IT BEGAN in a very small way. After thirty years living in obscurity in Nazareth, a backwater village, one of the most remote places in the then civilised world—‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’—Jesus, son of the village carpenter, began an itinerant ministry in Palestine, preaching and healing. He ventured beyond the borders of Palestine only once or twice. He began to attract large crowds, but was wary of this initial apparent success of his mission.

After spending all night in prayer he chose twelve of his followers to be his close disciples, to witness what he did and to receive special instruction on the nature of his mission. They found it very difficult to comprehend. They enjoyed being associated with Jesus when he was popular, but all abandoned him when the crowds disappeared and the authorities became hostile.

But Jesus persevered with them. They were central to his mission. The Twelve chosen disciples corresponded to the twelve tribes of Israel, the Old People of God. The twelve represented the new People of God, the new Israel.

And Peter was appointed by Jesus to be the leader of the Twelve and to guarantee the stability of the new community. ‘You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church (Qahal), and the gates of the underworld will never hold out against it. (Mth. 16:18). No forces of destruction will destroy the Church, neither the forces from without, nor the forces from within (the sins and weaknesses of its members). This is called the ‘indefectibility’ of the Church built on Peter.

Whereas Matthew’s Greek version reads: ‘You are Petros [a first name] and on this petra…’ the original Aramaic version spoken by Jesus worked much better: ‘You are kepha and on this kepha…’ Petra is a rock of any kind, even a stone or rocky ground, but kepha is the rock that one digs down to find and on which the builder lays his foundations—as the wise man who built his house on rock.

Jesus sent the twelve out to proclaim his message, and to have authority to cast out demons—the twelve were to carry out the same mission as Jesus himself. The Twelve were entrusted with the mission which they were to continue after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Others would work along with them, but they were the disciples directly entrusted with it by Jesus.

The Holy Spirit would give them strength, courage and guidance. At the last supper Jesus promised that he would not leave them orphans, that he would send the Holy Spirit so that they would be his witnesses throughout the world. At the Ascension Jesus finally sent them out with the command: ‘Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them... I am with you all days, to the end of the age.’

They were weak and prone to fear—very human and frail. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended on them and they were transformed. They went out and preached boldly, proclaiming that Jesus who had been crucified was risen and that they were witnesses to the fact. They called on the people to repent and be baptised, which they did in their thousands. Pentecost is seen as the birth of the Church. There were people in Jerusalem from all nations who became converts.

At Antioch they were called ‘Christians’, and the name took on.

Thus the Church developed from what Jesus and the Holy Spirit did with very ordinary, weak men.

Within the NT writings themselves we observe what is called the trajectory of the Twelve. They play a role of mentoring, oversight, teaching, decision-making, leadership, in the Church. They were the foundation
apostles, and the Church thereafter is called ‘Apostolic’.

Peter’s importance likewise becomes more heightened as the time of the New Testament writings wears on. This phenomenon is referred to as ‘the Petrine trajectory’. From Pentecost on he is the community leader.

Paul, with his co-worker Barnabas, was to take the Good News to the ends of the earth—Cyprus, Asia Minor, Greece, Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth and ultimately to Rome. He was ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’. He established Churches with the essentials of their organisation and moved on. Thus the Jesus movement became a world-wide reality.

Paul was also the first theologian. He gave theological interpretations of the mystery of the Church: the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the pilgrim People of God. The first letter of Peter picks up the theme: ‘Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people, for you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.’ (1Pet.2.9-10)

People from all nations form one people from many races and nations, baptised in the one Spirit. (1Cor. 12:13). We are the People of God, the Church. The Church is our community, a community of faith, hope and love. We enter this community through baptism. We are re-born when we are baptised. Hence the Church is our Mother—‘holy Mother Church’.

We thank God for all God’s gifts, for God’s care and concern for us. God shepherds us. One of these gifts is the Church institution. Jesus instituted the Church for us as the means by which he cares for our needs. This now massive world-wide institution, which began so modestly is our ‘Mother Church’.

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

Because God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are intimately involved in the being and life of the Church, and because of the divine purpose in establishing the Church to be an instrument to continue Christ’s work of redemption, we believe in a Church that will endure to the end of time. This is our faith. This is the Church we believe in.

All people, as we read in the Vatican II document Lumen Gentium nos. 13-16, are called to belong to the catholic unity of the People of God. The Catholic faithful are ‘fully incorporated’ while Catechumens, separated brethren, those who have not yet received the gospel but acknowledge the Creator, those who seek the unknown God, those who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God, and finally those who have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God but strive to live a good life are all related to the Church: ‘Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel’ (LG 16). Mother Church cares for them all.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

Mother and Teacher of all nations—such is the Catholic Church in the mind of her Founder, Jesus Christ; to hold the world in an embrace of love, that men, in every age, should find in her their own completeness in a higher order of living, and their ultimate salvation. [...] To her was entrusted by her holy Founder the twofold task of giving life to her children and of teaching them and guiding them—both as individuals and as nations—with maternal care.

Church-speak, the language of official ecclesial documents, can often be a source of dismay for would-be readers, both inside and outside the church. That dismay has been evident recently in response to the questionnaire on ‘family’, which is part of the preparation for the synod of bishops that will take place later this year. The formulation of that questionnaire is anything but user-friendly—‘How is the theory and practice of natural law in the union between man and woman challenged in light of the formation of a family?’ As a result, many Catholics keen to participate in the consultation found the experience frustrating.

Against that background, Pope Francis is proving to be a godsend. His earthy images and direct language make his statements accessible to those hungry for nurturing in faith. Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis’ ‘Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World’, exemplifies his straightforward style. It is, after all, not every papal document that includes a mention of ‘sourpusses’ (article 85). Quotable quotes surface often in the document: ‘an evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral’ (10); ‘I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber (44); ‘I want a Church which is poor and for the poor’ (198); and, of course, the already-legendary ‘smell of the sheep’ (24).

It would be a mistake, however, to equate Pope Francis’ freedom from jargon and obfuscation with a lack of substance. In fact, the papal document is a sustained challenge to the complacency that can impede every aspect of the church’s witness to the gospel. Rather than simply rail against complacency, Pope Francis promotes a positive alternative: the embrace of mission. He reminds the church that mission is, and must always be, at the centre of our life of faith as a Christian community. Evangelii Gaudium expresses Pope Francis’ passion for mission, a passion that is the peerless source of the gaudium that permeates both the document and the ministry of the new bishop of Rome.

Evangelii Gaudium is the post-synodal document from the synod on ‘The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith’ (2012). It is instructive to compare Pope Francis’ exhortation with the synod’s Instrumentum Laboris and its final ‘Propositions’, the latter of which Pope Francis inherited from Pope Benedict XVI. The Instrumentum Laboris, an earnest and somewhat defensive text, begins with ‘duty’ and turns to ‘joy’ only in its Conclusion; the synod’s fifty-eight Propositions have a single reference to ‘joy’, and that exclusively in relation to the consecrated life. There is perhaps no more striking gauge of the difference between Evangelii Gaudium and the synod’s texts than the fact that ‘joy’ appears fifty times in the first chapter of Pope Francis’ document.

Although exactly half of the Propositions from the synod of 2012 appear as footnotes in Evangelii Gaudium, the differences in tone between the present document and the synod’s texts indicate clearly that Pope Francis is making a personal statement or testimony, not simply repackaging the synod’s sentiments. Pope Francis signals unambiguously his conviction that ‘joy’, the joy derived from knowing the presence of God (article 4), is to underpin every expression of the church’s life.
The other linguistic feature of *Evangelii Gaudium* that identifies it as particular to Pope Francis is its use of terms characteristic of Ignatian spirituality. The exhortation contains neither direct quotes from St Ignatius Loyola nor citations from the Spiritual Exercises, but the constancy with which the pope speaks of ‘desire’ (thirty times), ‘discern’/’discernment’ (twenty times) and ‘contemplate’ (fifteen times) are unmistakable pointers to his Jesuit roots. In addition, the abundance of references to ‘mercy’ (thirty-two times), which Pope Francis has made his signature tune, demonstrates conclusively that the new document expresses the pope’s priorities—‘mercy’ occurs only once in the Lineamenta and three times in the Propositions.

Since *Evangelii Gaudium* is a sprawling text—Pope Francis is yet to add to his arsenal the virtue of being concise, a virtue that modulates passion without dulling it—the analysis of it in this article concentrates on four themes. The four foci are: the church as a missionary body; the pastoral life of the church; the dynamics of the homily; the relationship between evangelisation and building a more just world.

**The Missionary Church**

A primary characteristic of a church that could be good news for our complex world is its willingness ‘to go forth’ (article 20). This involves following Jesus in the midst of ‘the unruly freedom of the world’ (article 22). Becoming a missionary church requires the renewal of every aspect of the church’s life. It requires especially a concerted effort in the church to ensure that ‘mere administration’ (article 25) does not absorb all our energies.

Accordingly, parishes need to beware of declining into ‘a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few’ (article 28). Bishops in particular can support mission by ‘allowing the flock to strike out on new paths’ (article 31). Above all, every bishop can serve the mission of the local church by promoting whatever is conducive to participation and dialogue in those churches. Through such dialogue, the bishop ensures that those ‘who would tell him what he would like to hear’ are not the only ones to whom he listens (article 31). Pope Francis’ admonitions to bishops extend to his own office. He is alert, therefore, to the ‘excessive centralization’ that can impede the church’s missionary outreach (article 32).

Pope Francis advocates for a church characterised by a spirit that is ‘bold and creative’ (article 33). Such a church will be committed to the practice of a collective ‘wise and realistic pastoral discernment’; it will be a church willing to take risks, not simply repeat the way things have ‘always’ been done (article 33). Such a church will also not mistake mission for ‘the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed’ (article 35). *Evangelii Gaudium* invokes Vatican II’s ‘hierarchy of truths’ (article 36), as well as the teaching of Thomas Aquinas (article 37), to reinforce the need for the church to speak more about grace than the law, more about Christ than the church, and more about God’s word than the pope (article 38). The point, of course, is not to contrast the components of each pair, but to recognise that there is indeed a ‘hierarchy’ between them. The challenge for the church, therefore, is to ensure that it gives priority to ‘the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek...
the good of others’ (article 39).

What is particularly notable in the first chapter of the exhortation is the equation made between the effectiveness of the church’s mission in the world and the conversion of the church itself, a conversion directed towards ensuring that we are not promoting a ‘false god’ of our own making (article 41). In the context of highlighting the importance of asking whether our words and actions as ecclesial communities are genuinely evangelical, Pope Francis refers to the urgent requirement that we free ourselves from a concentration on customs that ‘may be beautiful, but … no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel’ (article 43). Equally, he stresses the need for pastors to act with ‘mercy and patience’ (article 44).

An authentic evangelical spirit commits the church to doing whatever good we can, ‘even if in the process, its shoes get soiled by the mud of the street’ (article 45). Evangelical activity, however, is not simply ‘doing’: it also involves the willingness to ‘see’ others and to listen to them (article 46). A church committed to mission, then, is a church with open doors—‘One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door’ (article 47). In order to be a conduit of grace, a missionary church will avoid situations where ‘we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators’ (article 47). In particular, Pope Francis appeals for the courage to commit ourselves to the poor, rather than remain ‘shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security’ (article 49).

The Pastoral Life of the Church

Throughout his exhortation, Pope Francis identifies the life of Christian discipleship as a life of joy, a joy that can be a source of good news in the world. Although it is easy to stigmatise both ‘joy’ and ‘good news’ as synonyms for naïveté, the pope engages in a hard-edged critique of the contemporary world, a critique that shows an acute awareness of the challenges that confront the proclamation of the gospel. Those challenges notwithstanding, Evangelii Gaudium displays a deep trust in the power of the gospel to offer hope, even in the world shaped, and distorted, by globalised capitalism.

The prophetic role that any pope is uniquely placed to exercise is most evident in Pope Francis’ analysis of the world of ‘the market.’ The sub-headings of the second chapter of the exhortation—‘No to an economy of exclusion’; ‘No to the new idolatry of money’; ‘No to a financial system which rules rather than serves’; ‘No to the inequality which spawns violence’—identify the pope’s concerns with laser-like precision. The pope names the flaws of unrestrained capitalism—its ‘exclusion and inequality’ (article 53), its ‘trickle-down’ mythology, ‘sacralised workings’, and ‘globalization of indifference’ (article 54)—with a directness that politicians consistently evade. At the heart of Pope Francis’ critique is his rejection of consumerism as the defining feature of humanity (article 54). With an emphasis deeply grounded in the tradition of Catholic social teaching, the pope homes in on ‘the common good’ as the foundation for an ethical financial system, no less than for a peaceful world (articles 56-60).

Beyond his scrutiny of economics, the pope uses the second chapter of the exhortation to review other features of the contemporary world. In terms that echo his two immediate predecessors, Pope Francis highlights the limits of ‘secularist rationalism’ (article 63) and the shadow-side of our information-driven society, especially its ‘remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment’ (article 64). In that vein, he also affirms the importance of the church’s role in raising questions that are ‘less palatable to public opinion’ (article 65). Particularly noteworthy in the analysis of society is the pope’s
discourse on ‘cities’ (article 71-5), which he characterises as the venue from which arise both ‘countless possibilities’ (article 74) and obstacles to human development, obstacles represented by human trafficking, narcotics, the abuse of minors, and the abandonment of the elderly (article 75).

The goal of the pope’s social critique is to clarify the context in which the church is to engage in pastoral activity. Here again, the subtitles that capture the necessary priorities of such activity are particularly instructive: ‘Yes to the challenge of a missionary spirituality’; ‘No to selfishness and spiritual sloth’; ‘No to a sterile pessimism’; ‘Yes to the new relationships in Christ’; ‘No to spiritual worldliness’; ‘No to warring among ourselves.’

The prophetic zeal that Pope Francis demonstrates in naming social ills is no less evident in his passion for a promoting a church committed to addressing those ills. A central aspect of his strategy is to highlight the dangers that might engulf the church’s pastoral workers—as an aside, the use of ‘pastoral workers’ is an intriguing instrument: it includes the ordained, but is not limited to them, so it enables the pope to make his case without becoming embroiled in unproductive disputes over who can or cannot be a ‘minister’.

Pastoral workers, then, need to guard against an ‘inordinate concern’ for ‘personal freedom and relaxation’, which result in ‘a heightened individualism, a crisis of identity and a cooling of fervour’ (article 78). Pope Francis cautions pastoral workers against an obsession with being like everyone else and seeking to possess what they possess (article 79). Above all, he warns against activity ‘without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable’ (article 82). Such empty activity, driven by the desire for immediate results, leads pastoral workers to be intolerant of ‘disagreement, possible failure, criticism, the cross’ (article 82). Those who succumb to such a condition become like ‘mummies in a museum’, being melancholic and lacking hope (article 83); they become ‘querulous and disillusioned pessimists’ (article 85).

The alternative to such flawed approaches is a recovery of ‘the revolution of tenderness’ that God offers humanity through the Incarnation (article 88). A church focused on God will not slip into ‘a self-absorbed promethean neopelagianism’ or a ‘narcissistic and authoritarian elitism’ (article 94)—here, the temptation to jargon proves irresistible! The key to a mission-oriented church, then, can be found only in a focus on Jesus Christ. For that reason, Pope Francis urges all in the church to reject ‘the vainglory of those who are content to have a modicum of power and would rather be the general of a defeated army than a mere private in a unit which continues to fight.’ What is needed instead is a church that draws on ‘a history of sacrifice, of hopes and daily struggles, of lives spent in service and fidelity to work, tiring as it may be’ (article 96). Likewise, we are not to be a church whose members ‘war’ against one another, but one in which there is ‘a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion (article 99).

The final passages of Chapter Two (articles 102-07) are less developed than the preceding parts of the chapter. The most significant feature of the final section is the pope’s effort to hold the need for ‘still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church’ (article 103) in tension with the exclusion of women from priestly ordination, which ‘can prove to be especially divisive if sacramental power is too closely identified with power in general’ (article 104). Although it may well be of some consolation to some women that the pope reminds the church that ‘a woman, Mary, is more important than the bishops’ (article 104), it is difficult to imagine that the current document could be the last word, even the last papal word, on women in the church.

* * *
The Homily

The prominence of ‘the homily’ in an apostolic exhortation on evangelisation is perhaps unremarkable. More remarkable, however, is Pope Francis’s acknowledgement that homilies are a source of ‘so many concerns’, indeed of ‘suffering’, for both the people in the pews and for priests (article 135). What is not in doubt is the pope’s conviction about the importance of the homily: in the context of the Eucharist, the homily ‘surpasses all form of catechesis as the supreme moment in the dialogue between God and his people’ (article 137). The possibility that the homily might actually be recognised as such an exalted instrument is linked inextricably with whether or not the preacher knows ‘the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren’ (article 137).

A good homily, then, is not ‘a form of entertainment like those presented by the media’ (article 138), but ‘a kind of music which inspires encouragement, strength and enthusiasm’ (article 139). Indeed, Pope Francis presents the homily as being akin to a mother addressing her children, who are receptive because they ‘know that they are loved’ (article 139). It would be fascinating to poll both congregants and preachers to determine the degree to which the ‘motherly’ image of the homily does or does not resonate with those who listen to or preach homilies.

Pope Francis clearly believes strongly that the human qualities of the preacher – ‘the closeness of the preacher, the warmth of his voice, the unpretentiousness of his manner of speaking, the joy of his gestures’ (article 140)—can cover a multitude of sins. Indeed, he contends that those human qualities will bear fruit even when the homily ‘may be somewhat tedious’ (article 140). Preaching that involves ‘heart-to-heart communication’ can have a ‘quasi-sacramental character’; as such, it differs markedly from a lecture on exegesis and from content that is ‘moralistic or doctrinaire’ (article 142).

‘Preparation’ is the largest single topic that Evangelii Gaudium examines in its review of the homily. Pope Francis asserts that preparation must have priority, ‘even if less time has to be given to other important activities’ (article 145). Preparation is far more than working on the mechanics of preaching; in fact, its core component is ‘serene concentration’ on the biblical text (article 146). Preachers, therefore, are to be the first to hear the text on which they are to preach, they are to practise lectio divina, and to recognise the implications of those texts for their own lives, not simply for the lives of others (articles 147-53).

As with the other emphases in the document, the discussion of the homily stresses both the human and faith dynamics that it involves. This includes linking the text to the specific situations of people’s lives, while avoiding the temptation to dwell on ‘questions that nobody asks’ (article 155). As Pope Francis presents them, good homilies are an act of love for the neighbour (article 156), they ‘awaken a desire and move the will towards the Gospel’ (article 157). In short, good homilies form part of ‘a mystagogical renewal’ in the church that aids ‘the integration of every dimension of the person within a communal journey of hearing and response’ (article 166).

Evangelisation and Building
a More Just World

The election of a South American as pope sparked immediate debate over whether he was or was not a devotee of liberation theology. Some participants in that debate were adamant that not only had Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Pope Francis’ earlier incarnation, eschewed that theology, he had positively opposed it. Irrespective of whether or not Pope Francis claims ‘liberation theology’ as a brand, there are certainly sentiments in Evangelii Gaudium that would
not be out of place in the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez or Jon Sobrino—nor indeed of John Paul II. Accordingly, the exhortation is unequivocal in the link that it makes between the Holy Spirit at the heart of evangelisation and a commitment ‘to desire, seek and protect the good of others’ (article 178).

As is common to liberation theologies, it is Pope Francis’ reflections on ‘the kingdom’ that generate his strongest statements on the link between the spread of the gospel and service to the sufferings of our world: ‘True Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological kingdom, always generates history’ (article 181). The document stresses that authentic religion is neither merely private nor focused on the preparation of souls for heaven, because ‘God wants his children to be happy in this world too’ (article 182). Faith, therefore, is utterly reconcilable with ‘a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it’ (article 183).

Pope Francis identifies the ‘option for the poor’ as ‘primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one’ (article 198). As such, it has implications for the church’s own life: it calls the church to be friends with the poor; indeed it calls the church to be ‘poor and for the poor’ (article 198). The connection that the pope makes between evangelisation and justice resounds in his emphasis on the need for the church to be attentive to ‘a privileged and preferential religious care’ for the poor, since ‘the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care’ (article 200).

It is evident that Pope Francis envisages the church being transformed by commitment to the poor. Thus, he imagines a church that moves from ‘spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk’ (article 207) to become one that draws near to the world’s multiple expressions of poverty and vulnerability (articles 210-12), is committed to care for the earth (articles 215-16), and work for peace (articles 218-21), especially through multiple forms of ‘social dialogue’ with other religions (articles 238-58).

To describe Evangelii Gaudium as an inspiring document would be true, but that description would run the risk of domesticating the pope’s challenge, reducing it to the level of a bumper-sticker or a fridge-magnet. A more appropriate response, for individuals and communities, would be continual prayerful reflection on the text. In that reflection, we might pray that the Spirit would enable us to experience Christ, ‘risen and glorified’, as ‘the well-spring of our hope’ and empower us with ‘the help we need to carry out the mission which he has entrusted to us’ (article 275).

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**Let the risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life!**

If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms.

If you have been indifferent, take a risk: you won’t be disappointed.

If following him seems difficult, don’t be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.  

—Pope Francis.
DEAR PRIME MINISTER

MALCOLM P. FYFE msc

Office of the Vicar General

The Honourable Tony Abbott MP,
Prime Minister of Australia,
Parliament House, Canberra.
20.01.2014

Dear Prime Minister,

I write to express my deep concern at your Government’s current Asylum Seekers’ Policy.

I am alarmed by the number of men, women and children whose lives have been put indefinitely on hold and who must deal with harsh conditions of detention, both within Australia and particularly offshore. As a Catholic priest here in Darwin, I have tried to minister to a number of these people and have heard their stories.

So many people with whom I mix are deeply alarmed by the deliberate renaming of asylum seekers as illegals. Renaming some reality doesn’t change its nature. Operation Sovereign Borders is widely regarded as fudging the truth.

Have asylum seekers always been illegals? Seemingly under Malcolm Fraser that was certainly not true. At what point in time did they become illegals and on what grounds?

Your Government, along with the previous Labour-led Government, has followed a policy of demonizing these people to the extent that many good people in the Australian community now think of these asylum seekers as having no rights and as justly deserving the inhuman treatment being meted out to them. Is this what we are being asked to celebrate on the upcoming Australia Day, a day when we hark back with approval to the arrival by sea in 1788 of people who up till then were foreign to this land? In reality, Australia has been significantly built up as a nation by boat people.

‘Stop the boats’ is a clever and mindless mantra. It overlooks the critical fact that the ‘boats’ are actually full of human beings. I know the story of many of these people—it makes the slogan very ugly. The expressed concern about people drowning is greatly discounted when I discover that it is an acceptable risk for these people as an alternative to the horrors they have experienced.

Does it no longer concern you that so many people, especially families, are being grievously punished, particularly in isolated and offshore detention centres, in order to deter people from attempting to claim asylum in Australia? How far can one go in inflicting suffering on some people in order to deter others from acting in a certain way?

Though I have no first-hand knowledge of Manus or Christmas Island, I am personally quite familiar with the Island of Nauru. You must know that living there may be fine for Nauruans, I-Kiribatis and the few expatriates they are in a position to employ, but for others it is an island prison and a dead-end.

You are damaging, ruining in some cases, the lives of people who arrived here before the recent election contest between your Party
and the current Opposition. At that time, you were out to convince the Australian public that you could be harsher and more ruthless than your opponents. You have succeeded in desensitizing many Australians to the misery, frustration and endless uncertainty these earlier arrivals are being subjected to.

In regard to an offshore ‘solution’, both major political parties are guilty.

If there is one humane goal I would urge your Government to engage in, it would be to proceed with vigour and with speed the processing of asylum seekers who arrived here under previous legislation, that would again allow genuine refugees to be re-settled into Australian society.

Finally, political parties are not things: they are collections of human beings. And so, political parties, like every human being, are capable of good and capable of evil. History is littered with examples. Governments need to take on board the well-intentioned scrutiny of their actions. Good governments lead the community in fostering goodness, in appealing to the best in people. Bad governments appeal to the less noble elements of people’s characters.

The eyes of the world and in particular the eyes of Asia (I can again speak from considerable experience) are on Australia’s mean handling of the asylum seeker phenomenon. More and more Australians are coming to the realization that Australia is capable of something much better than our current harsh and inhumane response.

Prior to engaging the media, I would appreciate some response to this letter.

Yours respectfully,
Father Malcolm P. Fyfe msc
Vicar General,
The Catholic Diocese of Darwin.

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**Appalling silence or a voice for the voiceless**

**EDMOND NIXON CSSR**

I SOMETIMES wonder whether a future Australian prime minister will rise in the House of Representatives and make a speech that might begin:

I move that: Today we honour the peoples who were confined to unduly long, oppressive and sometimes cruel detention by successive governments, for their simply daring to seek asylum for themselves and their families—asylum from all manner of discrimination, and from terror, torture, and violence of every stripe.

On behalf of past parliaments, past governments and the Australian citizens of that period I say to those asylum seekers, ‘We are sorry; we are sorry for the way we treated you and for the trauma we inflicted; we are sorry for supplanting your originality, and for extinguishing your hope, most especially the trust of your little ones.

It is no secret that recent Australian governments have had their hands full facing an extraordinarily difficult challenge—how to respond to that very small proportion of the world’s 45,000,000 displaced citizens who seek refuge on our shores.

Governments are duty-bound to make a response, but they also have the obligation of
making a just response.

Both sides of politics have failed in that regard, especially when they have kept and continue to keep already traumatised people in unduly long and gratuitous detention which is itself traumatising. Yet not all parliamentarians have been complicit in this failure and a good number have fought the good fight for justice. Their stance did not come easily—many were ignored in their party rooms and often ridiculed in their electorates.

There are many issues that make it difficult for governments to arrive at a balanced and just response. I mention just two: firstly, people smugglers parasitically piggy-backing on the misfortune of the stateless and, secondly, the steady stream of misinformation deliberately broadcast by some sections of the media about who asylum seekers are and what they do.

The first issue causes governments to settle on policies of deterrence, and in some instances this makes sense. But it makes no sense if the deterrent policies are cruel and unjust. The second issue prepares the population to accept the policies of deterrence uncritically. However, to unduly detain asylum seekers in order to deter people smugglers is inherently unethical. The end does not justify the means. A human person may never be used to justify a separate outcome. Extended detention is not altogether unlike persons being used as human shields, just as they were in some of the countries from which asylum seekers fled in the first place.

Asked once what was most important for world peace the Dalai Lama answered: ‘Critical thinking followed by action.’ Jesus would have said ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ Maybe the wisdom of Jesus and the Dalai Lama are opposite sides of the same coin.

Pope Francis often shows how love and critical thinking go together. In his first visit as Pope outside Rome, in July 2013, Francis visited the island of Lampedusa (Italy’s ‘Christmas Island’), and in the face of the asylum seekers struggling ashore he cried out ‘Has the world wept?’

Science can tell us that there are more messages going from the emotions to the brain, than from the brain to the emotions. Perhaps the Pope is onto something. If we are to think critically in a way that leads to action it might be only after we have begun to empathise with and love sisters and brothers fleeing oppression and violence.

In 2014, wouldn’t it be marvellous if the Australia Day fireworks booming out across the night sky were a harbinger for its citizens, including Christians, finding their voice—a voice with which to break through the appalling silence surrounding the plight of asylum seekers, a voice for the voiceless!

‘Detention should be only to establish asylum seekers’ identities and to ensure they are not a threat to Australia’s health or security. These checks should take no longer than three months,’ says Broome’s Bishop Christopher Saunders and a regular visitor to the remote Curtin Immigration Detention Centre near Derby.

Thirty young people, including minors, have been in detention near Port Augusta for around a year. While the nearby Catholic school would accept these children, they are not permitted to attend. Port Pirie’s Bishop Gregory O’Kelly, SJ, said ‘No parent and no politician would want their own children to undergo such a regime for so long.’

I know there is popular rhetoric about turning the boats around. But the important focus for me is not the boats but the fact each boat is full of human beings. This is not a legal matter but a matter of human rights, indeed a matter of morality, says Darwin’s Bishop Hurley. Quoting the words of Patrick McGorry, the eminent psychiatrist and 2010 Australian of the Year who called detention centres ‘factories for producing mental illness’, Bishop Hurley says he prays that we might embrace those who land on our shores in the same way our forebears were welcomed.

The piece first appeared in the North Perth monastery church bulletin for Australia Day and then on the Australian Redemptorists’ website.
THE AGELESS VIRTUE OF HOSPITALITY

DAVID W T BRATTSTON

Hospitality is an ageless virtue in the church, although of late we do not hear homilies or read much about it in church magazines. The earliest Christians, on the other hand, said much about this practice at a time before modern separation into different denominations took root. Their counsel as to being hospitable therefore applies to all Christians alike.

According to my dictionary, hospitality is the friendly and generous reception and accommodation of guests and visitors. Saint Paul in his Letter to the Romans 12:13 encouraged his readers to be ‘given to hospitality’ as well as to contribute to the needs of other Christians. First Peter 4:9 exhorts us to practise it ungrudgingly, as well as to be engaged in other forms of charity. One New Testament author and some other ancient Christian writers highly commended hospitality to strangers, of which more below.

In the middle of the second century AD, a brother of a pastor-bishop of Rome put forth commandments for the Christian life in a book called The Pastor of Hermas, which he said were revelations from the divine. In hospitality, the book said, is a fruitful field for goodness. Half a century later, Clement of Alexandria in Egypt was dean of the world’s foremost Christian educational institution. He encouraged Christians to be ‘given to hospitality’, like St. Paul, in a long list of what he considered desirable conduct for Christians, such as helping the poor and weak. In another book Clement wrote ‘akin to love is hospitality’.

Clement’s successor as dean was Origen, the most outstanding Christian professor, writer and preacher of the first three centuries. So great was his knowledge of the Christian faith that he was called upon as a theological consultant by pastors throughout the eastern Mediterranean. In his Commentary on Romans, he regarded receiving guests as a Christian virtue, along with rescuing the innocent and helping the poor, such as the hungry and naked. He said that great grace is to be found in hospitality, both with God and with people. In one of his homilies he valued hospitality in the same list as justice, mercy, patience, gentleness and helping the poor.

Strangers were singled out as special objects of hospitality. The New Testament Letter to the Hebrews 13:2 says ‘Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.’ The most prominent examples in the writer’s mind were probably Abraham and his nephew Lot in Genesis 18 and 19. Clement of Alexandria called hospitality ‘a congenial art devoted to the treatment of strangers’, and also ‘Hospitality, therefore, is occupied with what is useful for strangers’.

In some localities, hospitality for fellow Christian strangers was a standing institution. A first- or second-century church manual from Syria or Egypt called The Didaché prescribed detailed regulations for the reception and accommodation of travelling Christians, especially clergy. About the same time as Origen, the church father Tertullian in Tunisia placed hospitality to Christian travellers in the same class of Christian activity as relief of the poor. A little later, early papyrus letters of recommendation for travellers indicate that there was a network of hospitality among the churches.

Although especially for strangers, hospi-
tality was not confined to travellers by the ear-

liest Christians. Clement widened the scope
of the term ‘strangers’ as a category: ‘guests
are strangers; and friends are guests; and breth-
ren [i.e. Christians] are friends.’ In an even
more universal statement, he wrote ‘And those
are strangers, to whom the things of the world
are strange.’

The Bible considers being hospitable as
a desirable quality especially for clergy. First
Timothy 3:2 recommends it in the same pas-
sage as such qualifications as being above
reproach, an apt communicator and not a
of Titus 1:7 includes hospitality in a list with
such necessary traits as self-controlled, up-
right and a lover of goodness. In a para-
phrase of 1 Timothy, Origen in his Commen-
tary on Romans considered a hospitable
nature as necessary for clergy, as also being
above reproach, vigilant and respectable.
Such linking reveals early Christians’ high
esteem for both the office and the practice:
while it demonstrates how dedicated clergy
must be, it also shows the centrality of hos-
pitality in church life.

The early authors’ frequent listing of hos-
pitality along with relief of the poor was prob-
ably not accidental. Christian hospitality, as
well as Christian life in general, has always
been concerned for guests and strangers no
matter what their financial circumstances. The
ancient authorities promote the virtues of gen-
erosity and helping all people, including stran-
gers, regarding them as brothers and sisters in
Christ and as being entitled to the same recep-
tion and accommodation as is Jesus. In his
Homilies on Luke Origen exhorted his hear-
ers to invite into their homes Christian friends,
even the poor ones, and also people who have
trouble expressing themselves, the retarded,
and other persons who are intellectually im-
paired. Jesus himself commanded: ‘when thou
makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the
lame, the blind’ (Luke 14:13).

The New Testament and other early Chris-
tian writings and homilies were directed to all
readers and to all people present in congrega-
tions. Their admonitions are put to all of us to
provide generously to people we barely know
or even not know, simply for the name of Christ
and without regard to their means, status or
circumstances. Jesus himself provides a spe-
cial blessing for the hospitable: in Matthew
10:11f and Luke 10:5 he instructed Christian
travellers to salute and wish peace on the
homes of hosts who showed them hospitality.
These hosts might well have been hospitable
to angels unawares. So might you.

We must not forget the generous response of many men and women,
associations and organisations which, seeing the sufferings of countless
persons caused by emigration, are struggling for the rights of migrants,
forced or voluntary, and for their defence. The commitment of these people
can be attributed above all to that compassion of Jesus, the Good
Samaritan, that the Spirit stirs up everywhere in the hearts of men and
women of good will and in the Church too.

—The Love of Christ towards Migrants, Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of
Migrants and Itinerant People, 2005, no.3.
A N EARLIER ISSUE of this journal carried an overview of significant developments in Christian Ethics since the second Vatican Council. This entailed a deeper appreciation of the spiritual basis of the moral life, the formative role of Scripture, the centrality of the person, the importance of conscience and the function of the virtues. The article anticipated current studies, both international and national, prompted by the fiftieth anniversary of the commencement of the Council in 1962.

Here, I would like to take that discussion further. In the first decade of this millennium, Christian Ethics, in becoming more clearly global, offers a different and expanding context as a discipline. While a comprehensive survey is beyond the scope of this article, some representative soundings can be made.

So this prompts the question: are we seeing the beginnings of a seismic shift in Christian Ethics? This article examines evidence for this statement and some reasons underlying it under three headings: moral consciousness as international and global; global discourse on suffering and solidarity; Catholic social teaching and Moral Theology leading to concluding comments.

Moral Consciousness as International and Global

At the outset, it should be noted that cross-cultural theological discourse was the aim of the international journal Concilium since its inception over forty years ago. It is published five times a year in five linguistic editions. Again, between 1998 and 2007 Theological Studies ‘‘Notes on Moral Theology’ reveals an emerging sense of pluralism in Moral Theology which is inclusive in its scope and its participants.

Our discussion is best guided by two landmarks in the past decade—the International Conferences of Catholic Theological Ethics in Padua, 2006 and Trento, 2010. Padua’s Mission Statement captured their aims, though, as will be noted later, Trento had a more specific context. The Statement’s key points indicated: a) need for an international exchange of ideas amongst Catholic Theological Ethicists; b) need to interconnect within a world church; and c) the opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue from and beyond local cultures motivated by mercy and care. To be truly international, the organisers ensured the presence of scholars from the developing world by underwriting their expenses.

Each conference was shaped by its overarching purpose. ‘At Padua we gathered to meet and listen to one another’, observes James Keenan. In 2006 ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘global’ are the key words. Foundation papers responded to ‘How can Theological Ethicists respond to the World’s Needs?’ Speakers from each of the five continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America) addressed the same three questions: what are our moral challenges; how are we responding; and what hope do we have for the future? Following these were presentations under the rubric of ‘applied ethics’—ranging from globalization, justice and the environment, questions about gender, HIV/AIDS, Bioethics and Justice, sexuality and marriage and questions concerning method in Moral Theology.

In 2010, rather than a gathering for listening and interchange, Keenan suggests there was a ‘need for a defining context.’ Hence, the choice of Trent—for many reasons, but per-
haps the most important was that ‘theological ethics was defined by the Council of Trent: we became a specific discipline within theology.’ It was fitting that Trento, given its historical and ecclesial significance, was the location where theological ethicists could ‘share fundamental insights and claims, to reflectively and respectfully consider the needs of today within the context of a world church and its evolving and constantly emerging traditions.’

Again, this conference, rather than build on the five continents, attempted (and successfully so) to ‘target seven populations’: more representation from theologians from some European national groups and moral specialist (such as the Redemptorists); participation of the hierarchy and some formal, institutional recognition of the Conference; scholars engaged in inter-religious dialogue; women theologians together with financial assistance for women scholars on the African continent for further graduate studies; ‘new’ or young scholars and financial assistance for them to attend; senior theological ethicists; finally, the support of a local committee at Trento and its Archbishop.

The opening theme for Trento was ‘Ethics and Religious Dialogue in a globalized world (Catholic, Protestant and Muslim perspectives).’ It then moved in three stages: the past - evaluation of the Council of Trent, interaction of history and theological ethics and the ‘unheard’ and ‘missing’ voices in that history; the present—moral reasoning, political ethics and health issues; the future considered identity, reciprocity and familial relations, pressing global social challenges and theological ethics in the future.

What was achieved in these gatherings? They were clearly about a theological approach to ethics. The international ‘conversation’ continued through the publication of plenary papers and selected presentations in applied ethics. For the participants, Keenan notes that a frequent comment after Padua was ‘We shared the same vocation.’ This was experienced as a strong intellectual and affective solidarity of participants and a renewed sense of their contribution to the Church. It was both ‘inter-national’ and ‘inter-cultural’. It brought a solidarity that reached across generations, gender and cultures. With good will and respect in place, there was a freedom to challenge and question each other. Finally, the process generated the need for other groups and structures to continue the dialogue in local conferences and associations.

Another consideration is pertinent here. A key area of development in Moral Theology in the past two decades has been virtue ethics. The virtues provided a needed conceptual ‘bridge’ and common moral vocabulary between differing historical and cultural contexts—relevant for cross-cultural and global dialogue today.

Other religious and cultural traditions have virtues that function in ways similar to the cardinal virtues. Across all cultures there seems to be a call to treat all people fairly and impartially, to be faithful to one’s commitments and promises and to care of ourselves. These are guided by practical wisdom (prudence) that adjudicates between their claims. Again, Keenan notes that the more ethicists use the virtues, the more they work beyond local contexts. Finally, compassion and solidarity are needed, virtuous dispositions for ‘receiving’ the texts and experiences from within any tradition (whether one’s own or others’) and ‘for developing the moral perception to understand them.’

As the Trento conference closed, the young African women scholars summed it up for
James Keenan: ‘Jim, we are so surprised that we actually belong to something so big, so dedicated, and so dynamic.’ Keenan then concludes ‘At Trento we discovered our catholic vocation.’ That vocation, he explains, is a call to read the signs of the times ‘as they actually are.’ That involves the search for the truth, ‘and in part that means naming what is lacking, not yet seen, understood or articulated. It also means being aware of those not heard, rejected, oppressed or abandoned.’ This brings us to our next shift in the landscape of Christian Ethics.

**Suffering, Solidarity and Global Discourse**

With some exceptions, for all the advances made by European moral theologians in the twentieth century, their concerns were predominantly conceptual and concerned with ‘in-house’ issues arising from their theological community and amongst their peers. Suffering and poverty were only addressed in general terms and from a distance.

Three main strands form the historical backdrop to an increasing response to suffering: the Holocaust, liberation movements in the developing world and the various forms of struggle for human rights at the global level. In that context, we are reminded of René Girard’s comment that the emerging concern for victims in history is ‘the secular face of Christian love’ and of Anthony Kelly’s added comments that this unprecedented ‘stirring of conscience’ is the transforming effects of one particular ‘risen’ victim—Jesus Christ.

Theologically, one can detect initial changes in perspective in the final third of the twentieth century. European theologians such as Metz, Schillebeeckx, Moltmann and liberation theologians from Latin America (Sobrino and Boff) found common cause on the tasks of theology. They saw suffering (and its ‘dangerous memory’) as the appropriate starting point for praxis—the interaction of faith with lived experience.

During this period, an increasing sensitivity to the poor and marginalized appears amongst a handful of European Theological ethicists (e.g., Enda McDonagh, Kevin Kelly, Enrico Chiavacci, etc.) and this was further developed in the next generation of moralists, especially, in the USA, by women scholars. In the new millennium, when combined with theological work outside Europe, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the overall effect today is summed up by Keenan: ‘...the call to respond to human suffering shapes contemporary theological ethics’ In the USA, Lisa Sowle Cahill is typical of women ethicists (and others) who offer responses that are specific and concrete, based on a theological approach that is both personalist and relational but also formative of communities of concern and solidarity.

Representative of this call is Australia’s Robert Gascoigne’s discussion of suffering as a source for moral reasoning. He observes that ‘although it is suffering that most confounds our search for ethical intelligibility, it is likewise suffering that is the most profound source of insight and conversion.’ Human experience is a contested source for Christian Ethics. But when, as here with suffering, it provides an occasion for self-transcendence in terms of moral response to what is truly good, truly just, it is both authentic and normative.

We have noted above some of the many current studies in Christian ethics that probe suffering in its various forms (injustice, alienation, oppression, poverty, HIV/AIDS). It may help to glance back to 1975 for Dorothy Soelle’s *Suffering*—a landmark study of the dynamics of how to engage with suffering.

In the first step, one is mute, dumbfounded with the evil as experienced. At this stage, it is just about survival. In the second phase, one makes explicit and conscious the horror, the pain of what has been experienced (whether from human agency or nature, whether personal or social). It is named and claimed in two ways. ‘We can feel the suffering in solidarity with others and give voice to our an-
guish.’

We can tap resources from Scripture of crying out from the depths, such as with Jesus on the cross. Then, it is through Lamentation that we are enabled to acknowledge suffering and loss.

We are also empowered for the third phase, namely to act—to ‘aim’ in a constructive manner what we have experienced. Justice demands that these sources of suffering and evil can be alleviated or eradicated as part of the ongoing redemptive work of Christ. At times, such suffering can be transforming through deepening and expanding our consciousness of what is true and good at the personal or communal level.

Going beyond Soelle, complementing suffering is the call to solidarity. Interdependence is a reality in human society. John Paul II argues that this is the grounding of solidarity as a moral virtue, attainable for everyone. It is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the sufferings of others. It is a ‘firm persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, since we are all really responsible for all.’ Together with the theologians mentioned above, there is a call to human solidarity amidst suffering. God enters into and shares in all human suffering. In a special way, those who suffer injustice remain indelibly etched in God’s memory and ought to be inscribed in human consciousness.

In surveying Moral Theology in the past decade, what stands out is the increasing concern for suffering and solidarity. This is associated with a deeper sense of social sin and structural evils. Its overall perspective is not autonomous ethics but the Reign of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Further, the overall impression is that, at times, studies couched in the language and style of the academy, resemble extended exercises in theological reflection. One can trace the triadic dynamic of a) experience (describe it, enter it); b) reflection (learn from it in light of Christian tradition and human science); c) move to action. Robert Kinast suggests theological reflection in similar terms: a) Word-from-God (God’s ongoing self-communication in history and creation; b) Word-about-God: Faith as gift involves confession, interrogation, investigation; c) Word-to-God: Christian living in personal, social and Church life.

Overall, amongst Christian Ethicists, we have seen a growing awareness of those who are ‘not heard,’ of those ‘rejected or abandoned.’ This leads to our third consideration: Catholic social teaching on justice as an indispensable constituent of contemporary Moral Theology.

Catholic Social Teaching and Moral Theology

From what we have seen, with the two International conferences, the associated literature and the increasing attention to suffering and solidarity, what stands out is the frequency of a concern for social justice. We can only take a few examples.

At Padua, the social justice emphasis clearly resulted from the three questions guiding the plenary papers from the five continents. For instance, the challenge of world poverty; from Africa, issues concerning identity, instability and democracy, horrendous suffering and theology needing to be located with ‘the wretched of the earth’, ‘anthropological poverty’—what affects the deepest recesses of the personality in terms of self-belief and initiative; from India, Christian ethics in relation to cultural complexity and social inequality.

At Trento, while the focus was different, we still find, for instance, Bryan Massingale exploring the absence, if not erasure, in the U.S Catholic ethical reflection, of ‘Black Experience’ and hence of the bodies of those who experienced survival amongst oppression. Again, we find papers under headings such as ‘Justice and Equity in the Health Care world’ and ‘Pressing Social and Global challenges’ concerning Economics, Sustainability and Citizenship.

Keenan’s detailed and extensive surveys show that the social justice direction is also
evident in theological journals in many languages. *Theological Studies* in the English speaking world is representative of this. Earlier in the decade we find discussions on a global ethic and on the overlap between natural law and human rights and their implications for marginal individuals and groups.23 It is present in the March issue of the ‘Notes’ in 2008, 2009, 2010 amongst commentaries on the two volumes of the Padua conference. For instance, we find a discussion on identity crises in a globalized world.24 In a broader ecclesial context, we also find in the 2010 ‘Notes’ a series of essays on *Caritas in Veritate* from Maura Ryan, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Phillip Gabriel Renzes and Drew Christiansen.

Overall, what emerges is Moral Theology ‘from below.’ It is a critical ethical reflection on real problems that face real people, communities and nations and their structural roots. Issues of injustice, poverty, health, human rights, political and social life are the staples of life experience for inhabitants of Africa, Asia and Latin America. They are increasingly the concern for the global community in the light of the 2007 GFC and its impact on economic and social life.25

*Participative Bioethics* (a phrase from Lisa Sowle Cahill) underlines the practical, embodied and communal nature of ethical life and responsibility. She sees Bioethics in the context of social justice. This mirrors a more explicit presence of Bioethics within Catholic Social thought and of both seen within the broader sphere of Theological Ethics.

But there are other signs of ethical involvement on the ground level. Fordham University’s Maureen O’Connell, in her innovative work on muralism, explores the connections between theological aesthetics and ethics.26 In 2007, *Time* magazine ran a short feature on Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Project (MAP). In the space of twenty years, it changed the city’s visual landscape. By bringing together artists, inner-city neighbourhood associations, and charitable trusts, MAP helped to transform the city’s neighbourhood wastelands. Jane Golden, MAP’s executive director says ‘Art saves lives. Murals can play a catalytic role in healing the wounds of the city.’27

Such a phenomenon is found earlier in Australia. In 1976, David Humphries worked with the Lower East mural movement in New York. From the late 1970s to the early 1990’s Humphries and Rodney Monk pioneered the Community Mural Movement in Sydney. The murals were a cause of pride to local communities. They were eloquent visual statements about issues and associated values, namely peace, ecology, multiculturalism, concern for the aged etc. Art was at the service of social change, to expand a community’s moral horizons.28

Recently, in Sydney, the *Ambrose Centre For Religious Liberty* was established. It is ‘committed to strengthening democratic life in Australia and to ensuring that genuine pluralism flourishes in our country through a unity of religious faiths pursuing this common purpose.’29

August 2011 saw the inaugural meeting of the *Sydney Alliance*, a non-party political organization that brings together unions, with community and religious organisations ‘to advance the common good and achieve a fair, just and sustainable city…by providing opportunities for people to have a say in decisions that affect them, their families and everyone working and living in Sydney.’30

In Melbourne, the *Yarra Institute for Religion and Social Policy* acts as ‘an independent, ecumenical organisation established to conduct research into the implications of Christian social thinking for formulating public policy in Australia, and to teach Christian social thinking and its implications for public policy in Australia.’31

**Conclusion**

Returning to our opening question: are we seeing the beginnings of a seismic shift in Christian Ethics? It may not be ‘seismic’ but the ground has somehow moved and the landscape
is not quite the same. While the person, conscience, Scripture, spirituality and the virtues are still clearly visible, one’s gaze is caught by the insistent presence of social justice and inequality. With this, there is a deepening sense of evil and sin as social and structural. These are viewed through the lens of Christian faith and the Reign of God.

Further, there seems to be emerging, perhaps instinctively, a stronger sense of a praxis methodology, or alternatively, on a ‘theological reflection’ approach to Christian Ethics. Allied to this is an enhanced (and more confident?) appreciation of the place of experience in moral reasoning that guides action. This is particularly the case with the normative potential of suffering. But it is also evident in how the descriptive aspect of experience relates to what is normative. John Paul II argues that interdependence is a reality in human society and that, as a source of ethical insight, it grounds solidarity as a moral virtue.

Perhaps rather than a move of social ethics to centre-stage in Christian Ethics, global changes are bringing a new local awareness of social, economic and political issues in people’s lives elsewhere. With global discourse (cultural, gender, national), the moral horizons of those living in the developed world are being broadened by contact or interchange with the developing world. Perhaps there is occurring, in Lonergan’s words, a differentiation of consciousness.

James Keenan observes that Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate*, as a development in Catholic Social Teaching, offers resources from Scripture and the Church’s tradition to make judgements guided by practical wisdom, to respond to specific practical challenges facing the world today. Its focus is on justice centred on, and animated by, *love*—now better appreciated as at the heart of the Christian moral life. As both a mirror and a catalyst of Theological Ethics becoming more integrated with Church Social Teaching, *Caritas in Veritate*, in many ways, exemplifies ‘the developments in theological ethics over the past seventy years.’

**NOTES**


2 This was noted in Ryan, ‘Christian Ethics: Moral Dilemmas’, 36.


4 Keenan, *CTEWC*, 3.


7 Keenan, *CTEWC*, 5.


12 Adapted from Keenan’s heading for chapter 9. See Keenan, *A History*…197.


14 Keenan, *A History*, 198

16 Robert Gascoigne, ‘Suffering and Theological Ethics: Intimidation and Hope’, CTEWC, 163-6, at 163.
17 Keenan in his various ‘Notes’ and Chapter 9 of his History gives detailed evidence supporting this and for our next section on social justice from papers, authors, institutes and journals from Europe, Asia and Africa.
19 Sparks CSP, ‘Suffering’, 952-3.
20 John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 38.
21 Sparks, ‘Suffering.’ 953. With the announcement of a Royal Commission into sexual abuse in Australia, in the light of what is said here, what should be a theological response from the Catholic community? Perhaps Dorothy Soelle has something important to offer us about solidarity in suffering.

‘It costs so much to be a full human being that there are very few who have the enlightenment or the courage to pay the price...One has to abandon altogether the search for security, and. reach out to the risk of living with both arms. One has to embrace the world like a lover: One has to accept pain as a condition of existence. One has to court doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing. One needs a will stubborn in conflict, but apt always to total acceptance of every consequence of living and dying’

—Morris West: The Shoes of the Fisherman

‘For my part I believe in the forgiveness of sin and the redemption of ignorance’

—Adlai E. Stevenson Jr. (1900 - 1965), retort to a heckler asking him to state his beliefs, Time, November 1, 1963.
MISSION, CULTURE AND A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART

ANTHONY ARTHUR msc

ANY SPIRITUALITY involves the process of communication (knowing—revealing—listening—being known, revealed, heard). Culture is the environment or context in which the act of communicating, and hence of spirituality, takes place. The fundamental context of the spirituality of the Heart is, of course, the culture within the Godhead: the culture of divine self-giving (kenosis): communicative action and interpersonal communion (koinonia). As human persons, we are being shaped and formed by God’s self-communication and invited (drawn) into the culture of the Trinitarian life through the revelation of the Son and the action of the Spirit, the action of self-communicating love.

God comes to the human person as the one who loves. A lover creatively seeks a way of attracting the attention of the other. He or she tenderly seeks a way to the other’s heart. The other is, of course, perfectly free to reject or accept the wooing. Freedom enables the loving quest for the way into the heart of the other person. Love can arise and grow only in the space of freedom. Love makes one sensitive to the other’s behaviour and stimulates the lover’s imagination. (Theo Sundermeier)1

Evangelization—living the Gospel—is about embracing culture; it is not about rejecting the world and society. The Word of God embraced the world and its culture and ultimately challenged it by the witness of his way of living as a human being. Spirituality is always a way of embracing the central mystery of incarnation: becoming flesh. This is especially true of spirituality of the heart: the affective embrace of the world.

* * *

The culture of God—Trinitarian life-style

The divine persons have invited us into the culture of their lives. Every culture has its own depth of mystery, expressed in its symbols and values. Thus in the divine culture revealed to us in the Word made flesh, we encounter the mystery of the Trinitarian life, one of shared love (koinonia), and absolute self-giving or kenosis. The symbol for this divine culture is the ‘Heart’. The Spirit draws us into the mystery of the culture of divine communion and self-communication, and invites us, in turn, to share its life with our brothers and sisters. This is what we call a ‘spirituality of the Heart’: the challenge to inculturate the way of God’s Heart.

For those whom God knew before ever they were, he also ordained to share the likeness of his Son, so that he might be the eldest among a large family of brothers (and sisters); and those whom he foreordained, he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified’ (Rom 8, 29 – 30) ….

In order that now, through the church, the wisdom of God in all its infinite variety might be made known…. (Eph 3, 10).

The Gospel message is not abstract, any more than God’s love is abstract. God’s involvement with our human world is essentially and actively relational—from the first! God’s Word takes created form; it wants to be incarnated, to pitch its tent in a particular human culture and society; it wants to communicate culturally. In fact the only way the Word can communicate is culturally. This is the way in which God has always chosen to act in our regard. The culture of the people of the Old
Testament was shaped by God’s self-revelation and in turn their cultural experience effected their understanding of God and God’s ‘way’ of relating with them. The primitive Christian community’s response to the Good News of the Risen Christ was shaped by a similar process: the dynamic interaction between the message of Jesus and the context in which his first followers were living (their cultural world). The Word of God became inculturated—or contextualized—in the human culture of the Primitive Church and its life-style of shared communion and fellowship.

Our human culture is the only context in which we receive the Word, interact with it, and pass it on. This interaction between the cultural expression of our humanity and the revelation of the Word has continued throughout history. ‘From the time the Gospel was first preached the Church has known the process of encounter and engagement with culture’ (Fides et Ratio # 70). This encounter has shaped Western culture, has shaped the culture of the Religious Life and of the Church.

**Culture and Inculturation**

The Gospel needs to be inculturated and commitment to living a spirituality is a way of inculturating the Gospel. A culture structures life-experiences into thinking processes, attitudes, values, providing ‘names for important feelings and significant environmental features, and permits communication with other persons of the same culture’.

Culture embraces all manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the products of human activities as determined by these habits. (Franz Boas)

Arbuckle makes an important distinction between two contemporary models of culture: the static classicist and the modern experiential (represented by Boas’ definition above). Culture structures our life-experiences and our thinking processes, i.e., our interpretation and evaluation of those experiences. Another definition by Kelly and Kluckhohn is perhaps illuminating with regard to our present concern with spirituality of the heart: ‘A culture is an historically derived system of explicit and implicit designs for living, which tends to be shared by all or specially designated members of a group’. We might suitably adopt this, equally well, as the definition of our spirituality. Our spirituality of the heart seeks to create a culture, an environment for living and making decisions—and to challenge the prevailing culture in church and society.

This, I suggest, was the intention of Fr Jules Chevalier in promoting devotion to the Sacred Heart. He wanted to create, as an anthropologist would say, a ‘new pattern of meanings’, a ‘new network of symbols, myths narratives and rituals’. By developing cultures we humans seek to respond to the ‘competitive pressures of power and limited resources in a rapidly globalizing and fragmenting world’. Culture is not a static entity, it is a ‘process of becoming’ based on hidden assumptions of political, gender and ideological power. Integral to any culture are its symbols, which make a definitive statement, touch the heart and the imagination and direct us to certain ways of acting. All of this is surely relevant to considerations of any kind of spirituality of the heart! ‘For communication to occur in theology and liturgy, the structure of the symbols must first be able to express something relevant to the culture of the people; otherwise what is said is meaningless’. One is also reminded here of Pope John Paul’s statement that a faith that

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does not become culture fails to take root.

Any definition of a spirituality of the Heart will have to embrace the two disciplines of ‘missiology’ and of ‘anthropology’: God’s self-sending of the word, or self-communication, and humanity’s self-expression and self-experience. The process of inculturation takes place at the ‘intersection’ of mission and human experience: ‘mission is rooted in the mystery of communion’ (John Paul II, Ecclesia in Oceania # 10). Today we have come to better appreciate the nature of ‘mission’, that in the missionary enterprise there are not so much senders and recipients of the message, rather only participants in the shared process. This awareness of the dynamic of missionary communication, may help us come to a better appreciation for what is involved in the living of the spirituality of the Heart. It involves our intimate participation in the culture of the Heart of God: a culture in which God shares his innermost being in a communion of love shared, given and received.

We need to note an important distinction between inculturation and acculturation. Inculturation is intentional and critical, acculturation is simply the uncritical adoption of the values of the surrounding culture, ‘the process of culture change in which contact between two or more culturally distinct groups results in one group taking over elements of the other group or groups’. An example is the way in which the medieval Church assimilated the patterns of feudalism into its clerical and authority structures.

The challenge facing any authentic spirituality of the heart is to restore the central role of God’s love in culture. Spirituality of the Heart is by nature a critical spirituality, opposed to ‘utilitarian individualism’. This was the challenge faced by Fr Chevalier in the 19th century (what he named the ‘mal modern’, modern evil) Our post-modern world is searching for a meaningful and truly dignified human culture. Many Christians have reacted to modern culture by embracing reactionary fundamentalism, itself a static form of human culture and religious spirituality, with little appreciation of the character of the Church as a living communion (rather than an unchanging institution).

Following Vatican II and the breakdown of the premodern structures of the church, Catholics in general became exposed to the full force of modernity and its values. Whenever this secular cultural model is uncritically internalized, Catholics accept only those beliefs and practices that do not conflict with the mainstream values of the secular culture, manipulating the church to fit their personal aspirations. For them the church has become just another organization to be evaluated not in faith but in the requirements of utilitarian individualism.

We need to take charge of our own process of communication and inculturation, and critically interact and dialogue with the context in which we live. ‘The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity.’ (Paul VI, Address to the College of Cardinals, 2 June 1973)

Inculturation, as we have said, is not the same as acculturation. Because of its extraordinary power, the modern media can have an acculturating impact – people simply absorb and accept information and images, unreflectively and uncritically. As a result a new mentality and culture is being shaped without our interactive participation. In his encyclical Redemptoris missio the pope refers to the capability that modern communication technology has to form and shape a ‘new psychology’ (# 37), not only a world-view.

**Chevalier’s response to cultural change**

Father Jules Chevalier, recognized in the way of the Heart of God an effective response to the cultural challenges of his time, especially, as already noted, the challenge
and was opposed to socialism—he wanted to find another way to encourage social reform in changing times. He expressed his disappointment at the failure of the project to Father Victor Jouët:

Our indolent Catholics do not seem to recognize the danger. Since modern societies are entering a new phase, we also need to take new means to enter into the necessary combat and struggle. There has been too much discussing, hesitating and temporizing; there is no other way to triumph over evil than the one which Our Lord himself has given us. This is his divine Heart.

I think it is fair to say, then, that Chevalier saw in the devotion to the Heart of Jesus a powerful and effective instrument for social and cultural change: the formation of a truly Christian culture (of love). He intuited that new cultural values and structures needed to be put in place to effectively challenge the direction in which post-revolutionary and post-Enlightenment French culture was moving. He seems to have recognized the possibility of constructing a more Christian political and social movement animated by the culture of devotion to the Sacred Heart—the culture of the Heart of God. Certainly, in keeping with Catholic mentality at the time, there was a ‘reactionary’ aspect to his plan, but it was also, more importantly, a culturally constructive one. Today, one would say that he had a dream of cultural transformation based on the dynamic of the spirituality of the Heart, perhaps akin to Paul VI’s vision of a ‘civilization of love’. The ‘Chevaliers of the Sacred Heart’ were to be active social, cultural and political agents. There was an ‘inculturated face’ to his understanding of the ‘devotion’. This socio-cultural vision is reflected in the text of the modern version of the MSC Constitutions (# 24).

In a constant effort to share in the sentiments of the Heart of Christ, we will be attentive to all human needs and aspirations, such as, the need to be respected as persons, the need for love and peace, for freedom, justice and truth, and
the search for meaning in life.

Mission and culture—the example of Jesus

One of the principal ways in which we ‘discover’ and come to believe in the culture of the Heart of God is obviously through our own prayerful and contemplative openness to the mystery of God in our lives. One central dimension of that experience is mission. Mission is not simply about giving something to others it is also—and perhaps more fundamentally—about openness to receive from others: mission is dialogue (see Paul VI, Evangelii nuntiandi). We are drawn more intimately into the life of the Heart of God through those whom we allow to ‘shape’ us when they invite us into the culture of their lives.

Some of our richest experiences of the meaning of an authentic spirituality of the Heart can come through opening ourselves to sharing the experience of other cultures and spiritualities, of the marginalized and neglected members of human society. The culture of the heart is essentially a missionary one: sent forth from the Heart of God to share and communicate the life of God (John 1, 18). In Jesus God did not simply become a human being, bestow divinity on a human being. In the man Jesus God also opened God’s own self to ‘receive’ the gift of human culture that God might enrich it with his own divine culture. In the mystery of the incarnation—and of the redemption—there is an interactive process of giving and receiving at work in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Inculturation is a dialectical interaction between Christian faith and cultures in which these cultures are challenged, affirmed, and transformed toward the reign of God, and in which Christian faith is likewise challenged, affirmed and enhanced by this experience.

When interacting with members of his own complex culture and with peoples of other cultures Jesus Christ fosters this dialectical exchange characteristic of inculturation.

As Jesus inaugurates the reign of God through proclaiming the Good News of God’s Love for all, healing the sick, welcoming outcasts, he is in fact at the same time dialectically interacting with cultures and providing us with examples of inculturation.

Today we find many forms of theology. Karl Rahner has said that ‘there will no longer be any one single and universal basic formula of the Christian faith applicable to the whole Church and, indeed, prescribed for her as authoritatively binding’.

It needs to be stressed that the challenge of inculturation does not only apply to the insertion of the Good News into what may be called ‘traditional’ (‘primitive’) cultures—the ‘new’ Churches. The ‘old’ Churches (and the Consecrated Life) of the West also need to continually discern how to inculturate the Gospel in their rapidly changing ‘modern’ contexts, if the Word is to have relevance in their changing societies. To do this we need to critically interact with the culture in which we ‘live and move and have our being’. Culture is not something that belongs in a museum or in an opera house—it is the vital context in which we live, make our decisions, shape our societies and form our values. Culture is the very ‘heart’ of human society and modern communication; it is the point where the spirituality of the Heart encounters our humanity.

As human persons, we are immersed in culture, a culture that is increasingly being imposed on us (uncritically) by the powerful forces that shape our attitudes and responses today—especially the media. This is true of all societies, not only of those in the West. We can choose to accept critical responsibility for our interaction with the surrounding culture, or we can simply let ourselves be carried along uncritically by the dominant culture.

An authentic Spirituality of the Heart must challenge acculturation

It is appropriate here to quote the observations of Pope John Paul II in his message for ‘World Communication Day’ 2005—written in the shadow of the unfolding drama resulting from
the tsunami in South Asia and events in the Middle East.

Modern technology places at our disposal unprecedented possibilities for good, for spreading the truth of our salvation in Jesus Christ and for fostering harmony and reconciliation... Yet its misuse can do untold harm, giving rise to misunderstanding, prejudice and even conflict. When others are portrayed in hostile terms, seeds of conflict are sown which can easily escalate into violence, war or even genocide.

In contemporary Western societies (and increasingly also in non-Western ones), the increasing evidence of the uncritical acculturation effected by the instruments of mass media poses a serious challenge to any authentic spirituality of the Heart, for this spirituality is concerned with responsible love and freedom. It is rooted in God’s creative and critical self-gift, a gift that demands from us a conscious and proactive response (see the quotation above from Sundermeier). If we are to live this spirituality authentically we have to accept responsibility for our affective decisions and judgments, to critically evaluate and choose those values that we allow to shape our lives and commitments. The model against which we need to measure our response is the revealed culture of the Heart of God for the world (see John 3, 16. 19-20).

The process of inculturation follows the way of communion and communication: it is a shared process that involves us all. There are a number of models of inculturation (or contextualisation) but all of them involve some form of human interaction (affective, social, ideological, practical). It is through the process of inculturation that, in fact, the church discovers the work of the Spirit in the world (see Acts 10). Without openness to cultures (and the freedom of heart that such openness demands of us) we will not be able recognize the revelation of the Heart of God in our world today.

We do not control the message—the message controls us—but our cultural and social environment shapes our understanding and proclamation of the message.

A true spirituality of the Heart will be critically open to our cultural experiences and to the work of the Spirit in our opened hearts. Steven Bevans suggests that God has turned his own heart ‘inside out’ that we might see what is in God’s heart; in turn we need to allow our hearts to be so turned ‘inside out’ that the world may see through us the Heart of God. One could say that the basic challenge of inculturation of the Word is the willingness to have our hearts ‘turned inside out’!

The Spirit is the Spirit as God turned inside out; the Spirit given to Jesus turned him inside out and opened him up to the vision of God’s reign among men and women; the Spirit lavished through Jesus turns his disciples inside out as they include the unthinkable people and go to unthinkable places. Thinking missiologically about the Holy Spirit can turn the church inside out, perhaps make it more responsive to where God is really leading it in today’s world.

**Incarnation and cultural change**

The mystery of the Incarnation might also be described as a mystery of inter-culturation: God in Christ has intentionally become personally and intimately involved with human culture, and humanity, as a result, has become intimately involved with the divine culture of inter-active self-giving love and interpersonal communication. In Jesus these two cultures interact.

The mystery of the Incarnation challenged Jewish culture and Jewish ideas about God and human society. Jesus’ own cultural world was not homogeneous but complex and fragmented. He used socially dramatic parables to communicate his message, to bring those individuals who were isolated by a subculture of poverty and exclusion into the community of God’s people. His religious ‘culture’ was person-centred not law/culture-centred; he saw people as persons and rejected the culture of ritual and violence that marginalized people (*i.e.* religious fundamentalism). He permitted the poor and marginalized to speak, gave them a voice and
rejected the culture that kept them silent.

The story of his encounter with the Syro-
apheneian woman (Mark 7, 24 – 30) demonstr-
ates how Jesus was able to put aside his Jew-
ish prejudice against gentiles and women, and
the exclusive priority of Israel.

Jesus puts aside cultural prejudices through
the persistence of a woman. This is not the only
time that Jesus is successfully challenged to act
through the tenacity of a women (see John 2,
12). The incident is also a reminder that to en-
counter those who are marginalized,
evangelizers themselves must risk being
marginalized. By challenging the cultural preju-
dices Jesus allows himself to be pushed further
toward the boundaries of his culture. 20

Arbuckle also has a perceptive and inter-
esting interpretation of the scriptural accounts
of Jesus’ agony in the garden and on the cross
as examples of dramatic cultural change.

His prayer in the terrifying darkness of
Gethsemane reveals the degree of abandon-
ment expected of him if he listens to his Fa-
ther (Mark 14, 36). This darkness is shattered
by the heartrending cry: ‘My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?’ (Matt 27, 46).
This cry is the definitive break with the cul-
tural expectations of his people, who so
yearned for a human king. Letting go of what
is culturally familiar to us in order to venture
into the unknown demands abundant faith.
Inculturation is not human technique, but
above all a journey of faith, a journey of lis-
tening and letting go (Rom 1, 15—17). 21

In the anguish of Jesus, God does not sim-
ply communicate a ‘message’, God commu-
nicates God’s own personal self-giving: the
message is the revelation of the inner life of
the tri-personal God. This revealed truth also
has implications for multiculturalism. It chal-
lenges our secularism to be more sensitive to
the central importance of ‘relationality’ in hu-
man society. An authentic spirituality of the
Heart thrives on differences; it is about rela-
tionship rather than achievement. And it will
be characterized by genuine ‘mutuality’.

... the Council committed the whole Church to
listen to people of the day in order to under-
stand them and to invent a new kind of dialogue
which would permit the originality of the Gos-
pel message to be carried to the heart of con-
temporary mentalities. Indeed, leaders today
are asked to rediscover the apostolic creativity
and the prophetic power of the first Disciples in
order to face contemporary cultures. 22

The Mission of the Son

Today we have become much more sensitive
to the dynamic interaction between evan-
gelization and culture. I suggest that both of
these elements—evangelization and inculturation—are integral to our understand-
ing of and living out of a genuine spirituality
of the Heart. The basis of this spirituality will
always be the ‘culture’ of God, which wants
to reflect itself in our human culture. The
roots of the spirituality of the Heart are to be
found in God’s way of being rather than in
the human condition. We learn the way of the
heart from God, for we have been made to
mirror the Heart of God.

The act of the incarnation (the inculturation
of the Word) expressed this divine culture in a
humanly historical way that invites us into its
mystery: God invites our hearts into commu-
nion with the Heart of the Son who reveals the
Heart of God. Through this ‘process’ of
inculturation we will come to know our true
selves (our ‘heart’) in communion with the
Heart of God: As you, Father, are in me and I
am in you, may they also be in us, so that the
world may believe that you have sent me (John
17, 21). Inculturation is about an interior
change of heart and relationship:

What matters is to evangelize human culture
and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as
it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital
way, in depth and right to their very roots), in
the wide and rich sense which these terms have
in Gaudium et Spes, always taking the person
as one’s starting-point and always coming back
to the relationships of people among themselves
and with God. (Paul VI, EN 20). 23

Is this not the challenge of living a spiritu-
ality of the heart? Let me quote two passages
from Jules Chevalier’s writings to illustrate
this.
A day will come, when we will know our own heart by knowing the Heart of Jesus; we will be able to say with the apostle: ‘Everything belongs to us, we belong to Jesus, and Jesus belongs to God’ [see 1 Cor, 3, 22]. Then the universe in its entirety will appear as it really is, as a word uttered in time to express the secrets of eternity.

We know from where the Word comes; he comes from the unfathomable depths of the divine essence, from the Heart of God. If he is the splendour of the glory of his Father, he must also be the substantial expression of the Heart of God from which he is brought forth. He must be love eternal. And this infinite love, which constitutes the very depths of God, is contained in a human heart born from the blood of a Virgin. Christ is the whole of God, his living sacrament, his complete gift, he is his Heart with which to love us.

The key test of inculturation is: are people’s lives and cultures being transformed in faith? It is Gospel-faith that needs to be inculturated; for Gospel-culture is about the way of living and reacting to life-situations. ‘Inculturation is the call to relive the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery’ (Arbuckle). The principle of inculturation affirms that Christian faith is not anti-world – and the same must be affirmed of any spirituality of the heart, which seeks to embrace the world in all its diversity: ‘in the drama of inculturation people are telling their stories of what it means for them to wrestle with the tension between their own cultural narratives and those of the Gospel.

The Gospels are full of stories of people who were challenged to let go of what felt culturally familiar and secure. See, for example, the story of Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria (John 4), who had to step out of her own secure religious and cultural world to accept the promise Jesus offered. Another example is the story of the Good Samaritan which challenges the Gospel’s readers to question their own religious and social mythologies; similar is the experience of Peter when challenged by Jesus in Mark 8 over his image of the Messiah.

The spirituality of the Heart challenges us to abandon the mythologies of the insular and defensive culture of a static post-Reformation Catholicism, and our own national story (as evidenced in the ‘culture wars’ of recent history) and interact in Gospel freedom with a changing world.

**Challenges of contemporary culture—a conclusion**

The trend in contemporary culture is to emphasize the immediate, the now, and instant material self-gratification, the globally abstract rather than the personal. It is easy to become acculturated to such impersonal values because they are all around us in the world of the media and of political ideologies. Technological and economic achievement easily becomes more important than human persons or human communication.

The culture of the heart stands for something very different: it is about weaving relationships, and establishing risky inter-personal communication. It challenges us to work hard to develop cross-cultural connections in a cultural environment that tends to divide and isolate. We are well aware that many people are searching for spiritual meaning in a world of instant information and distraction. The spirituality of the heart focuses on the true meaning of the person.

Contemporary culture tends to relativize truth and commitment. ‘In the now society’s electronic eye, no truth is eternal and unchanging. The now culture deals not in commitment but in sensation, not in eternity or in the ‘yet to be’, but in evanescence, in the ephemeral’. The culture of the spirituality of the Heart, on the other hand, is constructed on confidence in the eternal truth of God’s loving and compassionate relationship with and commitment to us, in the central importance of mutual relationships for human truth and meaning, in the lasting quality of interpersonal commitment and dedication to truly human goals of hope and redemption.

We are participants in modern culture and
it is from the context of our own participation in that culture that we dialogue with the world around us. Something that Nicholas Lash wrote about the responsibilities of theologians can challenge us also as prophets of the spirituality of the Heart.

For the theologian to discharge his responsibilities within the community, he must experience the tensions between the spontaneity of faith, the pragmatic exigencies of social order, and the critical quest for truth for its own sake, within his life experience.

NOTES

2. ‘Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded … [but] the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Roman thought .. to reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God.’ (John Paul II, FR 72)
4. quoted Arbuckle, p 3
5. quoted Arbuckle, loc cit.
6. see ibid, p 17.
7. loc cit.
9. Arbuckle, p 167 – 268. As will be obvious, I am very much indebted to the work of Fr Arbuckle for the analysis in the following pages. He has helped me clarify my own thinking!
10. ibid, p 127.
11. quoted in Evangelii Nuntiandi, 3.
12. see Anthony Arthur, ‘Global Communication Culture’ in Compass, 47 (2013.2) p 9ff, for further discussion of modern media and spirituality.
13. See, as an example, the way in which the leper invites Jesus into the ‘culture of his life’ and thus reveals Jesus’ mission to him (Mark 1, 40 – 41).
14. ‘Jesus, himself the Good News, was the very first and the greatest evangelizer; he was so through and through: to perfection and to the point of the sacrifice of his earthly life.’ (EN 7)
15. Arbuckle, p 152
16. quoted Arbuckle, p 149.
19. Jules Chevalier expressed it thus: ‘The Heart of God descends in haste to his creation with the weight of infinite love, and the heart of creation rises toward God, drawn by an attraction that dominates all others in it. It is in Jesus that these two Hearts meet, and they unite so profoundly that the two Hearts become one, and this single Heart is the fruit of heaven and earth’ (Sacré Cœur, p 76).
20. ibid, p 158. See also his encounter with the leper referred to above.
21. ibid, p 165.
23. Father Pedro Arrupe was the one who developed the seminal ideas about culture that Pope Paul enunciated in Evangelii Nuntiandi He described inculturation as the process whereby the Christian faith becomes incarnated within ‘a particular culture, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation’.
24. op cit, p 170. ‘Liberation without inculturation … sees humans simply as economic beings, while inculturation without liberation becomes an elitist, antiquarian quest irrelevant to people’s lives’. (Peter Phan)
26. ‘Increasingly alert to God’s presence the Samaritan woman realizes that her acculturation or acceptance of Christ’s narrative must mean a change in her behaviour. is she prepared for this transformation? She must abandon attachment to aspects of her Samaritan mythology. She assents and immediately goes to share her joy with others’. (Arbuckle, p 181)
27. William Friend, loc cit.
EVOLUTION: SCIENCE AND HISTORY

NEIL BROWN

MODERN SCIENCE’S account of our origins adds a whole new dimension to our self-understanding: a universe bio-friendly within nano seconds of the big bang or bounce or fluctuation, through its thirteen and a half billion year passage, from quarks to atoms to galaxies to solar systems, to our own planet, some nine billion years in the making, born in the Goldilocks region of a small star among hundreds of billions of others. Another three quarters of a billion years were to pass before the first microscopic sparks of life appeared; it took this spark another two and a half billion years to form multicellular life until five hundred and fifty million years ago this life suddenly burgeons with species evolving and adapting amid huge geological shifts, extreme climate changes, mass extinctions and cataclysmic events, culminating in the appearance of the first human beings possibly only some one hundred and fifty thousand years ago.

The New Atheism unilaterally states that there is only one way to read all these facts, that they can all be explained in terms of physics and chemistry, mathematical equations, and the evolutionary struggle for survival, as Richard Dawkins confidently asserts: Human thoughts and emotions emerge from exceeding complex interconnections of physical entities within the brain. An atheist in this sense of philosophical naturalism is somebody who believes there is nothing beyond the natural physical world, no supernatural creature intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, no soul outlasts the body and no miracles—except in the sense of natural phenomenon that we don’t yet understand.1

The purpose of science is to determine and analyse the facts of our material world, to devise theories, to explain them mathematically, and to discover the laws that govern them. Dawkins’ statement is itself an interpretation of the scientific facts, going far beyond what the methods and purposes of science themselves warrant, to assert that there is no other way to read them.

It is, however, possible to examine those facts with a different purpose in mind, to discover what they may say about ourselves, about who and what we might be in our vast universe, a question of value rather than scientific fact.

Any such reinterpretation must stay true to those facts, respecting the methods and findings of science, if there is to be genuine complementarity, rather than conflict, between the stories. Reinterpreting facts from different points of view, as for example in a detective story, is always possible, because facts are always open to being arranged in a different way to discover any new meanings they may contain—it wasn’t the butler after all!

When it comes to human ‘value’, Paul Davies argues that we need to take ‘mind’ seriously when looking at the scientific facts: its ‘characteristic qualities are even more distinctive and totally unlike anything else found in nature... thoughts, purposes, feelings, beliefs—the inner subjective world of the observer... they are a class apart.’2

If you insert this qualitative note into the array of facts, which, of course, the New Atheists won’t allow, the emergence of the human in the aeon long process of evolution becomes more than a study in physics and chemistry, but also a history, a possible different telling of the story—it becomes our story.

The introduction of ‘mind’ and its ‘history’ brings with it self-consciousness, sophisticated language, culture and society, interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, value, agency, and a whole host of human purposes, into the story. Here we are talking of subjects, centres
of activity and purpose, the beings who do science among many other things and who, inescapably, seek meaning for themselves and their world, as Michael Polanyi shows:

These personal powers include the capacity for understanding a meaning, for believing a factual statement, for interpreting a mechanism in relation to its purpose, and on a higher level, for reflecting on problems and exercising originality in solving them. They include, indeed, every manner of reaching convictions by an act of personal judgement. The neurologist exercises these powers to the highest degree in constructing the neurological model of a man—to whom he denies in this very act any similar powers.1

The New Atheists will have none of this. Their view of the ‘human’ remains always tightly tethered to biology. For Colin Hewson, consciousness is an emergent property of sufficiently complex systems, and therefore that it is the brain’s complexity that generates consciousness.4 For Richard Dawkins, our brains are an ‘unexpected bonus’ given the ‘mediocre utilitarian devices necessary for survival’.5

In this view, there are no breaks in the story line, no place for ‘value’ to reside. Luckily, morality is hardwired into our brains as a mix of altruism, natural feelings, and group threats and benefits; while, ‘unluckily’, religion is also present as a ‘misfiring’ of gene clusters.6 Nothing is allowed to gate crash this gathering, even the ‘spiritual’ and ‘mystery’ are neuro-psychological phenomena that point beyond themselves’ but never ‘beyond’ the physical world.8

The crucial question is: What are we losing when we reduce, without residue, our vast array of human characteristics to the biological level of adaptation and survival? For the New Atheist, as for example, A.C. Grayling, it is all physics and chemistry, but this leads to some disturbing results.

First, the best option on offer for human living seems to be a series of conditionals and exclusions, for example:

• to live and be responsible as if one were free, which one is not, we just ‘feel’ as if we were;
• to choose values to live by as if life matters, even if the universe is ultimately pointless, which it is;

• think only within the square, rule out the bigger questions like ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’;
• if you accept your finitude, death will lose its sting;
• if we come to realise ‘our own insignificance in the face of the universe,’ it will enlarge our soul.

Secondly, to make sense of things a whole series of very fragile assumptions have to be made, all with little visible support other than the ‘fact’ that human beings are more complex than other species, assumptions made even more precarious by the determinism of the evolutionary red tooth and claw struggle for survival which is their ever present backdrop. For example:

• human beings have ‘inherent dignity’;
• ethical reflection must start off from the ‘more generous and sympathetic understanding of human nature and the human condition’;
• natural feelings will prompt us to be moral;
• the value of responsibility, generosity, care and sympathy can be seen in themselves;
• murder, rape, torture, oppression, injustice, ‘are not to be tolerated anywhere at any time’ (even though killing, lying and cheating, all have evolutionary advantages);
• life is ‘never lost to human history.’9

These values seem to appear from nowhere and hang in mid air desperately looking for ‘facts’ to support them. They hang suspended because they are leftovers from previous religious thinking shown to be ‘illusory’ by the New Atheism. In an age of conspicuous consumption, competitiveness, an overriding focus on wealth accumulation, and a utilitarian mindset, those ‘relief’ assumptions appear more and more ‘illusory’ themselves.

This reduction of everything human to biol-

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ogy erodes the foundations of the value and meaning of the lives we lead. This is not to deny, however, that we are products of an evolutionary process, where laws, algorithms, physics and chemistry, still operate in the way we function as embodied beings. But it is not all of who and what we are and we are still a work in progress.

This work in progress is now a work of civilization and culture as much as biology. The biology remains; we are not, however, its prisoners. Culture, through our powers of critical thinking and creative agency, is able to remake what nature has produced to discover and create meaning and value, and to change for better or worse the conditions of our lives. Biology may be the first word, but it is not the last word.

Civilization and culture over time enrich language and give rise to communities, traditions and skills, which create structures of interpretation and value, by means of which we experience, interpret, judge and act within our world. Adaptation and the struggle for survival have given us much, but are not capable of providing ‘truth’, ‘goodness’ and the appreciation of ‘beauty’. John Haught, for example, points out the contradiction involved in trying to put everything into the evolutionary basket:

The question I have for you, then, is this: Given the avowedly exhaustive explanation of your intelligence in terms of purely unintelligent causes, why should I, or anybody else including you, take seriously the claim that this purely adaptive instrument is now making? Why should I assume that this adaptive instrument (your mind) is able to discover truth? Obviously, you want me to accept your mind’s evolutionary explanation of intelligence as true... But how can I accept this as true if, at the same time, your own intelligence may simply be engaging in one adaptive—and that means possibly deceptive—exercise? 

Science itself is a product of culture, not biology, and it draws its confidence in its reasoning and investigative powers from deep resources in mind and human agency.

Faith also has its roots in this level of being, in our uniqueness, our deep questioning, our restlessness, and our sense of how much depends on our agency. Unlike science, faith is about value. If faith is to relate its story to the account of science, it will do so from the point of view of the inherent worth and potential it discovers and affirms in human beings in their openness to the future, as John Haught again explains:

I would submit here that the novel informational possibilities that evolution has available to it arise from the always dawning future. It is the arrival of the future, and not the grinding onward of an algorithmic past, that accounts for the novelty in evolution. Without the persistent coming of an unrehearsed future, the present and the past would have no opening onto the path of transformation. Evolution is rendered possible only because of the temporal clearing made available when the future faithfully introduces relevant new possibilities.

Retelling the story of evolution from a faith perspective does not necessarily mean that we do so with ‘design’ in mind. Science vehemently rejects any suggestion of ‘design’, as do the New Atheists. Some authors, such as the distinguished philosopher Alvin Plantinga, continue to argue cogently for the presence of design. Whatever the outcome of the debate, perhaps faith might learn that reticence is better than impulsive conjecture when it comes to determining what God might or might not be doing. In this case particularly we may do well to keep God’s rejoinder to Job from the whirlwind before us: ‘Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?’ (Jb 38:4)

Rather than ‘design’, John Haught suggests that faith has other ways of approaching the scientific account:

My thesis, however, is that cosmic purpose lies deeper than either Darwin or design. Cosmic purpose is more appropriately thought of in terms of nature’s promise than of the ‘design’ that appears on the surface of this great text. The idea of ‘design’ in any case, is too brittle to represent the richness, subtlety and depth of the life-process and its raw openness to the future. Life is more than ‘order’. Life requires also the continual admittance of disruptive ‘novelty’, and so the idea of ‘promise’ serves more suitably than ‘design’ to indicate life’s and the universe’s inherent meaning.

Faith’s interpretation of our prehistory discovers and affirms ‘subjectivity’, the ‘intelligence...
gibility’, the ‘unexpected’, the ‘surprising’, the ‘novel’, and the ‘openness to the future’ of the whole aeon long process. We are reading backwards as well as forwards. Science shows us the laws, numbers, chance, events, algorithms and survival strategies involved. Yet here we are! We can stay with the bare scientific facts, but the most wondrous new fact of all is that we exist with all our potentiality and possibilities. Faith’s explanation of this fact is that there is ‘presence’, ‘gift’, ‘promise’, ‘blessing’ and ‘hope’ embedded in our history.

Our Scriptures deal, not with great heroes and world shattering events, but with the way, for the most part, ordinary human beings, rich and poor, amid their striving and strife, success and failure, their human vulnerability and fragility, are given to see a ‘love’ beyond all telling in their creation. Ultimately it is from this vantage point that Christian faith tells our story and discovers meaning.

For A.C. Grayling the most important question we can ask ourselves is, ‘Do I or do I not wish to commit suicide?’ That way we can find out, he says, whether or not we have ‘reasons for living’. The answer to such a test is, however, totally unpredictable—a bad hair day could easily do us in!

The inherent dignity of human beings and their strivings is embedded in the whole faith project: it discovers new ‘facts’ and provides support for all our ‘assumptions’ about what is worthwhile in our lives. It enables us to survive, not just bad hair days, but all the challenges and difficulties of our lives, even the most calamitous.

With the hindsight of history we can now understand that the Marxist attempt to see all culture as just superstructure and so to reduce everything to economics and the class struggle was a disaster. So too are all other modern attempts to reduce the human to some material basis, such as instinct, the will to power - or, with the New Atheism, biology. The outcome of losing our fundamental beliefs, Michael Polanyi warns, is that:

Then man dominates a world in which he himself does not exist. For with his obligations he has lost his voice and his hope, and been left behind meaningless to himself.15

This faith story we tell is crucial, because we don’t just discover the richness of our inner lives, we create it through our culture, our history, our values, and our individual striving. The beliefs, values, truths, and ideas forged in our experience define who we are as individuals and communities. In faith, this striving is affirmed in God’s original blessing of creation.

Our new modern story shows us to be not just isolated individuals, but as beings who have emerged with other creatures from elements formed in the burning of stars and from the nurture of our own planet. Our lives have untold depths. And our possibilities remain unimaginable. Preserving and fostering ‘humanity’ into the future will be one of the chief tasks of faith.

NOTES

6. See Objecting to God, 136-170; The God Delusion, 163-207; 211-33.
8. ibid., 39-52; 138-77.
12. Where the Conflict Really Lies, 225-64.
The Imagination Versus Skepticism

Apparently, it was a turning point in the career of C.S. Lewis when he became convinced that the imagination could be a weapon against skepticism. Anyone who has read The God Argument by the atheist author A.C. Grayling, or the recent debate between theist author Deepak Chopra and atheist Leonard Mlodinow, will be surprised to hear that. Neither atheist expends any effort refuting the alleged theistic implications of the imagination. It scarcely figures at all. How does it figure?

That question takes me back to the University of Adelaide in 1961 to the Philosophy 1 subject in the department of J.J.C. Smart, who achieved fame with his argument that the mind just is the brain. The set text by John Hospers, An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis, presented a case against religion very similar to the one now being put to the general public by the current atheist writers. That is not surprising, since it is essentially the empiricist argument first developed by the philosopher David Hume (1711-76), and reinforced in the 20th Century by Bertrand Russell.

As I had come from a religious background, the highly developed skeptical onslaught hit me like a brick wall. To the rescue came Dostoyevsky, bearing works of the imagination. First came Crime and Punishment, the great novel about bad conscience. The current secular analysis of that is that we internalise commands from our “significant others” in the social environment, i.e., those people, whether they be parents, teachers, sporting heroes or peers, who matter to us, and when we contravene what they approve of, we experience guilt, remorse, loss of face, etc. We have to concede that this social conscience exists. We all have significant others, and going against their grain makes us uneasy.

But beneath that, is something further, “the still, small voice”, which the hero, Raskolnikov, could not shrug off. It looked convincing. That it was, was strengthened in my mind by another work of the imagination, Francis Thompson’s epic poem of desperate conscience “The Hound of Heaven”. Having read that, Ivan Karamazov’s bars against theism in The Brothers Karamazov seemed a straightforward instance of distracted conscience.

Dostoyevsky wrote of himself that he depicted all the depths of the human soul. He did. The problem was that he didn’t depict the heights, the breakthrough into sanctity. But Tolstoy did. In his short story, ‘Fr. Sergius’, he writes about a military officer who has a brilliant career, but who became disillusioned with a ‘successful’ life, and joined a monastery, where he became a renowned monk. However, he has a crashing fall. He fled the monastery, and became a wandering pilgrim. He found, when he helped people, like writing letters for the illiterate, that ‘little by little, God began to reveal himself within him.’

In another of his short stories, ‘What Men Live By’, Tolstoy wrote of an angel who was cast from heaven to earth in order to learn three things. When he had learned them, he smiled, and became bright as day; he was transfigured. I learned later that transfiguration is real, not just fictional. A case in point was the joint transfiguration of the Russian nobleman Motovilov, and St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-83), perhaps the greatest saint of the 19th century.

This description of the depths of the human soul and the heights it can reach has never been matched by the atheist authors who are making such an impact to-day. Compared to Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, the works of skeptical polemics like Grayling and Mlodinow are shallow.

Something else comes out of the comparison, which is that the kind of concepts used in the debate between theists and atheists does not have the same effect on the personality as feelings do. That does not mean that such concepts have no value. On the contrary, they have great value. But for all that, they do not reach as far into the personality as feelings. To use a metaphor from Dostoyevsky, our feelings go down into another world.

—Reg Naulty
STUDENTS’ THEOLOGICAL PERCEPTIONS

A Case Study

MARGARET GHOSN, DOMINIC AL-TAKCHY, MARIA CHALHOUB, YVONNE MOUSSA, CHANICE NAHMY and ANTOINETTE NAJIM

Introduction

An enrichment programme for students was established a number of years ago at Our Lady of Lebanon College. In 2013 staff was again asked to nominate students to participate in the programme. The students who accepted being part of the enrichment programme were asked to choose a topic and a staff mentor. This paper describes the research undertaken by an enrichment group consisting of Year 10 students that chose to further their knowledge in the area of ‘Religion’. It presents their findings and their theological analysis of the data and concludes with a theological commentary from the teacher mentor.

Getting a Working Theme Together

The first step involved discussions and throwing around ideas. From this the enrichment group chose to conduct student surveys on topics of personal interest. Topics that emerged included perceptions on: church attendance; suffering; free will; the body; the Eucharist; and the Pope. The enrichment students were encouraged to write questions that were clear and unambiguous, including both open and closed-ended questions, to elicit information. The number of questions per topic was to fall in the 2-4 range in order to elicit enough information to study but not too much that would overwhelm the students.

The enrichment students were given a month’s time-frame to interview their peers. It was emphasised that all who partook in the surveys had to be volunteers, covering Years 7-12 and of both genders, in order to get a cross section of the College and young people’s perceptions on religious issues.

The next stage of gathering the data involved sifting through the information and noting what common responses emerged and whether any responses stood out. The enrichment students had to infer their conclusions from the responses given.

THE FINDINGS—STUDENTS’ INTERPRETATION

Church Attendance

Students were asked whether they attended church regularly accompanied by a parent. The results suggested that as age increased, the likelihood of students attending church decreased. However a minority of students still undertook their Christian obligations, irrespective of their parents. Findings suggest lack of transportation, parental support and increasing workloads affect church attendance.

The second question focussed on participation levels of youth in parish activities. The survey data revealed the involvement of youth in their parish activities was somewhat lacking. The mature age students were likely to attend parish activities but their participation levels were average. The argument for these results centred around the busyness of mod-
ern day lifestyles.

**Analysis of Suffering**

The following question was asked in the analysis of suffering: What do you understand by suffering? The most common response was that suffering is a part of life and that it involved pain, both physical and emotional. This idea of suffering reflected the individual’s upbringing and attitude towards life and death. Other individual responses included suffering is the cross that one carries due to sin and that one inflicts suffering upon oneself.

The second question put forward was: Is suffering and pain the same thing? The most common answer was that suffering and pain are the same. However other students indicated that suffering and pain are not the same and justified this by saying you can feel pain without suffering yet you can suffer without feeling pain. Furthermore suffering induces a more spiritual heartfelt response, while pain is a temporary physical and emotional state of instability.

The third question in this area was: How do you deal with your suffering? Many students dealt with their suffering through prayer. A significant number turned to aspects of music, exercising, meditation, talking to someone or keeping it bottled up.

Finally the question was asked: Why do we suffer? Responses suggested it is an inevitable part of life, reflective of sin. Others stated that suffering is unavoidable; a spiritual purification for our transgressions; or that God sends suffering to test our faith and love.

The survey data indicated students are familiar with suffering. Yet, in saying so, the students interviewed did not voice the opinion that suffering can have positive implications such as one gains insight into one’s faith and spirituality.

**Free Will**

Students were asked if they had any issues that may be ‘grey’ areas in terms of Church teachings. Generally, there were no concerns. Most students took on board the view of the Church on a wide range of issues, aside from the much publicised matter of homosexuality.

Older students (Years 9-12) were more likely to express concern in the area of homosexuality than younger students (Years 7-8). According to the survey, most students take the approach of consulting a priest to discuss the issue of homosexuality, as it was seen by them as a trustworthy Catholic approach. Notably, many older students additionally research into the issue for themselves, seeking the Magisterium of the Church as well as scriptures to inform their conscience, as opposed to the younger students who were less likely to exercise their free will during the decision-making process.

The understanding of free will is seen as the ability to make our own individual choices. It is a God-given role that allows us to accept or dissent from a certain belief. It is a privilege that allows for one’s control over one’s own life, reflecting the Christian belief and intrinsic principles of freedom. So the question was put forth: How significant is free will in your decision-making when regarding church teachings? The most prevalent response was to educate yourself on the issue and weigh out all the consequences. By exercising your free will, you choose what decision to make in accordance with your conscience, research and church teachings. The younger students who had limited knowledge on their faith were more likely to take the Church’s approach, while older students were more open to studying the issue and making their own learned decisions.

**Human Body**

This survey was conducted to identify the students’ perspective on the importance of the human body. The majority of students answered that they should treat their bodies with
respect. Many students said they achieved this by maintaining a healthy diet and exercising regularly and that by treating their bodies with respect, they were able to respect others. This response is in agreement with the Christian belief that one’s body should be respected, supported by Paul’s teachings. The junior students were more likely to say that their bodies were not sacred, as they believed they were no more important than any other creature that God created.

Students surveyed in regards to the second question about sex before marriage unanimously agreed that sex before marriage was wrong. They believed that people should withhold from sexual acts because engaging in these prior to marriage is not an expression of love but a way of achieving personal pleasure. These responses were in conformity with the teachings of the Catholic Church. The majority of students recognised their bodies as sacred because they believed that each human is made ‘in the image and likeness of God.’ They believed that their bodies were a gift and created for a purpose.

**Understanding of the Eucharist**

Sixty-five per cent of the students surveyed revealed that they received the Eucharist at least once a week, especially at Sunday church services. Twenty-five per cent of the students surveyed revealed they partake of the sacrament of the Eucharist every two weeks and ten per cent of the students revealed that they received the Eucharist only at School Masses.

The majority of students believed that Eucharist was the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ and the reason for their statement was because Jesus said he was ‘the Bread of Life.’ Students in Years 7 and 8 recognised the Eucharist as a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ. They did not believe that Jesus is present in the Eucharist, due to their limited knowledge.

* * *

**Opinions on the Pope**

According to the survey results, many believe that the new Pope, Francis, should be assisting with social justice and equality, giving his blessing to the poor, sick and homeless. The Pope should be finding new laws and rules of the Catholic Church, ways to bring Catholics back to faith, uniting all Christians under faith, encouraging Christians to follow and know more about their faith and to be an inspiring role model.

All students surveyed agreed that Pope Francis promotes the values of Christianity through his care for others and respect for each person no matter their status. Many believe that Pope Francis chose his name through the influence of St Francis and the emphasis on humility.

Many of the opinions regarding Pope Francis suggest he has a unique person that can change the world, guided by divine inspiration and was a prominent and beloved figure for Catholics.

**STUDENTS’ SUMMARY**

The enrichment programme allowed the group to further their knowledge in the area of ‘Religion.’ Through the study of various aspects including church attendance, suffering, free will, the human body, the Eucharist and opinions on the Pope, the surveyed students provided findings that expressed the perceptions of youth within today’s society.

Even though survey numbers were limited, the questions were broad and responses were varied. In order to truly find, you must first search, and through these surveys, topics of interest were explored and knowledge was gained by the enrichment students.

**A Take on Student Theology**

The evaluation of the data provided by responses to the surveys may be considered quite brief and simple. The enrichment stu-
udents interpreted the findings along the lines of their own understanding and experience, and this at times contributed towards a more conservative approach to the interpretation of data.

If one was to interpret the survey responses as a theologian of many years’ experience, one would identify here a school cohort that is quite ‘religious’ and faithful to Catholic teaching compared to the majority of young Australians as revealed in findings by Phillip Hughes in *Putting Life Together: Findings from Australian Youth Spirituality Research* (2007) and Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton and Ruth Webber in *The Spirit of Generation Y. Young People’s spirituality in a changing Australia* (2007). Research and reflection informs one’s interpretation of data, yet does this knowledge also colour one’s interpretation?

For the enrichment students it was a given that students accept, often without question, the teachings of the Church, or see the priest as the final authority on issues, or acknowledge that suffering is sent by God to purify one, *etc*. For these young people the practice of questioning and challenging and stepping out of boundaries was neither viewed as part of their religious practice nor understanding.

The *status quo* was generally accepted, although there were emerging indications that religion is not always black and white. The issue of homosexuality and attendance at Mass indicates that young people move towards personal decision making in regards to religious positions, but this can be a gradual process.

A seasoned theologian has critique as part of one’s tools, and would likely have honed in on the responses of students, concluding that the continued religious maintenance and practices by this school cohort may be due to the ethno-religious background that includes a tight-knit Maronite community that holds tightly to its culture and faith.

Yet on the other hand, young people, unlike seasoned theologians, are not commonly dissidents and their theological outlook often begins conservative. Their religious interest, if pursued, will over time become exploratory and possibly more inclusive. Yet this will depend on their mentors, their teaching and formation, and the ability to discern from the prolific and varied information that is presented to them.

**Conclusion**

Sitting in the background observing and listening to these enrichment students unravel the survey findings, lively debate ensured. There were issues that polarised the group, such as the ‘necessity’ of attending Sunday Mass, while other issues elicited opinions leading to further discernment.

What emerged overall from this programme included findings which revealed to the enrichment students, a College student body that in general still practices the Maronite Catholic faith. It also revealed that there are querying minds. The unexpected responses opened and challenged the minds of the enrichment students to a wider view of how ‘Religion’ is understood and practiced. This can become a starting point for a more open and questioning stance on their behalf in regards to how they tend to view ‘Religion.’

Through the process of leading them to elicit responses from other young people and analysing data in a meaningful way, the enrichment students were confronted with perceptions that did not necessarily conform to their ‘religious’ views and so the practice of theological discernment began. If the practice of delving into unfamiliar religious terrain of their peers excited them, we may be on the way to forming open-minded and thoughtful theologians.
THE ART OF THEOLOGY

Mary as Bride of Christ

MARY BARKER and MERVYN DUFFY SM

Mariology has progressed by applying biblical imagery to the relationship between Mary and Jesus. 'Mother to Son' is supplemented by 'Bride to Husband', which in the high Middle Ages was expressed in powerfully erotic words and imagery. The article traces the theological discussion through patristic writings and then considers some public artworks that show the wide reception of the themes discussed.

Liturgy and theology use paradox to express the mystery of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The central paradox of a mother who is a virgin is enlarged and echoed when other biblical themes are applied to Mary and her Son. St Paul styled Jesus as the Second and Last Adam, Irenaeus (c.130-202) extended that typology to Mary and cast her as the New Eve. The parallel is not exact because Mary is the mother of Jesus, while Eve was the wife of Adam, yet the power of liturgical imagery and a mystical strand in theology are untroubled by apparent contradiction. Interpreting Mary as a figure representing the Church enabled the Pauline image of the Church as bride of Christ to be applied to Mary. Mariological development progressed more by a series of symbolic leaps than any logical progression. As will be shown this led to imagery of the relationship between Mary and Jesus that the piety of our age finds shocking. One leap in the series is the application to the Virgin Mary of the most erotic section of the Old Testament.

In elegant and sensuous prose the Song of Songs of the Old Testament articulates arguably humankind’s finest attempt to describe the indescribable—to express in terms of human beauty, God’s abiding and loving concern for his people Israel. A lover, described as ‘King’ (1:4 and 12) or Solomon (3:7 and 9) and his beloved, identified as ‘the Shulamite’ (7:1), address each other in verse of the greatest intimacy: ‘You ravish my heart my sister, my promised bride (4:9)’ he says; ‘Let my Beloved come into his garden, let him taste its rarest fruits’ she replies (4:16). They are united, divided, sought and found, constantly and seductively seeking each other’s presence. Attributed to Solomon but now believed to be of unknown authorship, it is dated to around 900 BC.

This idealized language of love is expressed in conjugal terms. Insofar as it is an expression of God’s love for his creation, the greatest and most powerful metaphor is articulated in a manner closest to human understanding—the love of a man for a woman united in a vowed commitment: ‘my promised bride’ he calls her. The familiarity of these words from the Hebrew scriptures easily found its way into the Gospels and offered a new dimension to the apostles striving as they were, to understand both Christ’s human presence and Christ as fulfillment of the Messianic promise. John the Evangelist, for instance, uses ‘bridegroom’ as a metaphor for Christ’s coming (3:29) and mentions, but does not identify, His bride. The Author of the Book of Revelation expands this insight. Here the bride becomes the ‘New Jerusalem’ and the ‘Bride that the Lamb has
married’ (Revelation 21: 2, 9-10).

The Apostolic Fathers built on the words of the Gospels so as to establish within the various religious and philosophical currents of the time the identity of Christ as true God and true man. Hippolytus of Rome (d.235 AD) describes the movement of God into the human sphere through the act of procreation:

Being outside of the flesh, the word of God took upon himself the holy flesh of the holy Virgin; like a bridegroom he prepared himself that garment which he would weave together with his sufferings on the cross … in this way he intended to obtain salvation for man, who was perishing.

It was Ephrem the Syrian (306-373) who first explicitly identified Mary as the Bride of Christ. This great doctor of Syrian Christianity was one of the first Fathers of the Church to allow living sentiments of love and devotion towards the mother of God to emanate from his writings. He imitates the cadences of the Song of Songs in his own poetry, insisting on Mary’s sinlessness, her spiritual beauty and her holiness. He reflects on her relationship with her Son who is at the same time the Son of God and the promised One:

For I am [your] sister from the House of David, who is second father. Again, I am mother because of Your conception, and bride am I because of your chastity. Handmaiden and daughter of blood and water [am I] who you redeemed and baptised.

Ambrose (d.397) added a further dimension; he identified Mary as type and image of the Church. ‘Well [does the Gospel say] married but a virgin, because she is a type of the Church, which is also married but remains immaculate’. It was Ambrose who identified Mary as the ‘Shulamite’ from the Song of Songs: ‘From the womb of Mary was brought into the world the heap of wheat surrounded by lilies (cf. Song of Songs 7:1) when Christ was born of her’. In giving birth to Christ Mary fulfilled Old Testament longing and ‘contracted a maternal relationship with all men on a spiritual level. She contributes to the building up of the Church into the body of Christ’.

The great Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 AD) confirmed this theology:

How is it that you do not belong to the Virgin’s birth, if you are members of Christ? Mary gave birth to our Head, the Church gave birth to you. Indeed the Church also is both virgin and mother, mother because of her womb and her charity, virgin because of her integrity and piety.

The double thread of Mariology—Mary as Mother and Mary as Ecclesia/spouse was set to music in the Akathist Hymn c. 5th-6th cent. It has been attributed to many, to Romanos the Melodist (sixth cent), to George of Pisia (seventh cent), Germanus of Constantinople (eighth cent). It is the most profound and ancient of all Marian hymns, poetic, theological and contemplative, every alternative stanza finishes with ‘Hail Mary Bride’. It is sung to this day in the Eastern Church.

Despite the conjugal imagery it is clear
from the beginning that it was all to do with virginity. This glorious nuptial language translated from the Old Testament to the New, was to be lived in the mind, in the realm of imagination, exultation and sublimated desire. As Marina Warner points out, the love songs of Solomon and the Shulamite were predominantly applied to the love of Christ and the consecrated life of virgin or nun. The counter-intuitive ideology surrounding Mary’s place as mother, spouse and bride of the Song of Songs and type of the Church, limited this fragile understanding to the learned and cloistered.

It was not until the twelfth century that Mariological mysticism reached its high point in the impassioned love and language of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). In a series of eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs Bernard identified Christ as the lover of the Old Testament, as love itself and Mary as both bride and spouse. Bernard’s commentaries ‘took a surprising turn towards heightened eroticism paralleling explicitly spiritual adoration with the act of sexual love’. Both carnal and spiritual love is expressed in the same language. According to Bernard, carnal love disturbs the spotless soul, however, pure love, the leap of the soul towards God as love itself, restores prelapsarian purity—that idyllic state before the Fall. That pure love took a further step in Bernard’s theology; it was expressed most intensely in the visual sign of motherhood—that of the mother feeding the child from her breasts, in the milk which gave life to the human form. In this case it should be remembered that milk was understood at the time as processed blood so that milk represented both human nourishment and Christ’s supreme sacrifice. That love was both gendered and genderless, Christ became both lover and mother. Writing to his community Bernard says: ‘suck not so much on the wounds as on the breasts of the crucified ... He will be your mother and you will be his son’.

Bernard of Clairvaux’s emotional prose was not entirely original. He was responding to the discourse of the age. It is not surprising that at the same time as he was formulating his theology, the High Middle Ages was captured by ideas of courtly love. Courtly love was the ‘pure love’ of the troubadours. Tied initially to the love poems of Ovid, courtly love was the unrequited love of knight or courtier for an unattainable noblewoman expressed in elevating music and emotional and erotic verse. Such love was a secular version of Bernard’s spiritual yearnings but it gave him the language and the disposition to allow his imagination full reign.

Some early attempts had been made to illustrate the mystical and ambiguous relationship between Christ and his mother. These were limited to illuminations that accompanied texts from the Song of Songs in Bibles and manuscripts. It was not until the twelfth century that artists sought to translate such complex theological concepts into public art. Eighteen months after a visit by Bernard to Rome, Innocent II commissioned a vast mosaic that enshrined the ‘passionate imagination of the saint who engineered it’.

In the central apse of S. Maria in Trastevere a mosaic, created in 1140-1143, shows a crowned Mary the Mother of God as both Queen of Heaven and Ecclesia, the embodiment of the Church. Seated close to her Son on a back-veiled throne Mary, dressed in the robes and jewels of a Roman princess, unfurls a scroll which reads: Leva eius sub capite meo et dextera illius amplexabit me (His left hand should be under my head; and his right hand should embrace me - Song of Songs 8:3). The book on Christ’s knee repeats a phrase inspired also by the Song of Songs: Veni electa mea, ponam in te tronam meam (Come my beloved and I will put my throne in you) Mary and Christ are identified as the lover and the spouse. The intimacy of the words is repeated in the gesture: Christ encircles his Mother within his right arm. From an abstract concept, Mary becomes a living, visible woman, loving and loved in turn but she is always less than her son. Art has a language of its own.
and the importance of the subject is often shown by size. Thus in the mosaic Mary is smaller than Christ, she sits at his right hand, her fingers, while still holding the scroll, point to her son who is at the same time the Son of God. Amidst a blaze of gold, Mother and Son reign together in glory but they reign together in the intimate union of mother and spouse, son and Son.

The Franciscan saint Bonaventure (1221-1274), followed Bernard’s passion for the mystical union bedded in the Song of Songs. Saint Francis himself had couched his dedication to the virtue of poverty as ‘Lady Poverty’ in terms of marital love; his own symbolic marriage to the Virgin became the subject of artistic fantasy. Bonaventure was to follow with his own commentary, which further developed the intimate nature of Mary’s relationship with her son.

It was left to the artist Cimabue (1240-1302) to convert those religious concepts into visual form and he embraced Bonaventure’s understanding. The position of Christ and his mother/bride becomes more explicit in a fresco in the Upper Church apse of San Francesco, Assisi.

Cimabue ends his life cycle of Mary with a central Assumption that responds to Bonaventure’s writings yet draws directly on the artistic conventions of the age. Ancient images portrayed sexual love with a contrived overlapping of the legs. Relationship is conveyed, it is one of possession, but little warmth is shown. Illustrations for the Song of Songs were to provide a licit visual convention for conjugal love. An Austrian model book dating from the 13th cent from which artist’s could draw inspiration, shows a fully clothed couple surrounded by offspring, seated together with their arms around each other in a loving embrace, the man has his leg placed over his wife’s left thigh. It is emblematic of the relationship between ‘physical and emotional intimacy and procreation in legitimate marriage’.

Cimabue’s fresco adopts this convention. Christ and Mary are shown seated on a single throne within an ascending mandorla (an almond-shaped aureole of light surrounding the figure of a holy person, most often used for the figure of Christ). Mary is typically shown on Christ’s right as she is shown in the mosaic in S. Maria in Trastevere and in most other heavenly scenes of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin, a pattern established in the Old Testament where the Queen is described as sitting at the right hand of the King (Kings 2: 19, Psalm 44:10). In this fresco Cimabue departs from the tradition. Mary is shown to the left of Christ emphasizing explicitly the line from the canticle that says: ‘His left arm is under my head’ (Song of Songs 2:3). He sits with his left arm high around her shoulder, his right hand clasps hers, she rests her right hand on his shoulder and leans her head against his cheek. While their upper extremities are joined in a tender embrace again there is a break from the accepted convention, here it is Mary’s leg that is placed over Christ’s thigh.

Due to deterioration of the fresco the imagery of Cimabue’s painting had for many years remained largely unresolved. In 1956 an art historian, Millard Meiss, discovered a long-ignored winged altarpiece in the collection of the Rothschild family the central panel of which replicates, almost line for line, Cimabue’s fresco. This has enabled a closer analysis of the manner and meaning of the iconography of Cimabue’s work. The Rothschild panel, now known as the Stella Altarpiece, the work of the Cesi Master (c. 1298-1305), visualizes in brilliant colour the relationship of Christ as bridegroom and Mary as his bride from the Song of Songs. Dressed in a bejeweled gown, Mary and her son are backed by a star-filled firmament. Again the figures are seated enthroned within a mandorla their upper bodies locked in the same intimate embrace. Christ has his left arm around his mother’s shoulders, she looks downwards, resting her head against his cheek her right hand on his shoulder. Their other hands rest tenderly
on each other’s. Christ’s feet are bare and rest on the lower arc of the mandorla.\(^{18}\) One of Mary’s shod feet is placed beside her son’s, the other hangs free, high above the edge of Christ’s gown. Her left leg is clearly raised, crossed over and placed over the left thigh of her son ‘taking him into her possession as she did in taking him into her womb’. Mary is of her son as he is of her. The sexual connotations of these works have long been observed.\(^{19}\) There is, as Lavin states, a ‘problem of decorum implicit in the image of Mary and the adult Christ locked in a passionate embrace’\(^{20}\). Here the words of the Song of Songs and the intuitions of the Church Fathers are interpreted in a visual form which is at the same time both sexually confronting yet theologically sound.

The frankness of this iconography gives another dimension to the ponderings of the theologians. In all its colour and beauty something more has been added, an aesthetic value that makes the concept more than words, theology has been made visible.

Two further examples dating from the first half of the fourteenth century can be found in the Capella della Madonna, Sacro Speco, Subiaco and the Monastero di Santa Maria di Monteluco, Perugia. Both adopt the same intimate positions for the upper bodies of Mary and Jesus but the legs are placed side by side.

Such visual and philosophical theology would make little sense in today’s world defined as it is by a broad-based relativism. The hard-edged sexuality of our times leaves little room for the concepts of pure beauty and pure love expressed in terms of unrequited conjugal love and obvious sexual expression. Ideas of the beautiful have changed. Bernard’s mystical meanderings would seem simply the overcharged fantasies of a disturbed mind. He was a product of his times. His birth at the high point of the Middle Ages allowed him an emotional vocabulary which transcended human experience and acknowledged a world which could only be described in the language of ecstasy.

The theologian Richard Viladesau describes what he refers to as ‘the moving point of view’. From earliest Christian times, he says, the primary role of art was at the service of religion. Post-Reformation ideology and iconoclasm changed that trajectory forever. Freed from such restraints art became increasingly secularized. Profane subjects came to dominate painting. A broad generalization sees Romanticism and landscape surrender realism to impressionism and to a later pursuit of the transcendent. In a post-modern world the ‘subject matter of painting becomes painting itself’. The process, the viewing, the methods and materials ‘canvas and paint, colour and form’ carry an aesthetic value of their own.\(^{21}\) Art, once God-centered and implicitly accessible to the masses, now assumes an elite status, revealing itself only to the initiated. It cannot now be captured for a single cause; it must operate at its own level, open to the interpretation of the individual viewer. Unconstrained by an underlying and rigid theology, art accesses a spirituality, an internal thought process, which need have nothing to do with religion but simply seeks to awaken the viewer to a different mode of thinking and seeing.

There is a theory that people are affected by the art they see. An early writer, Giovanni Dominici in his Rule for the Management of Family Care (1403) suggests that if a child is to be brought up ‘for God’ they should be surrounded by beautiful things, images of Christ, Mary and the Saints, in order that they may have a ‘desire for Christ, hatred of sin, disgust at vanity and a shrinking from bad companions’\(^{22}\). If this could still be so then what more beautiful way to describe God’s love for his Church than in the embrace of a son for his mother, a man for his bride. The power of the image to traverse the immensity between things of heaven and those of earth is now little intimated or even understood. In an ultimately pragmatic world something beautiful has been lost.
NOTES

2. Christ and Antichrist 4; PG 10, 732; GCS 1, 2, 6-7 quoted in Gambero, 87.
4. Quoted in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 63.
5. De *institutione virginis* 94; PL 16, 342 quoted in Gambero, 198.
6. Sermo 192, PL 38, 1012-13; NBA 32/1, 52 quoted in Gambero, 223.
7. Gambero: 338
10. Warner, 128.
14. This is a direct quotation from an antiphon for the feast of the Assumption found in the eighth century *Liber Pontificalis*. Warner, 122.
16. Lavin, 18.
17. Lavin, 16.
18. See Bridgeman Art Library, Maestro di Cesi.

*Mary and Christ enthroned: Apse Mosaic of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, ca.1140 AD.*
The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the readings for Sundays between April and July, from the Fifth Sunday of Lent to the Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

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

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

When we return back to the readings of Ordinary Time on July 6, we will see how the first reading for these Sundays in Ordinary Time covers a wide range of First Testament literature, with a particular focus on the prophets. In each case, the theme of the gospel has determined the selection of this reading. It is useful to be reminded (and to celebrate) the First Testament readings in their own right. They are stories of Israel’s experience of God. They remain foundational for contemporary disciples of Jesus.

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

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

3. The Gospel readings over the Easter Season continue the celebration of Easter Sunday. They help us affirm the ongoing presence of the Risen Jesus in our midst. Easter 6, for example, continues a theme from previous Sundays of preparing for the coming of Jesus’ Spirit. The Ascension Gospel of June 1 is a summary of Matthew’s Gospel. In a simple, climactic scene, the Easter Jesus empowers his followers to teach and make disciples of all peoples. In light of this, Pentecost becomes a liturgical highpoint. The Spirit’s presence breathed into the community by the Johannine Jesus (Jn 20) confirms God’s empowerment of the disciples.

When we return to Ordinary Time on July 6, after the Solemnities of the three previous Sundays, we also return to Matthew’s Gospel. As we remind ourselves that this gospel is addressed to a Jewish followers of Jesus in the later part of the first century, we note how Jewish themes permeate these gospel readings. The selections from Mt 11 to 14 enable us to experience the figure of Wisdom revealed in Matthew’s Jesus: He teaches, calls into discipleship, nurtures and empowers. It is this figure that is important for a world searching for wisdom today, and a Christian community seeking how to form itself as an authentic revealer of God’s presence to this world.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS


April 17—Holy Thursday, Ex 12:1-8, 11-14. The Passover meal of deliverance. 1 Cor 11:23-26 Paul remembers Jesus’ last meal with his friends before death. Jn 13:1-15. Jesus’ act of foot-washing is a symbol of service and solidarity Theme—Leadership: Jesus is the one who leads us to God. Leadership is the cry of our Church, world, community. Who reveals to us the most authentic values of human existence?


April 19 & 20—Easter: Mt 28:1-10. The Risen Jesus brings joy to the women who come to the tomb. Violence is overturned. Theme—Joy. In a world and among people who seem so sad and preoccupied with survival, this Easter message is central, offering a renewed vision: He is Risen!
April 27—Easter 2: Acts 2:42-47. The Jerusalem followers of Jesus are portrayed as sharing a common life. This is the fruit of Jesus’ spirit active amongst them. 1 Pet 1:3-9. The writer expresses the fruit of baptismal life. Jn 20:19-31. The Risen Jesus offers peace to the assembled disciples: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ Theme—Being Blessed. The Easter presence of Jesus brings God’s blessedness to human beings feeling terrorised by life and its demands, and in a church that struggles.

May 4—Easter 3: Acts 2:14, 22-28. Luke summarises Peter’s Pentecost sermon in terms of the Gospel’s story about Jesus. 1 Pet 1:17-21. The writer proclaims the vision that God has for all who are baptised. Lk 24:13-35. Two unfaithful disciples experience the presence of the Risen Jesus in the ‘breaking of bread,’ the moment of Eucharistic communion. Theme—Jesus’ Presence. Jesus continues to be present to all, especially when darkness, blindness or personal issues seem to cloud life’s journey. The weekly Sunday Assembly becomes, among other liturgical experiences, the place of our encounter with the Risen Jesus.

May 11—Easter 4: Acts 2:14, 36-41. Peter appeals to his attentive audience to be converted to God. 1 Pet 2:20-25. Jesus is the model of how to be with God in the midst of life’s suffering. Jn 10:1-10. Jesus is the sheepfold gate who allows access to God and protection for his community. Theme—Jesus, the Gate: We seek safety, security and protection. Jesus offers us a community where we can be at ease with God. What are some of the ways in which this happens in our Sunday Eucharistic Assembly and in the lives of those who gather for this Liturgical experience?

May 18—Easter 5: Acts 6:1-7. Seven are appointed to minister to the practical needs of the Jerusalem multi-cultural community of Jesus followers. Luke shows how ministry must be flexible, inclusive and respectful of all. 1 Pet 2:4-9. All the baptised form a holy priesthood and spiritual household. This is an important text that celebrates the priestly act of all God’s people, not just a select few. Jn 14:1-12. Jesus is the way, truth and life for troubled people. Theme—Call of the Baptised. Our community that gathers each Sunday is precious. It is God’s ‘royal priesthood,’ blessed and beloved by God. Baptism empowers us all to ministry, especially in a Church once preoccupied only with the ministry of the ordained. Baptism is at the heart of future ministry and lay ecclesial leadership.

May 25—Easter 6: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17. Philip preaches to the Samaritans. Peter and John visit them and pray that the Samaritans will receive the Holy Spirit. A second Pentecost now takes place amongst a non-Jewish people! 1 Pet 3:15-18. Reverence for God is at the heart of the Christian life. This enables the believer to act with integrity especially in times of difficulty or false-accusation. Jn 14:15-21. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit. This ‘Advocate’ will be with his disciples. Theme—Release of God’s Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit permeates every human being and atom of creation. This empowerment is a guarantee that God’s Spirit is directing the future of our churches.

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

June 8—Pentecost: Acts 2:1-11 God’s Spirit empowers and unites the fragile Jerusalem community of Jesus’ disciples. 1Cor 12:3-7,12-13 The many gifts evident in the Christian community are the signs of the ongoing activity of God’s Spirit who brings about communion. Jn 20:19-23 Jesus breathes his Spirit of forgiveness and peace on to his frightened disciples. Theme—Courage: In times of fear
or anxiety, our celebration of this Pentecost reminds us we are empowered by God’s ever-present Spirit.

**June 15—Trinity:** Ex 34:4-6.8-9. Moses declares the essential truth about God: God is merciful. 2 Cor 3:11-13. God is a community of lovers into which disciples are called. Jn 3:16-18. God’s love for us is revealed in Jesus. **Theme—Friendship:** The Trinity is an essential truth of God: a communion of Persons, in love. We are called to share this divine communion of friendship. We reflect God’s triune life to the world, as others reflect God’s inner life to us through friendship.

**June 22—Body and Blood:** Deut 8:2-3.14-16. Moses reminds Israel how God cares for them through food and drink in the desert. 1 Cor 10:16-17. Eucharist is communion in the one body. Jn 6:51-58. Jesus is the living Bread of God. **Theme—The Sunday Assembly:** At a time when we think about new ways of liturgical life as priest numbers decline, the Sunday Eucharistic Assembly becomes more important than ever. Here we celebrate God’s life with us and our communion with all who gather, and those who feel excluded.

**June 29—Peter and Paul:** Acts 12:1-11. Peter is seized and imprisoned. God rescues him from danger and evil. 2 Tim 4:6-8.17-18. These words, not written by Paul but by a ‘ghost writer’ in the name of Paul, celebrate Paul’s fidelity and God’s protection of him. Mt 16:13-19. A key moment in Mt in which Peter publicly identifies Jesus as ‘Messiah, Son of the living God’. Peter in turn is honoured by Jesus as leading disciple. **Theme—Ecclesial Unity:** Peter and Paul represent a gospel outreach that embraces the whole world. This outreach seeks to bring people of different backgrounds, cultures and history to a sense of communion. What assists unity? What threatens it?

**July 6—Ordinary Time 14:** Zech 9:9-10. God as King will come to deliver, protect and offer peace. Rom 8:9.11-13. We possess God’s Spirit who empowers our daily lives. Mt 11:25-30. We are invited to come to Jesus who wants to be with us in our struggles. **Theme—God’s Comfort:** Many people today feel the burdens of life. Our faith community gathered in this Sunday Assembly reflects a gentle God who seeks to offer support and comfort to those who struggle. How is this happening practically at a local level?

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

**July 20—Ordinary Time 16:** Wis 12:13.16-19. God teaches, offers hope and wisdom. Rom 8:26-27. God’s Spirit helps us in our weakness. Mt 13:24-43. This is the parables of good and evil. **Theme—Weakness:** The human experience of weakness and disaster invites us to draw close to a God who is present in our struggles. Mt’s parables remind us of the reality of life’s ambiguities which are part of discipleship and mysteriously reveal God’s presence.

**July 27—Ordinary Time 17:** 1 Kings 3:5.7-12. Solomon is blessed for seeking wisdom and discernment rather than wealth. Rom 8:28-30. God invites us to live in the image of Jesus. Mt 13:44-52. The parable of the search for the pearl of great price. **Theme—Wisdom:** All of us desire deep, lingering wisdom to live in peace and happiness with ourselves, others and God. Many illustrations abound where such wisdom is practiced by unwitting disciples.

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