a sly plot to promote the faith.

Following his retirement from public life, Dr Rumble became a ‘recluse’ (his own word) in the tiny room in the Kensington monastery where he had lived throughout his entire priestly life. The floor was bare and the shelves—made by Dr Rumble from timber boxes—were cluttered with books. A naked light provided meagre illumination.

He sewed buttons on the soutanes of other priests in the monastery and devised numerous gadgets to assist elderly members of the community to get about.

He hated the telephone and (partly because of increasing deafness and blindness) carried...
out all contacts with the outside world—incorporating other priests and sometimes bishops, who became willing messengers for an aging patriarch.

Dr Rumble was a kindly and good-natured man who, it was said, never once lost his temper and was invariably charitable towards his opponents.

In today’s changed ecclesiastical climate, he came to be regarded, even within his own denomination, as an anachronism.

If he was unhappy with the present trends within the Church, he rarely showed it, but an indication of his views may be gained from an interview in the Catholic Weekly on the occasion of the golden jubilee of his ordination in 1974. In the interview, he stated:

Our primary duty is to make clear the authoritative teachings of the Catholic religion... Claiming that the recent Vatican Council was essentially a pastoral and not a dogmatic one, many Catholic writers have felt free to publish all kinds of speculations with no claim to be official Catholic teaching, yet which have too easily impressed not a few teachers desirous of being up to date.

His final attack—the very last Rumbleism—was a bitter onslaught on the modern neo-pentecostal (charismatic) movement, which he condemned as a ‘corybantic’ religion and ‘eccentric cult’. (Corybant, he explained, was a mythical attendant of Cybele, who attended the goddess with wild dances and music as she wandered by torchlight over the mountains.)

By an unhappy coincidence his attack, published in Catholic newspapers throughout the world, appeared a few days before an audience—thus implying Papal approval—given by Pope Paul VI to members of a charismatic delegation from the United States and Australia. Dr Rumble countered that the “audience” was not a private Papal audience in the normally accepted sense of the word, but a low-key ‘bacciamiento’ (ring-kissing) ceremony deliberately intended to show the Pope’s hesitance if not actual displeasure.

Both this and previous controversies were forgotten at Dr Rumble’s Requiem Mass in St Mary’s Cathedral. Radio 2CH, once the rallying point for anti-Rumble forces, paid the departed priest glowing tribute in several hourly bulletins and announced details of the funeral for listeners wishing to attend.

By contrast, his death was virtually ignored by 2SM, now a pop station which (despite ecclesiastical ownership) displays little interest in either religion or the priest-with-microphone who was undoubtedly its most famous son.


...to be witnesses and heralds of the Gospel, after the example of Jesus Christ. This manner of acting is also recommended to us by St. Peter the Apostle, when he invites us to give an account and provide reasons, ‘for the hope that is in you’ (1 Pt 3:15). The Spirit is indicating ways that our Christian communities can embark on a new season of witnessing to our faith and devise new forms of response (apologia) to those who ask the logos, that is, the reasons for our faith. [...] As Christians, we are to learn a new manner of responding in ‘gentleness and reverence and a clear conscience’ (1 Pt 3:15, 16) with the gentle strength which comes from union with Christ in the Spirit and with the conviction that our goal is a personal encounter with God the Father in his Kingdom.

—Lineamenta for the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelisation (2012).
This morning we are doing a rather unusual thing. We are celebrating in this great cathedral with very public ceremony the memorial service of a man who abhorred attention given to him personally, who lived most of his life in a monastery room apart from the crowds. This is a rather unusual thing, but then, Dr Rumble was a rather unusual man, a special man...

In tributes made to him last year at his golden jubilee of priesthood, often this quote was made: ‘I have fought the good fight to the end, I have run the race to the finish, I have kept the faith’. It is a text which so obviously fitted his life and work. He was a man who had great qualities of heart and mind. To the public eye the qualities of his mind were perhaps more in evidence—radio, writings, numerous works characterised by clarity, conciseness, and a deep, extensive knowledge. But we who loved with him were probably more conscious of the qualities of heart. He was a kind and gentle man—a simple man as great men are always simple...

His was a fighting for truth, to explain, instruct in truth a kind of apologetics that still has a place in the Church of today, because it is that unwearying search for truth, and its clear expression—a truth that issues into life. In 1918 ....He had a mind that loved an argument in order to arrive at truth, and a heart that accepted people, never permitting any personal animosity, even towards those whose ideas he could not accept...

Last year, at his jubilee, Dr Rumble summed up his own life: ‘I have worked to bring the inestimable grace of the Catholic faith, in all its integrity, into the lives of as many others as possible, and to intensify it in those already blessed by it.’

—From the panegyric preached by Fr James Cuskelly MSC. (With thanks to James Littleton MSC, Editor: Defender of the Catholic Faith. Australia’s Radio Priest: Dr Leslie Rumble MSC. Published by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, 2011.)
NEW WORLD,
NEW PENTECOST,
NEW CHURCH

Pope John Paul’s II’s understanding
of ‘New Evangelisation’

PETER JOHN McGREGOR

RECENTLY, Pope Benedict XVI announced the establishment of a Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation. This Council has been given

the specific task of promoting a renewed evangelization in countries where the first proclamation of the faith already resounded, and where Churches are present of ancient foundation, but which are going through a progressive secularization of society and a sort of ‘eclipse of the sense of God,’ which constitutes a challenge to find the appropriate means to propose again the perennial truth of the Gospel of Christ.1

This ‘charter’, together with the fact that the new Council does not replace the Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples, shows that its purpose is to spur new efforts at spreading the Gospel in the developed world—the regions where Christianity was once dominant, but has been weakened by strong secularising trends. In light of this initiative it seems timely to look once again at what Pope John Paul II meant by ‘new evangelisation’ so as to assess what the task of this new Council should be, and how the Catholic faithful can participate in this ‘new evangelisation’. Later in this essay I shall also address the question of whether Benedict XVI’s understanding of ‘new evangelisation’ might differ substantially from John Paul II’s.

A Preliminary Analysis of New Evangelisation

The most immediate question is—what was ‘new’ about John Paul II’s concept? Was it merely a renewed effort to bring people to faith or back to faith in Christ and membership of the Church? Was it simply the latest in a long line of calls for a ‘re-evangelisation’ which stretches back to the Young Christian Workers, the ‘Mission de France’ and the ‘worker priests’,2 or was there something genuinely ‘new’ about it? And how ‘extensive’ was this ‘new evangelisation’ to be? Was it understood to be coterminous with the entire mission of the Church, or with only a part of that mission, that part which concerned the ‘reevangelisation’ of ‘post-Christian’ nations? Although John Paul’s II first use of the expression ‘new evangelisation’ was to the Latin American Bishops at Port-au-Prince in 1983,3 there were some intimations of the concept at the 1979 General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla. The theme of that conference was evangelisation at present and in the future of Latin America. The context of the conference was the relationship between liberation theology in Latin America and the understanding of evangelisation given by Pope Paul VI in Evangelii Nuntiandi.4 There Paul VI had moved beyond the notion that evange-
Evangelisation was limited to proclamation and catechesis, noting that it included the regeneration of cultures and the creation of a new society, a ‘civilisation of love’. For him, human development and liberation were profoundly linked with evangelisation, in as much as they should be a result of evangelisation, but they did not fall within the definition of evangelisation. He believed that the great danger for evangelisation was its secularisation, its reduction to a merely temporal project. In light of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Latin American Bishops at Puebla maintained that the Church in Latin America should scrutinize the ‘signs of the times’ so that its evangelising efforts would ‘contribute to the construction of a new society that is more fraternal and just’. In his opening address John Paul II expressed the same theme. He said:

> We cry out once more: Respect the human being, who is the image of God! Evangelize so that this may become a reality, so that the Lord may transform hearts and humanize political and economic systems, with the responsible commitment of human beings as the starting point.

However, he also went a step further than Paul VI. Rather than saying that human promotion and liberation were ‘profoundly linked’ to evangelisation, he stated that ‘works on behalf of justice and human promotion’ were an *indispensable part* of the Church’s evangelistic mission, not just a result. Furthermore, in a homily given on the day before the opening of the conference, he stated that:

> We have come here, not so much to re-examine the same problem [as at the 1968 Medellin Conference of Latin America Bishops]...as to re-work it in a new way, a new place, and a new historical moment...[now] the Church is looking for new ways to comprehend the mission it received from Jesus Christ more fully and carry it out in a more dedicated fashion.

When John Paul II first used the expression ‘new evangelisation’ in 1983 he reminded the Latin American Bishops that their next General Conference in 1992 would mark the 500th anniversary of the first evangelisation of the Americas. So that this anniversary should gain its full meaning, he said that the Church in Latin America needed to commit itself to a new evangelisation, ‘new in ardour, methods, and expression’. He maintained that this ‘new evangelisation’ must not be a simple return to the missionary methods of a former era. It needed to be new because Latin America has special needs—secularisation, corruption and grinding poverty—which the earlier practice of evangelisation did not meet. The new evangelisation needed to deepen the faith of Christians, create a new culture open to the Gospel message, and promote the social transformation of Latin America.

After this date John Paul II used the phrase ‘new evangelisation’ on many occasions and on every continent. After 1987 he linked this new evangelisation with the preparation for the great Jubilee in 2000. In *Redemptoris Missio* he specifically identified new evangelisation with the re-evangelisation of nations which had, to a large extent, lost their Christian faith. He portrayed this ‘re-evangelisation’ as a response to the spread of religious indifference, secularism and atheism in many nations where Christian faith and life had formerly flourished, as well as to the divorce of Christian faith from the way in which many Christians live their lives—the separation of faith and culture.

This preliminary analysis indicates that John Paul II saw new evangelisation as a response to a new situation. He saw the Church faced with new challenges in the form of secu-
larism, atheism and religious indifference, the separation of faith and culture, and the growth of poverty and injustice in many parts of the world. Also, he saw that the Church was developing a new awareness of its need to respond to these challenges by deepening the faith of Christians and their witness to the Gospel, as well as creating new societies that embody the truths of the Gospel. We should note that the initial context was not the need to re-evangelise the ‘developed’ or ‘first world’, but the need for a renewed evangelisation of Latin America in the face of not only secularisation, but also the need for authentic social transformation.

**Two Analyses of New Evangelisation**

Two essays which I have found especially helpful for understanding ‘new evangelisation’ are those by Lorenzo Albacete and Avery Dulles. Albacete pointed out the need to understand ‘new evangelisation’ within the historical context wherein it was first announced; the ongoing Latin American debate about liberation theology, especially in regard to the relation between gospel and culture. At Puebla, John Paul II identified the truth about the human person as the decisive question for liberation theology. He insisted that this truth could only be completely understood within the mystery of Christ, and that any anthropological analysis that did not accept this mystery would lead to a false understanding of human liberation. Any analysis not based on the mystery of Christ led to a faulty ecclesiology and, as a consequence of this, a faulty anthropology. However, according to Albacete, John Paul II was not content with criticism of liberation theology’s anthropology. The question of the relation between evangelisation and culture put forward by liberation theology still had to be addressed. For Albacete, ‘new evangelisation’ is the response to this question. The anthropological basis of ‘new evangelisation’ is to be found in the theological anthropology articulated by John Paul II.

Dulles presented what he called a ‘synoptic’ view of what John Paul II meant by new evangelisation. According to Dulles, John Paul II saw that the commemoration of the first evangelisation of the Americas and of the year 2000 Jubilee of the Incarnation both gave reason for the Church to reflect upon the context of evangelisation today. The current needs were not identical to those of the past. Hence, contemporary evangelisation required a new quality and new methods.

Underlying this call, Dulles saw a development in theological understanding. The foundation of this development is what John Saward has called a pneumatological Christocentricity; “that the living Christ is, through the Holy Spirit, the chief agent of evangelisation”. Consequently, new evangelisation is derived from a close, personal relationship with Christ on the part of those who bear the Gospel message. For their hearers new evangelisation ‘is not a matter of merely passing on doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Saviour’.

Because evangelisation ‘is the witness which the Son of Man bears to himself, perpetuated in the mission of the church’, new evangelisation ‘must be ecclesial in an even deeper sense’ than the past. By this, Dulles meant that it must be carried out by the whole Church’s membership and by each local Church.

From the perspective of the situation faced by the Church in the world Dulles noted that: ‘Our times offer special challenges and special opportunities.’ One of these is a new relationship of dialogue with other religions, a recognition of ‘seeds of the Word’ outside of Christianity and Judaism. John Paul II’s idea of new evangelisation embraces this dialogue as a part of proclaiming the Gospel. Another challenge and opportunity facing the Church today is a new understanding of the significance of ecumenism for evangelisation: Christian disunity as an obstacle to new evangelisation, and real but imperfect communion as a
way of facilitating it. According to Dulles, other challenges which must be met by a new evangelisation are secularism, indifference, atheism, political ideologies opposed to the Gospel, a culture of death, the negative results of urbanisation, the communication revolution, hedonism, consumerism; in short, a new cultural world, the new areopagus, which has to be met by a Christian message presented in a new language, with new techniques and a new psychology. The development of a new Christian ‘culture’ raises the whole question of the relationship between the Gospel and culture, not just in this new world culture, but with every individual culture. Finally, the growing human concern for justice has raised the question of the relationship between evangelisation and justice. The new evangelisation must integrate the building of a new civilisation of love into the mission of the Church. Dulles noted that all of these phenomena are both challenges and opportunities: on the one hand, people are ‘sinking more deeply into materialism and despair’, on the other hand there is, ‘an anxious search for meaning’. New evangelisation needs to recognise the nature of these challenges and opportunities, and respond appropriately to them.

The final point made by Dulles is that he believed that new evangelisation is actually bringing about ‘the birth of a new Catholicism that, without loss of its institutional, sacramental and social dimensions, is authentically evangelical’. In his judgment the ‘evangelical turn’ in the ecclesial vision of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II was one of the most surprising and important developments in the Catholic Church since Vatican II. However, he believed that pre-conciliar kerygmatic theology and Vatican II itself did the groundwork for this development. Overall, Dulles regarded ‘new evangelisation’ as John Paul’s II’s response to fundamental developments in awareness and self-understanding, both of the Church and the human race as a whole. In the Church there has been a shift from ecclesiocentricism to Christocentrism, from ‘hierarchology’ to the universal priesthood of believers and a new self-awareness by the Church of its own nature and purpose. In humanity as a whole there has come into being a new cultural world, a new areopagus, indeed, a self-awareness of the human person as a cultural being, bringing to prominence the question of the relationship of the Gospel to culture.

**Does New Evangelisation Have More Than One Meaning?**

Apart from the question of what might be ‘new’ in new evangelisation, the differing contexts in which John Paul II used the term prompt one to ask whether or not he used this phrase in different senses and, if so, are these senses consistent? Also, what is the relationship between new evangelisation and mission ad gentes, that is, to those peoples who have never been substantially evangelised?

Dulles noted that, in *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II seemed to put a different slant on ‘new evangelisation’, identifying it especially with those areas where large numbers of Christians have become estranged from their faith, compared with areas which have yet to hear the Gospel for the first time, and thus require a first or ‘primary’ evangelisation. Dulles’ comment upon this is that the compartmentalisation in John Paul II’s thought was not rigid. Dulles wrote:

> When John Paul II speaks of new audiences requiring first evangelisation he mentions not only new geographical areas but also new cultural sectors such as the inner cities, migrants, refugees, young people, and the ‘new humanity’ whose formation depends greatly on the mass media of communication.

Apart from this comment, Dulles did not attempt to investigate whether or not the two apparent senses of ‘new evangelisation’ are compatible. He left open the question of the relationship between the mission ad gentes and the ‘new evangelisation’. Is the mission ad gentes a part of or parallel to ‘new evangelisation’? I shall address this question below.
**New Challenges to the Mission Ad Gentes**

In *Redemptoris Missio* John Paul II attempted to address some new theological ideas that he saw as a threat to the Church’s mission, and in particular to the mission *ad gentes*. Foremost amongst these was a perceived objection to the exercise of the mission *ad gentes*, at least as traditionally understood, coming not from non-Christians, but from within the Church itself. Faced with this he attempted to show the continued and essential relevance of this mission, understood as the explicit proclamation of Christ to non-Christians, followed by their conversion and incorporation in the Catholic Church through baptism.

For John Paul II, particular Christological and ecclesiological errors underpinned the foregoing objection. He saw in these ideas a denial of the absolute uniqueness of Christ and the Church. He contradicted those who advocate a ‘Kingdom-centred’ mission as opposed to a ‘Church-centred one’; a mission *ad gentes* which aims to help non-Christians become ‘more human’, build a more just world and enable them to practise their own religion more faithfully rather than one which strives to bring non-Christians to explicit faith in Christ and membership of the Church. He disagreed with those who thought that ‘common ground’ may best be found with other religions by presenting the Kingdom of God theocentrically rather than Christocentrically.

John Paul II also responded to those who would eliminate any distinct mission *ad gentes* within the overall mission of the Church. It would appear that he saw this as another way in which the validity of the mission *ad gentes* was being undermined. In answer to this position he offered an analysis of the then contemporary missionary situation which identified three different situations in one mission of the Church: specific missionary activity amongst non-Christians, the pastoral care of mature and healthy local churches and the ‘new evangelisation’ of those who are no longer Christian. In doing so, he set the mission *ad gentes* within the context of the global mission of the Church.

Furthermore, in the face of the argument that the traditional distinction between missionary and non-missionary territories was no longer valid, he offered a new categorisation of the ‘field’ of the mission *ad gentes*. Instead of the traditional identification of this ‘field’ geographically, he proposed three new boundaries; territorial, sociological and cultural. The first boundary retained the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission. The second boundary nominated the validity of the territorial dimension of the Church’s mission.

**New Evangelisation and the Mission Ad Gentes**

Dulles has drawn our attention to the fact that in *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II restricted his meaning of ‘new evangelisation’ to the re-evangelisation of former Christians, distinguishing it from the mission *ad gentes*. In *Redemptoris Missio*, John Paul II had a number of strong motives for explicitly distinguishing between a new evangelisation of post-Christian situations and the initial evangelisation of non-Christians. He wished to combat the ideas that it is no longer necessary for the Church to attempt the concrete conversion of non-Christians to Christianity because such attempts are contrary to respect for conscience and human freedom. He also wanted to challenge the ideas that human development should be the ultimate goal of the Church’s mission, or that the proposition that Christ is the only Saviour contradicts the premises of inter-religious dialogue. He also wanted to dispel the notion that since the Church has only one mission, the distinctive features
of the proclamation of the Gospel to those who have had no kind of exposure to it can be ignored. Furthermore, he wanted to counter the notion that since all Christians are missionaries there is no need for anyone to have a life-long vocation to be missionaries *ad gentes*.\(^{57}\)

Whilst the necessity of distinguishing the mission *ad gentes* from other forms of evangelisation in *Redemptoris Missio* can be accepted, it is my conviction that, even within that document, John Paul II applied the principles of ‘new evangelisation’ to the entire contemporary mission of the Church, whatever its particular context. He believed that a new era in the life of the Church was beginning, one which included the mission *ad gentes*.

In *Redemptoris Missio* he wrote:

> *Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians, and missionaries and young Churches in particular, respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time.*\(^{58}\)

According to John Paul II, this new missionary age is being brought about by God himself. He believed that God was preparing the world anew for the sowing of the Gospel through a hidden work of grace within human hearts. John Paul II saw the new self-understanding of the Church and its mission being applied to the mission *ad gentes* through: The priority of evangelisation through witness of life,\(^{59}\) the proclamation of Christ rather than the Church,\(^{60}\) the call to conversion as well as baptism,\(^{61}\) the establishment of local Churches as signs of God’s presence in the world,\(^{62}\) the need for Christian unity to fully convince non-Christians of the truth of the Gospel,\(^{63}\) the need to incarnate the Gospel in each culture,\(^{64}\) the need to recognise and acknowledge all that is good and true in other religions,\(^{65}\) the fact that human development and liberation from evils of every kind are integral parts of the mission *ad gentes*,\(^{66}\) and the fact that every Christian is called to participate in this mission in some way.\(^{67}\) He even saw repeated the lamentable presence of the ‘mystery of iniquity’\(^{68}\) in the mission *ad gentes*.

In *Redemptoris Missio* he stated:

> Nevertheless, in this ‘new springtime’ of Christianity there is an undeniable negative tendency...missionary activity specifically directed ‘to the nations’ (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium. Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church’s missionary thrust towards non-Christians, a fact which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ.\(^{69}\)

According to John Paul II, the Church has also become aware of those developments in the world, including the non-Christian world, which affect the practice of its mission—urbanisation, mass migration, the spread of refugees, often caused by poverty and injustice, the development of a new youth culture,\(^{70}\) the need to evangelise the modern *areopagai* of the mass media, culture, scientific research and attempts to promote international dialogue,\(^{71}\) and the search for meaning and the spiritual dimension to life in the face of the hollowness of materialism and consumerism.\(^{72}\) He recognised that these and other changes, for example, the struggle between the culture of life and that of death,\(^{73}\) have become world-wide phenomena.

Did John Paul II’s thinking about the mission *ad gentes* fit into this more comprehensive picture which equates new evangelisation with the whole contemporary mission of the Church? I believe that when he included the mission *ad gentes* in ‘new evangelisation’ his thinking was consistent. When defending the concept of a distinct mission *ad gentes*, I think that he restricted the meaning of ‘new evangelisation’ to the reevangelisation of former Christians. Yet in other contexts I think that his concept of ‘new evangelisation’ embraced the entire mission of the Church in the contemporary world. I think that although it is justifiable for Benedict XVI to call the new Council for the reevangelisation of the profoundly secular societies of the ‘developed world’ the Pontifical Council for New Evan-
gelisation, it would be a serious misconception if we failed to understand that John Paul II wished the principles of ‘new evangelisation’ to be applied in every missionary situation.

**Does Benedict XVI Differ from John Paul II on New Evangelisation?**

Given that Benedict XVI’s new Council for New Evangelisation is being established to promote a renewed evangelisation of countries in the ‘developed world’, does it follow that Benedict XVI’s understanding of ‘new evangelisation’ is more limited than that of John Paul II? Even a brief perusal of Benedict XVI’s homily in which he announced the establishment of the new Council reveals that such is not the case. After quoting Pope Paul VI’s statement in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that evangelisation ‘is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity’, and how Paul VI gave voice to ‘the great conciliar yearning to evangelize the contemporary world, a yearning that culminated in the decree ‘Ad Gentes,’ but which permeates all the documents of Vatican II,” he states how John Paul II ‘developed this missionary project.’ He goes on to say that:

John Paul II presented ‘live’ the missionary nature of the Church, with the apostolic journeys and with the insistence of his magisterium on the urgency of a ‘new evangelisation’: ‘new’ not in the contents, but in the interior impulse, open to the grace of the Holy Spirit who constitutes the force of the new law of the Gospel and who always renews the Church; ‘new’ in the search of ways that correspond to the force of the Holy Spirit and are adapted to the times and the situations; ‘new’ because necessary also in countries which have already received the proclamation of the Gospel.

For our purpose, the key word here is ‘also’. For Benedict XVI, ‘new evangelisation’ defines the whole present day mission of the Church, a mission which must also be carried out in countries which have already received the proclamation of the Gospel. Further investigation reveals that Benedict XVI’s understanding of ‘new evangelisation’ is essentially the same as that of John Paul II. However, Benedict XVI adds a nuance that, while not contradicting anything said about ‘new evangelisation’ by John Paul II, sounds a cautionary note. Benedict XVI warns against the ‘temptation’ of impatience the temptation of immediately finding great success, in finding large numbers. But this is not God’s way. For the Kingdom of God as well as for evangelization, the instrument and vehicle of the Kingdom of God, the parable of the grain of mustard seed is always valid (see Mark 4:31-32). The Kingdom of God always starts anew under this sign. New evangelization cannot mean: immediately attracting the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church by using new and more refined methods. Nor -- this is not what new evangelization promises. New evangelization means: never being satisfied with the fact that from the grain of mustard seed, the great tree of the Universal Church grew; never thinking that the fact that different birds may find place among the branches can suffice -- rather, it means to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow. (Mark 4:26-29)

I do not think that these are meant to be words of discouragement, as much as too say ‘Well, if it doesn’t work, we tried our best’. Nor do I think, as some seem to, that Benedict XVI is resigned to a ‘remnant church’. Rather, they are words of wisdom, echoing those of Mother Teresa, that God asks us to be faithful, not successful. They echo the experience of St Peter Chanel, who at the time of his martyrdom on the island of Futuna had not made a single convert. They echo the conviction of St Paul—‘I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.’ (1 Corinthians 3:6)

**A New World**

I will now give my own ‘synoptic’ view of John Paul II’s understanding of ‘new evangelisation’. Besides the conviction that a new era in the life of the Church has begun, I think that he believed that we have entered a new era in
human history as a whole. According to him, this history is providential. God intervenes in human affairs. However, the Holy Spirit is not the only influence upon contemporary humanity. According to John Paul II there are two tendencies at work in the contemporary world, one to reject God and the other to search for God. The negative tendency is to reduce the human person to what he called a horizontal dimension with no openness to the Absolute.

According to John Paul II, this tendency springs from human pride in human achievements. The growth of religious indifference and atheism, especially in the form of secularism, is related to the great human advances in science and technology which have given rise to a new expression of the original temptation faced by the human race and recounted in the third chapter of Genesis; the wish to become ‘like God’. By removing all bounds to liberty, people have “cut the religious roots that are in their hearts; they forget God, or simply retain him without meaning in their lives, or outrightly reject him, and begin to adore various ‘idols’ of the contemporary world”.

In this new world which believes it does not need God, human beings no longer understand or value themselves as creatures made in the image of God. The human person becomes an object at the mercy of those who have power rather than a responsible subject endowed with conscience and freedom.

John Paul II believed that, paradoxically, this tendency has proved to be fertile soil for its opposite. It has been unable to extinguish the human longing and need for religion. When human beings, prompted by their conscience, have the courage to face the fundamental existential questions about suffering, death and the purpose of human life they are confronted with the same realisation that faced St. Augustine: ‘You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.’ (Confessions, I, 1) This has led to ‘an openness to a spiritual and transcendent outlook towards life, the renewed interest in religious research, the return to a sense of the sacred and to prayer, and the demand for freedom to call upon the name of the Lord’.

According to John Paul II, these two opposing tendencies are a result of the very nature of the human person and the effect of sin on that nature. We find both that we are powerful and weak, able to act nobly or basely, open to freedom and slavery, love and hatred. The forces we have unleashed are in our own hands and either we can control them or are enslaved by them.

John Paul II believed that we are in an ambivalent situation. We live in a world which “has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and existence itself”. On the one hand there is still a deep resistance to grace based, in part, on our pride in our achievements, as well as an uneasiness about the whole concept of ‘mercy’.

On the other hand he believed that there were doubts, fears and questions in the heart of modern people. ‘There is unease and a sense of powerlessness regarding the proposed response that man knows he must give.’ There is an increase in ‘existential fear’. When Dives in Misericordia was written this fear was often that of nuclear destruction. At the present moment it is perhaps more of international terrorism, civil strife in many countries and ecological destruction. John Paul II claimed that this was happening ‘against the background of the gigantic remorse caused by the fact that, side by side with wealthy and surfeited people and societies, living in plenty and ruled by consumerism and pleasure, the same human family contains individuals and groups that are suffering from hunger.’

As well as this unease and crisis of conscience, some are asking existential questions. What is our true nature? Why, in spite of so much progress, have we been unable to eliminate suffering, evil and death? What is the nature and purpose of these three realities? What good are all our human achievements when we must pay so high an existential
What is the significance of these developments for the contemporary mission of the Church that John Paul II called ‘new evangelisation’? He believed that the work of the Holy Spirit in the world has more fully prepared it to listen to the Gospel message. The Spirit has already prepared the world for the new evangelisation. Thus the Church should approach its mission with a renewed energy, hope and confidence. John Paul II held that the collapse of oppressive ideologies and political systems, the growth in what he called Gospel values among peoples, the unifying effect of contemporary communications and the stimulation of the search for the truth about God and the human person caused by the soullessness of secularism had presented the Church with new opportunities to evangelise. In Redemptoris Missio he said that:

God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelisation and to the mission ad gentes. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.91

Yet, paradoxically, he also saw more resistance to this Gospel. This paradox is grounded in the mystery of the divine economy, which has ‘linked salvation and grace with the cross’.92

I think that there were two convictions underlying this paradox. The first is alluded to directly in the proceeding quotation—that the way to glory is through sharing in the sufferings of Christ, that the preaching of the Gospel has itself to undergo a kind of death in order to rise in human hearts. The second conviction, which is related to the first, is that the ‘mystery of iniquity’93 ultimately serves the mystery of Christ, or, as St. Paul has put it, where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. (Romans 5:21) To put it another way, God is at work in the world, and through the Holy Spirit seeks to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.94 This conviction of the Holy Spirit brings about either one of two possible results in individuals, repentance or hardness of heart—that is, turning away from sin or committing the sin against the Holy Spirit. Hence, it is to be expected that the more the Gospel is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, the more violent human reactions to it will be, in terms of both acceptance and rejection. Either people will be “cut to the heart” (Acts 2:37) or they will become infuriated. (Acts 5:33 & 6:54)

A New Pentecost

Just as God is opening before the Church a humanity more fully prepared to accept the Gospel message, so too John Paul II believed that God is equipping the Church to proclaim it more effectively. He believed that the Holy Spirit is simultaneously preparing the world to receive a new evangelisation and preparing the Church to engage in it. The new evangelisation is both an effect of and response to a new Pentecost.95 John Paul II believed that the prayer of Pope John XXIII for a new Pentecost has been answered by the Holy Spirit - that Vatican II has indeed ushered in a new Pentecost in the Church, making ‘the Spirit newly ‘present’ in our difficult age’.96

Like the original Pentecost, the source of this new outpouring of the Holy Spirit is Christ himself. John Paul II said to the bishops of Latin America that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord who guides the Church to the fullness of truth and renews the revelation of God in her in a new Pentecost. He urged them to turn their hearts to Christ, to be open to Christ and to welcome the Holy Spirit, ‘so that a new Pentecost may take place in every community’.97

John Paul II believed that the effect of this new Pentecost on contemporary evangelisation could be as powerful as that of the original Pentecost.98 He believed that the result of this new evangelisation, empowered by a new Pentecost, will be a new Church, one which is the seedbed for a new humanity, one which
will know the love, joy and peace of the Lord. In his address to the bishops of Latin America he stated:

Be open to Christ, welcome the Spirit, so that a new Pentecost may take place in every community! A new humanity, a joyful one, will arise from your midst; you will experience again the saving power of the Lord and ‘what was spoken to you by the Lord’ will be fulfilled. What ‘was spoken to you’... is his love for you, his love for each one, for all your families and peoples...Today the Lord is passing by. He is calling you. In this moment of grace, he is once again calling you by name and renewing his covenant with you. May you listen to his voice so that you may know true, total joy and enter into his peace (cf. Ps. 94:7, 11)!19

John Paul II believed that if Christians were docile to the Holy Spirit as he works in this new Pentecost a ‘new springtime of Christian life’100 would burst forth in the new millennium.

**A New Church**

John Paul II believed that through a new Pentecost the Holy Spirit is not only empowering the Church with a new ardour to evangelise, but also forming a new depth of selfunderstanding in the Church which is a prerequisite for a new evangelisation. This new consciousness, which he also calls ‘self-awareness’, is a deeper grasp of her own nature and mission, her divine mystery and human mission.103

However, even while the Holy Spirit is inspiring this new consciousness within the Church, that same ‘mystery of iniquity’ at work in the world at large continues to make inroads amongst Christians and work in direct opposition to the new evangelisation. According to John Paul II the consciousness of some Christians reduces rather than adds to the understanding of God, the Church, its mission, and the human person. It involves a secular understanding of the human person rather than one which ‘embraces the whole person...and opens up the wonderful prospect of divine filiation’.102 I believe that the new consciousness of which he spoke was ultimately derived by him from *Lumen Gentium*—that the Church is a sign and instrument of communion with God and amongst every human person,103 and that it is missionary by its very nature, its mission being to bring every person into the aforesaid communion.

According to John Paul II, the Holy Spirit has given the Church a new awareness of the nature of her mission. She has received a deeper awareness that her *raison d’être* is to reveal the Father to humanity, through the Son. The reason for her existence is to enable us to ‘see’ the Father in Christ.104 He believed that this new consciousness of the Church that she is the ‘sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God and the unity of all mankind’105 must lead to a ‘universal openness’106 to the whole human race so that all may be able to find in her ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ (Eph 3:8)...Such openness, organically joined with the awareness of her own nature and certainty of her own truth...is what gives the Church her apostolic, or in other words her missionary, dynamism, professing and proclaiming in its integrity the whole truth transmitted by Christ.107

John Paul II believed that since the Church exists to make the Father known, a new consciousness was developing that every activity of the Church must have communion with Christ as its ultimate goal.108 Not only must every activity of the Church be evangelical, but every person in the Church must also be so. Rather than remaining the province of a few specialists, part of the Church’s new consciousness should be that all are called to be missionaries.109

This new consciousness of the Church also involves a profound shift in the immediate goal of evangelisation. Rather than simple membership of the Catholic Church and the acceptance of Catholic doctrine, that goal has become ‘conversion’. By this John Paul II meant a personal encounter with the Lord and a transformation of the person by the Holy Spirit. In fact, his language on this point often mirrors that of evangelical Protestants. Thus, evangelisation ‘is not a matter of merely passing on
doctrine but rather of a personal and profound meeting with the Saviour.\textsuperscript{110} The Gospel must be ‘directed to stirring a person to a conversion of heart and life and a clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; to disposing a person to receive Baptism and the Eucharist and to strengthen a person in the prospect and realisation of new life according to the Spirit.’\textsuperscript{111}

Moreover, John Paul II recognised that evangelisation often needs to begin with those who are already Catholics, since it is possible that they ‘have lost or have never had the chance to experience Christ personally: not Christ as a mere ‘paradigm’ or ‘value’, but the living Lord: ‘the way, and the truth, and the life’ (Jn 14:6).\textsuperscript{112}

John Paul II also believed that this lack is causing serious injury to the Church’s mission and even to her very existence. Addressing the massive defection of Catholics in Latin America to the so-called ‘sects’, he recognised that their very success often lay in providing more completely for the needs of the human person, including that which is most satisfying, a personal encounter with God.\textsuperscript{113}

John Paul II held that an indispensable part of this personal conversion that is required at this moment in history is repentance. In order to repent it is necessary for the Church to know her sins, which requires an examination of conscience. Realising the need for such an examination is a genuine development in the Church’s consciousness, one which, as John Paul II pointed out, is implied in \textit{Lumen Gentium}.\textsuperscript{114}

Although he urged all Catholics to carry out this examination, John Paul II carried it out, in a general sense, on behalf of the Church. In doing so he identified three major kinds of sin in need of repentance. These are sins against Christian unity,\textsuperscript{115} past sins of intolerance and violence against those who did not agree with the Catholic faith,\textsuperscript{116} and present day sins of religious indifference, ethical relativism, culpable theological error, disobedience to the apostolic witnesses, participation in the violation of human rights, and failures to fully respond to the gift of the Holy Spirit which was the Second Vatican Council.\textsuperscript{117} To this list could be added past sins of injustice against the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{118} I think that this self-examination was unprecedented in the Catholic Church and marked a new stage in the development of the Church’s self-understanding. It implied that such a repentance and purification is necessary if the Church’s mission to evangelise the contemporary world is to meet with any substantial success. The Lord’s first command in the Gospel of Mark is ‘Repent, and believe the Good News’ (Mark 1:15) How often do we attempt the second without first obeying the first?

According to John Paul II, the contemporary need for the personal conversion of Christians is also at the heart of a realisation of the need for Christian unity at this moment in the history of the Church’s mission. In \textit{Ut Unum Sint} he wrote:

Passing from principles, from the obligations of the Christian conscience, to the actual practice of the ecumenical journey towards unity, the Second Vatican Council emphasises above all \textit{the need for interior conversion}. The messianic proclamation that ‘the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand’, and the subsequent call to ‘repent, and believe in the Gospel’ (\textit{Mk} 1:15) with which Jesus begins his mission, indicate the essential element of every new beginning—the fundamental need for evangelisation at every stage of the Church’s journey of salvation. This is true in a special way of the process begun by the Second Vatican Council, when it indicated as a dimension of renewal the ecumenical task of uniting divided Christians. ‘\textit{There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart.}’ (\textit{UR} 7)\textsuperscript{119}

Indeed, in John Paul’s II eyes, working for the unity of the Church is an indispensable prerequisite for the new evangelisation. Without it, the world will not believe the Gospel.\textsuperscript{120} In his encyclical on ecumenism, he explicitly made his own the words of Paul VI, that in our current disunity, work for ecumenism is actually a \textit{means} of evangelisation, and that the absence of such work seriously impedes
According to John Paul II, another part of the Church’s new consciousness lies in its attitude to non-Christian religions. He took what he said about ecumenism and applied it ‘although in another way and with due differences—to activity for coming closer together with the representatives of the non-Christian religions’. As with ecumenism, he saw such dialogue as responding to what the Holy Spirit has said to the Church at Vatican II, and a recognition by the Church that the Spirit of truth operates ‘outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body’. For John Paul II, Vatican II was ‘the beginning of a new era in the life of the Church’. Its ‘enormously rich body of teaching and the striking new tone in the way it presented this content constitute as it were a proclamation of new times’. He believed that the Council was the beginning of the immediate preparation for the new millennium. For him, new evangelisation was the contemporary expression of evangelisation, that is, the contemporary expression of the entire priestly, prophetic and royal mission of the Church. He believed that it is being carried out by a new Church, born of the Holy Spirit in a new Pentecost, and is addressed to a new World, born of the selfsame Spirit—a new, ‘evangelical’, ‘pentecostal’ Catholic Church.

John Paul II believed that the end of this new evangelisation would be a ‘new springtime of Christian life’ which will be revealed by the Great Jubilee. However, he also believed that this new springtime of ‘a new humanity, a joyful one [which] will experience again the saving power of the Lord’, was not a foregone conclusion. It would only come to pass if Christians are docile to the Holy Spirit.

NOTES

5 This phrase, often used by John Paul II, was first used by Paul VI in his address at the closing of the Holy Year, ‘Sensitive love in the defence of life’, 31 December, 1975.
7 Ibid., no. 32. AEJT 17 (December 2010)
8 Ibid., no. 33. AEJT 17 (December 2010)
9 Ibid., no. 34. AEJT 17 (December 2010)
10 Ibid., no. 35. AEJT 17 (December 2010)
11 Ibid., no. 36. AEJT 17 (December 2010)
13 Dulles, ‘John Paul II and the New Evangelization,’ 57.
14 Ibid., 55.
15 Ibid., 56.
16 Ibid., 55.
20 Albacete, ‘The Praxis of Resistance,’ 612-613. 21 Ibid., 615.
22 Ibid.
28 Avery Dulles, Why Catholics don’t evangelize and why they must: John Paul II and the New Evangelisation, 12. This is a pamphlet version of Dulles America article, which differs slightly from that article. In the America article the text reads ‘new evangelization is for that reason a work of the church.’
29 Dulles, ‘John Paul II and the New Evangelisation,’ 56 & 58.
30 Ibid., 58.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 69-70.
36 Dulles, ‘John Paul II and the New Evangelization,’ 69.
38 Suquia, ‘The New Evangelization,’ 525.
39 Ibid., 70.
40 Ibid., 59.
41 Ibid.
42 Yves Congar, Lay People in the Church (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1957) 45.
43 RM no. 37.
44 Dulles, ‘John Paul II and the New Evangelization,’ 56-57.
45 Ibid., 57. Cf. RM no. 37
46 RM nos. 4 & 11.
48 Saward, Christ is the Answer, 102-103. According to Augustine Kanjamela, some Indian theologians regard Redemptoris Missio as being written, in part, to call into question some missiological stances taken by them. See Augustine Kanjamela, ‘Redemptoris Missio and Mission in India,’ in Burrows, Redemption and Dialogue, 195-205, at 198.
49 RM no. 32.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., no. 33. See Marcello Zago, ‘Commentary on Redemptoris Missio,’ 56-90, at 58; and Comblin, ‘The Novelty of Redemptoris Missio,’ 231-238, at 234, both in Burrows, Redemption and Dialogue. It is worth noting that in his announce- ment of the establishment of a Pontifical Council for New Evangelisation, Benedict XVI mentioned three situations which do not agree exactly with John Paul II’s. Rather, Benedict XVI said,

There are regions in the world that still wait for a first evangelization; others that received it but need more profound work; others still in which the Gospel put down roots a long time ago, giving place to a true Christian tradition, but where in the last centuries—with complex dynamics—the process of secularization has produced a grave crisis of the sense of the Christian faith and of belonging to the Church.

See the ‘Pope’s Homily at Vespers for Sts. Peter and Paul’
53 RM no. 32.
56 RM nos. 3-4.
57 Ibid., nos. 31-32.
58 Ibid., no. 92.
59 Ibid., no. 42.
60 Ibid., nos. 44-45.
61 Ibid., nos. 46-47.
62 Ibid., no. 49.
63 Ibid., no. 50.
64 Ibid., nos. 52-54.
This article was first published in the Australian eJournal of Theology 17 (December 2010)
In recent decades much has been said about the urgency of the new evangelization. Considering that evangelization is characteristic of the Church’s ordinary activity and taking into consideration that the proclamation of the Gospel Ad gentes requires the formation of the local community and the particular Churches in missionary countries of the first evangelization, the new evangelization is primarily addressed to those who have drifted from the Church in traditionally Christian countries. Unfortunately, this phenomenon exists in varying degrees even in some countries where the Good News was proclaimed in recent centuries, but today has not been sufficiently accepted to result in the Christian transformation of persons, families and societies. Though these situations were duly treated in the Special Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops of a continental and regional character, which were celebrated in preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, the subject still remains a great challenge for the entire Church. For this reason, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, after consulting his brothers in the episcopate, decided to convoke the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops from 7 to 28 October 2012 to discuss the topic: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith. Continuing the reflection which has taken place thus far on the subject, the aim of the approaching synodal assembly will be to examine the present situation in the particular Churches and to trace, in communion with the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, the Bishop of Rome and Universal Pastor of the Church, the new methods and means for transmitting the Good News to people in our world today with a renewed enthusiasm proper to the saints, who were joyous witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ “who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 4:8). It is a matter of drawing out a challenge much like the scribe who became the disciple of the heavenly kingdom, was able to bring forth things new and old from the precious treasury of Tradition (cf. Mt 13:52).

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Moral Dilemmas or Something More?

TOM RYAN SM

CONSIDER THIS experience. I normally begin a course in Christian Ethics by asking the students to say the first image or word that comes to mind when they hear the words ‘morality’ or ‘ethics’. It is intriguing to find, even in 2011, how often the response is ‘rules’ or ‘solving moral dilemmas.’ Perhaps the first phrase indicates a view of the moral life that is deeply-embedded for cultural or religious reasons. The second response is more understandable, given the nature of public life. Church leaders are called to respond to legal and moral questions concerning, for example, IVF, same-sex marriage, genetic engineering, economic justice, asylum seekers, etc.

When morality is seen as a particular approach to solving moral problems or as a set of rules, we are reminded that any perspective is limited. Making judgments about difficult ethical matters is important and rules express the demands of reality. But our capacity to make wise judgments and to appreciate the values beneath rules rests on a more basic role of Christian Ethics, namely, to clarify what it means to lead a good life, what that requires and to help people to do so. There have been many advances in this area in the past two decades. This article aims to highlight the more significant developments, with specific reference to the Catholic tradition.1

Where do We Begin—a Love Story

The students’ responses noted above could be seen as the residue of the common approach to Christian Ethics in the Catholic tradition until Vatican II and the 1960s. Within the discipline of Christian Ethics itself, its specialist practitioners moved beyond the ‘legal’ approach to the Christian moral life to one centred on the call-response of discipleship, namely following the way of Jesus. This sort of process does not happen overnight—for ordinary people as much as for specialist theologians. For instance, the North American Jesuit moral theologian, James Keenan writes in 2004:

I teach an introductory course on moral theology, and during my fifteen years teaching it I only recently learned to begin my course on the topic of love. Not only did I not begin my course on love, I never even taught a class on it.

He goes on to say ‘I always started with freedom’, namely the basic freedom in grace ‘to realize the call of God.’3

Here we have, nearly forty years after Vatican II, a leading Christian Ethicist suddenly realizing that when we ask ‘Where do I begin?’ of Christian Ethics, the answer is that it is a Love Story. It does not start with us in, for instance, the experience of conscience or of our freedom. It starts with God—the God who only wants to love, to share the divine life with us and all creation.

But there is more. To be able to respond to the gift of God’s love, we need the wherewithal that comes from God. God alone can give us the ‘yes’ to say ‘yes’ to his call to love. In other words, the gift of faith enables us to respond in love to God’s invitation to love and share a life. This gift—that we name as ‘grace’—involves faith that seeks greater understanding. It shapes us at the level of head, heart and hands. Our identity, perceptions and dispositions are slowly transformed. To appreciate the significance of this change of focus about the moral life, it may help to stand back and look at the context behind the shift.

Where have we come from? Generally, it is fair to say that the general attitude driving
the more legal approach to the moral life over hundreds of years was summed up in one sentence: ‘If I don’t sin, God will love me.’ Beneath this lies, what Patrick O’Sullivan refers to, as an ‘operational’ image of God.4 It is the one that, at the heart-level, guides a person’s expectations of God. Here, God is a judge and demands that I will gain God’s love if I measure up to what God requires. God’s love is something I earn. If I don’t sin, then God will love me. If I do sin, God’s won’t love me.

Another way of expressing this view of the Christian moral life is in the phrase ‘You can’t be too careful.’ This approach has four outcomes. The spotlight is on ‘don’t get sick.’ The moral life is basically about pathology rather than healthy living. Secondly, it is driven by fear, namely of avoiding potholes on the road of life, even if it is the way of Jesus. Thirdly, actions come before character and attitudes. What I do is more important than who I am. Finally, this approach is individualistic. It tends to put the emphasis on me and only secondarily on God, even less on relationships with others and in society.

What has emerged in the past fifty years? We start with ‘God loves us—no conditions.’ The underlying operational image of God is that of a God of unconditional love. It is embodied in the parable of the loving father and the two sons. It is a move from saying ‘God loves me because I am good’ to ‘I am good because God loves me.’ All God asks is that we let ourselves be loved—to receive that gift. In receiving that gift, I am enabled to say ‘Yes.’ Perhaps being saved is less from sin than from our fear of being loved?

If God loves me no matter what, then four things follow. It starts with God loves us. I am called to share in the divine life and, through that, to work together with God. Secondly, this shapes my identity, my attitudes and is reflected in my actions. Most importantly, it is not about avoiding sin but growing in loving responsiveness and responsibility in my various relationships – with God, others, the world, creation and oneself. Finally, the emphasis has shifted from ‘me’ to ‘us.’

Understood thus, the Christian moral life has a spiritual foundation. Spirituality and morality need each other. Spirituality grounds and animates the moral life. Morality ensures that spirituality has ‘skin on’ — that it is embodied in our everyday relationships.5 It is important to recall that the emphasis here is on God’s action. Right from the start, with the Gifts of Spirit given at Baptism, God’s transforming action is at work. It is more God’s work than ours.

When I sin—fail in my relationships, when I am not my best self—God still loves me. Does guilt have a role? Of course it does. It tells me that something is amiss within my various relationships with repercussions in my relationship with God. So what about being saved? It is certainly from fear of being loved. But I need to be saved in my person with all its aspects. We are not exempt from Jesus’ comment that the just person falls ‘seven times a day.’ Being ‘saved’ manifests our need for God to heal us from destructive or divisive tendencies that are often beyond our conscious awareness. Most importantly, we are saved from something because we are saved for something—a shared life with God.

Edward Vacek SJ captures the Christian spiritual/moral life with four phrases.

God loves us
We love God
We and God form a Community
We and God cooperate

Our discussion, captured in Vacek’s compact summary, distills a range of ingredients. What are some of its more significant elements? This can be approached in two stages:
the first will focus on the discipline of Christian Ethics as it addresses the shape and content of Christian discipleship; the second stage will highlight some developments within Christian Ethics precisely as specific field of theological enquiry.

**Christian Ethics as a Way of Living**

Vatican II called on Christian Ethics (‘Moral Theology’) to ground itself in the Scriptures with its focus on Jesus Christ. Hence, the ‘call-response in love’ model of the moral life. Subsequent to the Council, advances in Scripture studies uncovered some of the difficulties for Christian Ethics concerning Scripture as a source of moral insight and of moral norms.

While this shift in focus is central, the emphasis of the human person is, arguably, the most important element in the renewed understanding of Christian Ethics since that time. A commonly cited reflection of this shift in Theological Anthropology is from the official 1965 commentary on *Gaudium et Spes* No. 51 concerning the criterion of morality.

Human activity must be judged in so far as it refers to the human person integrally and adequately considered.\(^7\)

This marks a transition from seeing human existence in terms of nature (what we have in common with each other and especially as corporeal beings) to what is unique about the human rational animal, namely personhood. It is characterized by embodiment, certainly. It is through our bodies that the unique quality of each person is expressed, namely the capacity for rationality, relationship and creativity combined with the call to grow in the divine image through collaboration with divine providence.

Many of the recent advances in Christian Ethics in the Catholic tradition in the past fifty years have been built on this foundation.

Further, discussion amongst Catholic Theological Ethicists for two or more decades after Vatican II was predominantly in terms of autonomy and personal conscience, whether in itself or in relation to the Church. From the mid-nineties there has been a marked swing to a more relational and communitarian view of the person. ‘Relationship’ is not an added extra, argues Joseph Ratzinger in 1990 (a view continued in his encyclicals as Benedict XVI).\(^8\) Starting from the Trinitarian Word as a person constituted from and in relationship, to be-in-relation is constitutive of the human person. Seen in that light, rationality is less dominant in this view of personhood. It is important, clearly, but is understood more as rationality ‘for the sake of’, ‘at the service of’ relationship.

Allied to this are recent advances concerning Trinitarian theology together with their impact both on Christian Ethics and on understanding the moral life. There is a deepened appreciation that God’s self-gift in grace entails a share in the life and relationships of the persons of the Trinity. As ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1:4), we are called to be increasingly transformed in our rational operations at the cognitive, affective and volitional levels. We are enabled by divine action to know, judge, love and will in harmony with the persons of the Trinity.

Further, this dynamic activity is at the service of the relationships that constitute the ‘event’ of the Trinity’s life—the incessant giving and receiving of love, the affirming of the truth and goodness of each person (Father, Word, Spirit) that generates infinite joy and overwhelming happiness.\(^9\) It spills over into the service of the various relational dimensions of human existence— with others, society, nature and oneself.

In so far as ‘we and God form a community’, we are slowly transformed in the process. As part of the community of faith in the Church, we have the guidance of its leaders, its teaching and, in particular, the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. Together with the Liturgy and the Scriptures, who we are (our identity), how we see and interpret the world (perceptions) and our attitudes (dispositions to respond to what is truly good) are slowly shaped such that we ‘put on the mind of Christ.’
This approach suggested by the late William Spohn parallels the language of the virtues (developed, for instance, by James Keenan).\textsuperscript{10} For Keenan, the virtues are not so much good habits that perfect the self. They are more those readily responsive dispositions to be increasingly sensitive to what fosters growth in the various relationships that make up our lives.

Further, there is an enhanced appreciation of the role of emotions and human affectivity in moral living. Our emotions are meant to be our friends not our enemies. Without them, as Charles Taylor points out, 'we become incapable of understanding any moral argument at all'.\textsuperscript{11} They are part of what it means to be rational. Without them, we cannot grow in virtues. Emotions are part of the virtues and are meant to exist within the purposes of rationality, namely, to be at the service of relationships. Being affected and being responsive manifest the realization of the divine image in the world.

The gradual transformation of identity, perceptions and dispositions provides the bridge between Vacek’s sharing in the divine ‘community’ and how ‘we and God cooperate.’ The focal point of all this is that of ‘transformed judgment’—to evaluate, judge and choose with the mind and heart of God through identification with Jesus and guided by his Spirit.\textsuperscript{11} This converges with John Paul II’s comment that the Church

\begin{quote}
...puts herself always and only at the service of conscience ...helping it not to swerve from the truth about the good of man [sic] ...to attain the truth with certainty and to abide in it.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

\textit{Christian Ethics: As a Field of Theological Enquiry}

From our discussion, clearly Christian Ethics as an academic practice is more interdisciplinary. We have noted closer links with Spirituality and Systematic Theology. There is a pressing need to explore other areas concerning personhood that have implications for Theological Anthropology as the underpinning of Christian Ethics. Integral to this is the role of the human sciences—Psychology, Anthropology and Sociology. With questions emerging in Bioethics and Genetics, there is a consequent need for Christian Ethicists to be \textit{au courant} with the latest advances in the areas of scientific research that bear on moral issues arising in these fields.

The practitioners of Christian Ethics are today characteristically lay people and, increasingly, women theologians.\textsuperscript{13} Moral issues are seen less from a clerical perspective and more from that of secular and married life. Again, Christian Ethics is becoming increasingly international in character, inclusive in scope and culturally pluralistic. For instance, the North American journal \textit{Theological Studies} is, in many ways, a mirror of the changing face of Christian Ethics mainly, but not exclusively, in the English speaking Catholic world. Between 1998 and 2011 in its annual ‘Notes on Moral Theology’, it devoted separate treatments to Moral Theology in Western Europe, East Asia, Africa, Latin America, Beyond Western Bioethics and the Search for a Global Ethic.

Overall, Christian Ethics, as a discipline, tends to be more at the service of the world than a purely ‘in house’ concern with its own language and debates. Nevertheless, the past two decades have seen Catholic Ethicists engaged in historical studies leading to greater self-understanding and self-evaluation of the tradition of Moral Theology.\textsuperscript{14} For instance, in an article along these lines, Keenan and Black offer an insightful discussion on the Manualist tradition.\textsuperscript{15} It can be facile to dismiss this tradition as legalistic and sin-oriented. One of the advantages of the Manualist heritage was its respect for the place of differing theological opinions on a particular issue. There could be arguments for a particular theological position that made it a ‘probable’ opinion and hence could be followed as a guide to a judgment of conscience.

Until the mid-twentieth century, as Keenan and Black note, when moral questions were sent to Rome, curial offices or episcopal conferences, the general response was to direct the petitioners to the judgments of ‘approved’ Manualists. This recognized the role of prob-
able opinions in the Catholic theological tradition, the role of the local church and the standing of theologians in relation to the teaching tradition of the Church. These days, there is a more centralized approach—from a range of reasons and influences, one of which is speed of communication. Decisions are more often than not given from Rome. The question is—have we lost something from the Manualist tradition in the process?

Conclusion

Perhaps from these considerations, one has a fuller sense of Christian Ethics—both as a way of Christian living and how its practitioners in the theological academy see themselves and the discipline itself. Christian Ethics is princi-

pally about how to be a follower of Jesus and to collaborate in the work of Divine Providence in the bringing about of the Reign of God in the world. For its specialist practitioners, there is the responsibility to ask hard questions and grapple with them when they are asked by others or by life itself. As a discipline, Christian Ethics—far from being theology’s basket for the ‘too hard’ questions—is increasingly a fascinating and rewarding field.

During the first decade of the third millennium, Christian Ethics, as a field of theological enquiry, has become more global. This goes beyond its interdisciplinary, inclusive and ecumenical qualities. It offers a different context for Christian Ethicists. It also shapes the nature and form of the issues that need to be addressed. This is a topic in itself for a future time.

NOTES

1 These days, the term ‘Christian Ethics’ is used interchangeably with ‘Theological Ethics’ and ‘Moral Theology’ (more common in the Roman Catholic tradition).
2 This expands an earlier discussion in the first article of the Christian Living Series in the Marist Messenger, July 2005.
8 See Joseph Ratzinger, ‘Retrieving the Tradition: Concerning the notion of person in theology,’ Communion 17 (Fall, 1990), 440-454 and his later call for a ‘deeper critical evaluation of the category of relation’ Caritas in Veritate, (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls, 2009), par. 53.
13 For example, the North American theological ethicists Jean Porter, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Margaret Farley and Cathleen Caveney and an increasing number of women from Europe, Latin American, Africa and Asia.
REFLECTING ON PRACTICE
IN L’ARCHE

Encountering the Grieving Other

CATHERINE ANDERSON

Jean Vanier was the son of the 19th Governor General of Canada, Georges Philias Vanier and was endearingly known as ‘Jock’ at a young age and as a Dartmouth-trained naval officer. Jean left the navy and his life journey held many personal formative experiences. In 1962 Jean defended his Doctoral thesis, ‘Happiness as Principle and End of Aristotelian Ethics.’ He was unanimously pronounced Doctor of Philosophy ‘maxima cum laude.’

In Kathryn Spink’s second biography of Jean it is noted in the text that at important times in his life journey a resounding ‘echo’ in Jean’s being was his yearning, ‘To follow Jesus.’

Jean is recorded as saying he had heard the ‘primal cry of people with disabilities.’ Jean understood this cry from persons as a need for friendship. On the 5 August 1964 Jean responded to this cry of persons with an intellectual disability. Jean welcomed three persons, Raphael, Philippe and Dany into a small house in a village to the north of Paris.

Unbeknown to Jean this would be the first of more than 140 L’Arche communities scattered across the continents. While Jean essentially founded L’Arche it is vital to note how he credits his ‘Spiritual Father,’ Père Thomas Philippe, as the person whom he was ‘moulded by.’

What is L'Arche today? As in the first home or foyer L’Arche is about living with each other and together creating home. It is doing the very ordinary tasks together, preparing meals, washing clothes, sharing celebrations, and praying together at the end of the day around a lighted candle.

Assistants come to a L’Arche community to support persons with an intellectual disability. Persons with an intellectual disability are at the heart of a L’Arche community and are named the core members of the community.

Each community has a unique history and story. A community may be of one particular faith eg. of the Anglican faith, or it may be an ecumenical community or an inter-faith community.

Membership of a L’Arche community is confirmed by the Community Council. Persons who are members come from many different ‘walks’ of life and may be a core member, an assistant, spiritual member (person living in another state but wishing to pray for the community), long term member together with other forms of membership. Often persons who want to get to know the community come to one of the homes for dinner and build friendships. It is the continual nurturing of relationships that ‘grows’ persons in membership.

Again I draw from Kathryn Spink who notes ‘...those whose bodies were broken, minds were disabled and hearts were open had the gift of revelation and the capacity to lead others into the communion that is the life of God.’

Again and again persons as members of a L’Arche community are witness to Spink’s words. As the relationship with the other is deepened one is sometimes part of an encounter where the person with an intellectual disability can reveal a deep inner reality of one’s heart. We are reminded by Jean, that this is the ‘Role of the suffering poor person.’

In the following encounter two women met through an intentional faith community (L’Arche) and as we shall see the heart of this encounter in this instance is a place of blessing.

The Reflection

The encounter to be presented has been recorded in the text, Walking on a Rolling Deck: Life on the Ark. This text describes life in a L’Arche com-
munity through the eyes of Kathleen Berken. It is a wonderful selection of narratives introducing the reader to different aspects of Berken’s encounters with members of the L’Arche community who have an intellectual disability (core members).

The narrative I have selected is an encounter between two women and is set in L’Arche Clinton, Iowa. The two women concerned are Marilyn and Kathleen.

Kathleen, a journalist, came to live in L’Arche as an assistant, an assistant being a person who supports a person who has a disability. Kathleen understood when coming to L'Arche she would, ‘...live entirely for God with all these people who obviously needed her.’

Kathleen continues, reflecting on how she was blessed to have persons with a disability given to her as gift at this time in her life. She remembers a Sunday Mass the community were invited to. At the moment of consecration Kathleen reflects, ‘I felt grateful and blessed that God gave them (the core members) to me in this way, as broken bodies’.

These memories recorded by Kathleen help to illustrate how Kathleen quite unknowingly carried a certain degree of a collective societal understanding of persons with an intellectual disability.

However, ‘life dished out’ a new reality for Kathleen. Exactly one year later Kathleen was again attending Mass. Two weeks prior to this Kathleen had undergone surgery for breast cancer. Kathleen remembers she was ‘still bandaged up and had drainage tubes and bottles hanging from her (my) side.’ A year later she heard the words of consecration differently.

Kathleen was living a totally different reality. Her body was ‘broken’ and ‘blood was being poured out’ not for herself ‘but for them.’

‘They would be caring for me for a while now, and the line was blurred between who was broken and why. We were broken for each other. This was community this was the gift of L’Arche.’

Kathleen refers to her grief, during the first six months of her cancer treatment. ‘I could go from hysterical laughter to hellish despair in five seconds’ and ‘from raging anger to angelic peace in two.’

We turn now to the other woman in this encounter. Marilyn is a core member (person with an intellectual disability) of L’Arche Iowa and had recently been welcomed to one of the L’Arche Iowa homes. A year prior to this Marilyn’s mother had undergone chemotherapy and had lost her hair to this therapy. Marilyn’s mother had since died.

Kathleen was assisting Marilyn with her bath attending to Marilyn’s particular need at this time.

During the winter months because of her chemotherapy treatment Kathleen generally wore a hat. However, at this particular time it was very steamy in the bathroom when Kathleen was assisting Marilyn to take her bath.

Spontaneously Kathleen removed her hat and tossed it to the corner of the room.

At that same moment Marilyn from the bath looked up at Kathleen and, ‘very gently reached up with her wet, soapy hand and patted Kathleen’s bald head and smiled.’

Perhaps Kathleen’s bared head reminded Marilyn of her mother when she was undergoing chemotherapy. In any case Marilyn reached out; with an innate authority, when she seems to dimly reflect an aspect of the kenotic character of the crucified Christ who offered self for humanity from the ‘centre of (her) self’ devoid of ego.

This encounter is unique for Kathleen. Kathleen writes, ‘It was the first time in my life I had ever been anointed with soap and water.’

Kathleen was still grieving, ‘A bald woman, forty pounds overweight with one breast, a red face, and mottled chemo skin…….’ She was plunged into the reality of her human life at this time. The moment seems to be suspended in time...
as Marilyn smiled, offering an apparent deep reassurance and peace, revealing to Kathleen her uniqueness in spite of her grief.

Kathleen recorded in the text, ‘I did not want to wipe it (the anointing) off’.

It is important to now reflect on the shift in Kathleen’s initial attitude when she came to L’Arche in comparison to her present situation. Kathleen had believed she was to be available for all these people who obviously needed her. This belief seems like it was Kathleen who would be delivering care to the many persons who needed this. This belief did not allow for the other to contribute to the encounter as has been evidenced in the encounter cited. The line now becomes blurred; two women meet through their brokenness. Through this and other recorded encounters in the text we note a shift from Kathleen’s initial attitude when coming to L’Arche. Kathleen has experienced a major trauma in her life, her body has changed forever, and it would seem her heart has changed. She meets Marilyn differently.

At the point of the ‘anointing’ is a moment of silence realising a place of deep connectedness. Both women’s bodies are broken and it is at this place of brokenness the ‘heart’ of the encounter occurs. This scenario reveals a face of L’Arche when we consider, L’Arche is not about delivering a package of care but allowing the other to participate in the encounter. In this way there is room for each other and the possibility of mutual relationships. The gift of the encounter was that both women were broken for each other. In this way they met.

Berken has presented a ‘living text(s)’ that is a ‘witness to (the) encounter(s)’. In this the writer has graced the reader with a doorway into the often unfamiliar territory of the human journey.

This is supported by Spink in her second biography of Jean Vanier. Spink in reference to Vanier notes, ‘Those whose bodies were broken, minds were disabled and hearts were open had the gift of revelation’. Berken has captured well, and is witness to these words, that have become incarnate in this encounter. Further to this Berken has introduced the reader to a specific aspect of the practice of L’Arche. Kathleen received this gift of revelation offered by Marilyn through this encounter.

Marilyn offers further insight. In a gospel narrative of long ago Jesus the Master storyteller like Kathleen was anointed (Jn 12:3-4) at the point of suffering. Rather than costly perfume, Kathleen was anointed with soap and water, the ‘stuff’ of our daily lives. Jesus the carrier of the ‘mess’ of our story broke through this moment.

Both women held in their body a deep suffering and grief. However, it was Marilyn who was instrumental in blessing a certain place in Kathleen. Jesus the anointed one honoured this encounter dancing Kathleen to a place of surprise beyond grief. The most naked and vulnerable part of Kathleen’s self, was held as sacred and she was danced home to a place of deep contentment. Kathleen was adamant the anointing was permanent (she never wanted to wipe it off).

When Mary anointed Jesus the room held the perfume. In this encounter it was the very ordinariness of daily life that was the ‘bread’ of the encounter. This bread was blessed and broken offering a sweet perfume to the God of surprises.

Note

1 Pamela Cushing in her dissertation, Shaping the Moral Imagination of Caregivers: Disability, Difference and Inequality in L’Arche refers to Kathleen’s initial attitude. Cushing who researched L’Arche in Canada notes how persons without a disability coming to L’Arche ‘carry with them some degree of the socially pervasive perceptions about the weaknesses of people with intellectual disabilities.’

References


BOOK REVIEWS


This book explores the action of the Spirit in Scripture, Church tradition and history and theology. It explores the corresponding human receptivity of that action in Spirit-gifted individual believers (*sensus fidei*), and in the Spirit-gifted Church community (*sensus fidelium*), which is served by the Spirit-gifted teaching authority of the magisterium.

The book is a fine work of analysis and synthesis of the Spirit’s action in and human reception of divine revelation. It is clearly argued and readable, scholarly and well-referenced.

No-one, to my knowledge, has explored in such detail and provided such a comprehensive account of human reception of revelation and the Spirit’s role in the whole process. The book is the winner of the Lynlea Rodger ATF Book Prize for books published in 2009/2010. This Prize is for the most outstanding theological book authored by a theologian in the Australasian region. It is the fifth time the Prize has been awarded.

—Barry Brundell MSC


This book by Eugene Stockton, a respected Australian priest and academic who has written eloquently about Christian theology in the past, attempts to bridge the gap between Aboriginal spirituality and Christian theology. It places before us a commonality of intent based upon a recognition of the reality of indigenous mysticism—called *dadirri* by one informant. *Dadirri*, however, explores a going-out into nature, rather than a severance, an inwardness, which is often at the root of Christian mysticism. Apophaticism, or negative theology, so important to Christian mysticism in both the East and West, finds its counterpart in the practice of *dadirri*, in the stillness that is realized in our natural surroundings.

The book makes a cogent argument for a re-visioning of Christianity in Australia, a land that Stockton believes has much to contribute to the ongoing vitality of Christian spirituality in the modern world. This can only come about by way of an integration of the Dreaming into the broader tenets of Christian belief. Not as a merging of the respective myth and Gospel cycles so important to each belief-system, but of developing a greater understanding and sympathy with indigenous archetypes. These archetypes have a powerful numinous effect upon Aborigines, just as Rudolf Otto (*The Idea of the Holy*) maintains. It may be that in time such archetypes can find a place in the collective understanding of all Australians interested in the re-visioning of Christianity.

Stockton has drawn upon parallels in modern textual and psychological analysis. Jung, Freud, Hillman, Davies, Fox and others have informed his vision of an ‘indigenous’ Christianity. Archetypal theology is about finding, or at least building a raft out of, communal myths and symbols. It is clear from his book that the author is at home in Eastern and Far-eastern spiritual traditions. He sees the work of Hindu thinkers, for example, as aligning themselves to the growth of a more fluid and inclusive approach to theological research. This is not to suggest any tampering or amelioration of Christian dogmatics.

Ultimately the author comes down on the side of a return to—or at least a re-visioning of—that great stream of mystical thought that underpins Christian dogma and belief. He sees this stream as being more richly expressed in Eastern Orthodox Christianity because of historical reasons. *Hesychia*, or the practice of stillness (*apatheia*) via the Jesus Prayer, may
be likened to *dadirri* in his view. The prayer interiorizes the in-Godedness of Christ just as *dadirri* aids in the process of meditation by which nature is interiorized for Aborigines.

Woven into the text of this book is Stockton’s own experience among Aborigines as a priest, as well as a field researcher in Balgo Hills Western Australia. It is clear that he has a deep affinity with the Aboriginal encounter with his land because of his own encounter with it growing up in the proximity of the bush in the Blue Mountains of NSW. He admits that in his youth his imagination became fully engaged by this encounter. The great 20th century French philosopher Henri Corbin spoke of the realization of the ‘imaginical’ as a way of entering into the spiritual life. The imaginal combines the active imagination with the intellect. Stockton’s encounter with the bush, and his subsequent engagement with Aboriginal life, is thus an imaginal event and the basis for a theophany, another of Corbin’s favorite terms.

Stockton’s Christ figure partakes of what he calls ‘archetypal theology’. He is a Godman, a figure in history, and a groundbreaker in religious thought. He is also a prefiguring Christ—that is, he harks back to an older dispensation, which underpins all spiritual aspiration. Of course his Christ is deeply imbedded in Catholic dogmatics; but the author leaves the door open to viewing him as a more universal avatar. In a sense, the author wants us to re-vision Christ in the context of landscape too—that is, in the metaphor of landscape. While he and the Father are necessarily One, he is also the embodiment of what the Aborigines often refer to as the ‘big body’ of earth. The earth lives in us even as Christ does also.

*The Deep Within* is a landmark in spiritual literature emanating from this country. In clear and lucid prose the author has laid down a ground plan for the future of Christian thought in Australia. How does one fashion an archetypal theology that is not only Christ-centred, but also earth-centred? Stockton proposes that we recover the concept of mythic life. That is, he wants us to give myths a validity in our own lives. Not only the myth-life of Christianity, which must be acknowledged as being part of its ongoing spiritual vitality, but also a re-interpretation of Aboriginal myths in the light of what we now know exists. That is, a genuine Aboriginal mysticism known as *dadirri*.

*The Deep Within* is an important addition to the ongoing debate about the growth of an indigenous Christianity. We must be thankful that the author has taken the time to explore what is an exciting prospect for all believers, be they Christians or Aborigines. Indeed, Archetypal theology might one day be seen as a ‘first step’ along the road back to a meaningful dialogue with the mystical life.

—James Cowan

*Wisdom. From Philosophy To Neuroscience.*

Stephen S. Hall. UQP. 333pp. $34.95

Hall asks whether there is any real place for wisdom in our frenetic, postmodern, apocalyptic, multi-tasking, dual-income, economically challenging world. He maintains that among ordinary people there is a hunger for any excuse to raise their game and reclaim a better self.

Wisdom is an unusual quality in that it is extremely difficult to define, but fairly easy to identify. A former Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, remarked that you have only to speak to someone for twenty minutes to find out whether they have any.

Wisdom is not the same as intelligence. Everyone can think of intelligent people who don’t have any. Hall, who has ample quantities of both, writes that knowledge is fixed, impersonal, and in odd way, non-social. Wisdom, on the other hand, is profoundly social, deeply personal, adaptive and intuitive. It has an important emotional component.

Stephen S. Hall writes about science and society for The New York Times Magazine. He has written five other books and seems to have interviewed just about everyone in America in philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience who writes about wisdom, or whose...
work abuts on it. He has done a daunting amount of reading, which has been enlivened by frequent meetings with kindred spirits at Fanelli’s Restaurant and Bar, New York, to discuss philosophy.

No one could accuse Hall of neglecting the classics in pursuit of the latest. What Socrates, Confucius, and Buddha have in common in their thinking about wisdom, he writes, is a concern for social justice and a code of public morality, altruism, an insistence on mastering the emotions that urge immediate sensory gratification, and a mission to share their accumulated body of knowledge.

As a matter of fact, they have something else in common, and here is my major criticism of this delightful and instructive book. They draw on a wisdom which is higher than human wisdom. Socrates was attentive to an inner voice which was so specific that it stopped him in the middle of a speech when he was about to say something wrong. Confucius said that at fifty he knew the biddings of Heaven, and that at sixty he heard them with a docile ear.

Needless to say, Buddha muddies the water in this respect. Did he hear the biddings of heaven? Perhaps not. But he believed in a metaphysical dimension to life: ‘There is, O monks, that which is not born, not become, not made, not compounded.’ And if there weren’t, ‘there would be no release in this life of the born, the become, the made, the compounded.’

Hall enumerates the different aspects of wisdom: patience, altruism, discernment, emotional calm. He realizes that love is not enough. Altruism needs a diverse suite of cognitive and emotional skills: discerning the fundamental unfairness of a situation; having the courage to defy one’s immediate self interest; patience to wait for the rewards of a larger goal to materialize. And altruism is corrective, which raises the question of punishment.

The book purports to move from philosophy to neuroscience. And there is a lot of neuroscience in it. But what has that got to do with qualities of wisdom like knowing what’s important and a capacity to deal with uncertainty? Hall himself puts the question: ‘does all this dense, constrained, hyper-qualified and speculative science-speak ultimately tell us anything useful about wisdom?’ Well does it?

There is no doubt that it is useful to peer into our brains to discover whether anything is going wrong. But it remains unclear from the book how studying our brains will make us wiser.

One thing that the description of the neural machinery does is throw into strong relief the distinctness of mind and brain. We know from within what it is like to evaluate, deliberate and ponder. We never notice from within what the hiss and the pop of neural circuitry are like. The inference is that it is taking place in a different reality.

Occasionally, Hall transfers a description which belongs to mind and applies it to brain, to unintended comic effect. For example, he writes of an immensely ‘astute’ molecule called dopamine...’ like a movie critic assessing, broadcasting its opinion’[p.48] What a smart little molecule!

Like everything else, neuroscience can be abused, and Hall mentions a disturbing possibility. It has been found out experimentally which effects certain words have on the brain, and the emotions they release. There is a neuroscientific consulting corporation in California, which, down the track, may put together political speeches as a ‘mosaic of code words, inflections and implicit associations...designed to detonate unconscious emotional reactions, especially fear and disgust.’[p. 259] Does such perfidy await us?

In contrast, the psychologists and neuroscientists Hall brings to these pages come across as intelligent, constructive, sensitive to criticism, and humane. They may save America yet. Philosophers make a splendid contribution to the book, especially Confucius. Though he spent the last ten years of his life pounding the pavements looking for a job, he is still being heard.

—Reg Naulty
PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

April - July 2012

From Passion Sunday to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year B

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed in the Sunday Liturgies between April and July 2012, from Passion Sunday to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year B. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The readings over this period move us through the Season of Easter. After the celebrations of the key feasts of Ascension and Pentecost—which conclude the Easter Season—and Trinity, and Body and Blood (June 3 and 10) the Sunday liturgical calendar moves us back into Ordinary Time, with OT 11 (June 17) though briefly interrupted with the Sunday celebration of the Birth of John the Baptist (June 24).

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

In the time after Easter, as we return to the Ordinary Time readings (Sundays OT 11, 13-17), the lectionary picks up selections from the First Testament with a cross section of biblical genres: the prophets (OT 14, 15, 16) and one selection from the historical books (2 Kings, OT 17). We must continue to resist any tendency that harmonises these First Testament readings with the Gospel, or regards them simply as precursors to the Second Testament. Rather, we need to reflect upon them from the perspective of the Israelite people, their original audience.

The Second Reading is generally from the letter tradition of the Second Testament. These semi-continuous readings are usually from the letters attributed to Paul. In OT 13-14 the selection is from 2 Corinthians, a compilation of at least two other genuine letters from Paul and written around 57 from Macedonia. In OT 15-17, the selections are from Ephesians.

The letter to the Ephesians, written in the late 60s or early 70s by a disciple of Paul, reflects further on Paul’s mission and seeks to apply Paul’s teaching to a new situation, while drawing closely on another ‘post-Pauline’ letter, the Letter to the Colossians. Our liturgical readings (Eph 1-4, Sun 15 to 17) offer the heart of the writer’s theology—conviction of God’s involvement in the world, through the church, and revealed through Jesus. Jesus’ role is also reflected on and proclaimed.

The Gospel: As noted in the last Compass edition, we continue into Year B and read from Mark’s Gospel, though John’s Gospel is preferred during Easter. Even within the Markan cycle, though, the Gospel of John reappears. The Markan portrait of the more human Jesus...
Finally, a word about the festivals that conclude the Easter Season and lead us back into Ordinary Time: Ascension and Pentecost clearly complete the mystery of God’s action revealed in the Risen Jesus, now with God forever (Ascension) who sends God’s Spirit which empowers the nascent Christian Community (Pentecost). Rather than focussing on Pentecost as the ‘birthday’ of the Church, perhaps a more fruitful approach might be the empowerment of the Christian Community by God’s Spirit. The spirit enables the community to be formally constituted as God’s people, a theme that continues the Sinai event celebrated each year by the Jewish community on the feast of Pentecost. Pentecost also provides a moment to celebrate the way the Holy Spirit empowers our local faith communities with the charism of leadership, especially of the baptised. This reclamation of the leadership of the baptised is important at a time when the availability of ordained seems to be lessening.

**PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS**

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

**April 5—The Lord’s Supper:** Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14. The first Passover is remembered: God delivers Israel through the blood of the Passover Lamb. 1 Cor 11:23-26. Paul reminds the divided Christians at Corinth about what lies at the heart of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Jn 13:1-15. In the act of washing his disciples’ feet, John’s Jesus offers the model of active, community service. Theme—Service: This celebration reaches into the heart of every parish and faith community: selfless service focused on the Eucharist. How can we celebrate this happening in our midst and encourage it to deepen?

**April 6—Good Friday:** Is 52:13-53:12. This is the climactic ‘servant song’ celebrating the vicarious nature of the servant’s suffering, for the welfare of all. Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Jesus is compassionate High Priest, with God, who knows our sufferings and weaknesses. Jn 18:1-19:42. This passion narrative, unlike Mk’s, is...
a true celebration of victory over death. In fourteen dramatic scenes Jesus is presented as Lamb, judge, victor and source of Church life. **Theme—Victory:** Jesus, as the Passover Lamb who brings people to life, is victorious over death. Rather than a sombre or mournful liturgy, the readings encourage a confidence in God who is able to bring victory from death. This is a much needed focus in a world preoccupied with war and retaliation. What are the suffering and death-dealing experiences from which I seek release by the God of Jesus?

**April 7/8—Easter: Feast of the Resurrection:** Mk 16:1-8. This is the most important gospel proclamation in the whole year: Mark’s Jesus is resurrected and the women are encouraged to ponder the place of emptiness, the tomb (see above). Resurrection occurs in the most unlikely setting and moment—the place of death and hopelessness. How does my community experience emptiness? How would I like God to bring about life? What might this look like?

**April 15—Easter 2:** Acts 4:32-35. The power of the resurrection is evident in the fledgling Christian community of Jerusalem. 1 Jn 5:1-6. Faith in Jesus and his resurrection makes us ‘begotten by God.’ We are in tune with God and experience God’s life within. Jn 20:19-31. The resurrected Jesus offers his frightened disciples peace. He empowers them with authority to forgive sin. **Theme—Forgiveness.** The resurrected Jesus continues to breathe into his community today the spirit of peace and forgiveness. Where is this seen, identified and celebrated? What is my sin from which I seek forgiveness and release?

**April 22—Easter 3.** Acts 3:13-15, 17-19. Peter’s first sermon to the Jerusalemites is a summary of the gospel of Luke (the writer of Acts) and an invitation to a spirit of ongoing ‘conversion.’ 1 Jn 2:1-5. Even sin cannot separate us from God because of Jesus’ advocacy. Lk 24:35-48. The risen Jesus appears in the midst of his frightened disciples and eats a meal with them. The evangelist underscores the reality of the resurrection. **Theme—Reality of Resurrection.** In Luke’s gospel, the disciples first think that they are seeing a ghost (in Greek ‘phantasmos’) when Jesus appears among them. The resurrection is not a myth or invention by well-meaning believers. That Jesus rose from death is a historical truth. It is a reality that affects our being, the universe and the soul of our communities. What are some of the signs of resurrectional life in our midst? What can we celebrate?

**April 29—Easter 4:** Acts 4:8-12. Peter announces to all (and us): An experience of goodness and healing is an encounter with the Risen Jesus. 1 Jn 3:1-2. We are God’s beloved daughters and sons; God will be revealed to us fully, transparently, happily. Jn 10:11-18. Jesus is like a shepherd to us. He cares about us, protects us, loves us and ‘knows’ us, that is, is intimately close to us. **Theme—God’s Closeness.** God is revealed through Jesus who is present in our world through signs of goodness and acts of kindness (First reading). God’s intimacy with us revealed through Jesus (gospel) makes us whole and happy. What images of God do I find sustaining? What helps me deepen my friendship with Jesus?

**May 6—Easter 5:** Acts 9:26-31. Paul, now a zealous disciple of the risen Jesus though suspected by other disciples, preaches ‘boldly’. 1 Jn 3:18-24 We are called to love and live without guilt. We have a spirit of ‘boldness’ that is of God. Jn 15:1-8. We ‘abide’ (‘remain’, ‘dwell’) in communion with God and Jesus. We share God’s inner life. **Theme—Abiding with God.** Communion with God spills over into community life. God’s life abides with us. How does this faith community express tangibly God’s abiding communion with humanity, creation and within the church?

God’s love for Jesus spills over into the hearts of his disciples so that they may experience God’s joy. Theme—God’s Joy: An abiding spirit of joy may be difficult to identify in our world. God’s desire is for all to be happy. This ‘joy’ is celebrated and revealed at the heart of the Christian community. What are some identifiable signs of this?

May 20—Ascension: Acts 1:1-11. Luke’s second volume, the story of the early Christian community, begins with the angelic promise of Jesus’ ongoing presence, which will come again in power. Eph 4:1-13. Jesus’ communion with God (‘ascension’) is the source of the ministerial gifts of the Christian community. Mk 16:15-20. This later ending of Mk’s gospel emphasises the risen and ascended Jesus’ victory over evil and the confident proclamation of the Gospel. Theme—Jesus’ Ongoing Presence: Jesus’ presence is revealed in surprising and unexpected ways, less physical but no less real. Who in the local community reveal this presence?

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

June 3—Trinity: Dt 4:32-34, 39-40. Moses reminds the Israelites about the nature of their God: creator, powerful presence and liberator. Rom 8:14-17. God’s Spirit enables our spirit to know God as the intimate One, named ‘Abba.’ Mt 28:16-20. These are the final words in Mt, of the Risen Jesus, encouraging the disciples to make disciples of all nations in the name of the triune God. Theme—God’s Presence: God is present in human history, among human beings and creation. This presence invites intimacy. How is this intimacy with God expressed in our local faith communities?

June 10—Body and Blood: Ex 24:3-8. Moses’ symbolic act with stones, burnt offerings and blood ratifies God’s communion with the Israelites. Heb 9:11-15. Heard by Jewish followers of Jesus, Jesus is portrayed as the eternal high priest mediating a new covenant with God on behalf of the people. Mk 14:12-16, 22-26. The gospel narrative of Jesus’ final meal with his disciples. Theme—God dines with Us: The Israelite meal was a symbol of kinship solidarity and communion. God’s meals echoed throughout history and especially practiced in the meal ministry of Jesus (highlighted in final meal with his disciples) symbolise God’s passion for humanity. God is on the side of us and creation.

June 17—Ordinary Time 11: Ez 17:22-24. God will do the impossible. This truth is told using imagery of trees. 2 Cor 5:6-10. Paul’s ultimate focus is on God, no matter what happens. Mk 4:26-34. Jesus continues to teach in parables. God’s presence (‘kingdom’) is like growing and sprouting seed, or the smallest imperceptible seed that grows to provide shelter for birds. Theme—God’s Presence: God is present in ways that appear imperceptible. The eyes of faith enable us to see this presence. What are some of the ways? Who are those who sharpen our eyes to see God’s presence?

June 24—Birth of John the Baptiser: Is 49:1-6. A song praising God’s servant, called before birth to bring people back to God and be a light for the nations. Acts 13: 22-26. Paul preaches in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch about God’s plan in history, about Jesus, whose coming was prepared for by John the Baptiser. Lk 1:57-66, 80. Elizabeth names her son, John, confirmed in writing by Zechariah. Theme—Preparing for God’s Presence. This celebration is a reminder of our call to witness to God in Jesus. We do this in our daily lives, through our openness to God’s life within us and our
willingness to identify people, places and actions that speak of the presence of God. The work of John continues.

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

**July 8—Ordinary Time 14:** *Ez 2:2-5.* God declares to the exiled people that God is sending a prophet to them. *2 Cor 12:7-10.* Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ becomes his means to faith in God in his weakness. *Mk 6:1-6.* Jesus is portrayed as God’s prophet rejected by his hometown. **Theme—The Prophetic tradition.** The role and importance of the prophet has always been acknowledged in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The prophet, exemplified in Mark’s portrait of Jesus, is one who speaks the truth, reveals God’s activity in human history and community, and experiences rejection. Who might be such prophets today in our local community?

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

**July 22—Ordinary Time 16:** *Jer 23:1-6.* God promises the people new and faithful shepherds, and especially a future king who will reign with wisdom. *Eph 2:13-18.* Jesus is celebrated as the source of social, political and religious unity. *Mk 5:30-34.* Jesus shows concern for his disciples and compassion on the crowds who seemed shepherdless. **Theme—God shepherds us.** The image of a shepherd-ing God who looks after us, no matter what, is so rich and necessary today. What are the implications of a community who really believes in the active presence of such a God?

**July 29—Ordinary Time 17:** *2 Kings 4:42-44.* The prophet Elijah takes a few loaves, gives them to his servant, to satisfy the hunger of a large number of people. *Eph 4:1-6.* The writer urges unity within the faith community. The source of such a bond of peace comes from God’s Spirit. *Jn 6:1-15.* Jesus feeds the hungry crowd. **Theme—God feeds our hungers.** God desires to feed us deeply in our life’s journey. What are the struggles and difficulties that we face us and invite us to open ourselves to this God who seeks to address our deepest needs?

—Michael Trainor, School of Theology, Flinders University at the Adelaide College of Divinity.

---

The Sacrament of Penance is an excellent way to conclude the penitential season of Lent. It is best celebrated before Holy Thursday evening so that, with heart and mind renewed, all may focus on the celebration of the Paschal Mystery.

48