SATIRE AND CHARLIE HEBDO

DEEP RESPECT FOR PERSONS

A YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND GRACE

CREATION OF A PROTESTANT LITURGY
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THE RELEVANCE OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

TERRIBLE THINGS are being done in our time. Our newspapers and news bulletins are filled with accounts of acts of terrorism, oppression, enslavement, human trafficking and other atrocities. Some things that are done, by Boku Haram and Isis for instance, seem to be more than inhuman. They seem quite demonic.

We are experiencing something of what the people in Mark’s Gospel were experiencing: the people of Jesus’ time were very aware of evil spirits—they felt beset by demons.

Hence the people came to Jesus in great crowds. They saw Jesus as the powerful one who could cast out evil spirits. The evil spirits tried to control him, but they could not. Jesus drove them out and brought goodness and peace in place of evil. That was Jesus' mission - he came to defeat and drive out evil and to rescue humankind from the powers of darkness and establish God's rule. He 'brought us out of darkness into his own wonderful light'. Jesus saves.

It is said that the missionaries in Papua New Guinea once asked the locals: 'What have the missionaries brought you that you most appreciate?' They were expecting them to answer that they most appreciated schools and education, or hospitals and health. Instead they answered that they most appreciated how the missionaries had freed them from fear, meaning the fear of the powers of evil.

The Gospel of Mark is an account of the essential message of Christianity. Humankind needed to be liberated. The powers of evil were so strong that it was necessary for the Son of God to come to rescue humankind and to drive out the evil spirits. The power of God in Christ was needed to liberate us.

Mark’s Gospel makes us aware of the drama. When Jesus began his mission he entered into immediate conflict with the demons that were possessing people. When Jesus cast out the demon that was possessing the man who came to Jesus in the Synagogue, the demon threw the man into convulsions and left with a loud cry. The event made a deep impression on everybody who witnessed it.

St Paul reflects on the blessing that is ours because God is with us: 'If God is for us who can be against?' With God on our side we are with the strength.

We can appreciate our baptism in the light of these reflections. Baptism is the first of the sacraments of initiation. This sacrament brings us into the Church community, into God's family; we become adopted sons and daughters of God. We then dare to call God 'Our Father'. But baptism is just the beginning, our initiation into the life of following Christ. God has done and continues to do great things for us. While God does all, and we accept with open arms God’s gifts, we are not wholly passive in the relationship. It is for us to allow ourselves to be drawn into union with God, and not to put resistance or obstacles in the way of drawing closer to God.

On Ash Wednesday we have ashes put on our foreheads as a sign of repentance, and we hear the command to ‘turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel’. Every year we enter into this special season of repentance and conversion. At the beginning of every Mass we express our sorrow for our sins, ask for God’s mercy and plead for God’s help to enter into everlasting life. Truly, Christians are not converts but people on a journey of conversion.

Jesus, as in Mark’s Gospel, is the liberator. We must allow Jesus to liberate us.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor
ON THE SEVENTH of January 2015 the Paris office of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo was stormed by extremists who executed nine people associated with the magazine, and three others who were caught in the crossfire. As the assailants left the premises they were heard to shout, 'we have avenged the Prophet Muhammad.' It is thereby assumed that the violent rampage had been carried out in response to blasphemous depictions of Muhammad in the magazine.

Not surprisingly, these events have led to global condemnation of extremist violence. Fundamentalists of any religion must not be tolerated, especially by the faith traditions they betray. However, less agreement has arisen in the discussion concerning the right to freedom of speech and, more broadly, freedom of expression.

This commentary will focus on a subject which has not yet made its way into the public debate; the dangers of satire. In order to do this, it is necessary to give an overview of the history and function of satire. There arises satire which is known to be either constructive or destructive. The differences of these styles can be explained in a comparison of the story of Jonah in the Bible with the cartoons of Charlie Hebdo. Discussing the merits and pitfalls of satirical works will weigh in on the argument for the freedom of speech and expression.

Death and satire are no strangers. As early as the seventh century BCE it was thought that Archilochus' satire was demonic and had the power to kill its intended target. Satire was then believed to have magical powers not dissimilar from ancient curses that were thought to be deadly. As the belief in magic and curses waned the satirist was no longer perceived to have supernatural powers. Yet, satire was still believed to be injurious to its victim. For instance, there are two reported cases where Muhammad, who tended to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, executed popular female satirists. King Saul's demise was signalled by the humiliating songs of the 'dancing women'. Barak of the Bible story, only agreed to go to war against Sisera if Deborah, a well-known satirist would accompany him. Her satirical musings were known to rouse the otherwise apathetic tribes of Israel. The language we use to speak of satire today (venomous, caustic, cutting) preserves the dangerous origins of this form of discourse.

The potential danger of satire should be known to any satirist who is well versed in the craft. It was certainly known to the satirists of Charlie Hebdo, whose offices were firebombed after they published a controversial cartoon depicting the prophet Muhammad on the cover of the magazine. However, Charlie Hebdo persisted with their satirical attack regardless of the negative consequences. It is difficult to suggest what their motivation was for doing so. Indeed, Freud has even warned us to be suspicious of our own intentions, which may not be consciously known to us. Thereby, although Charlie Hebdo waved the banner of the right to offend all people equally, other possible motivations, such as celebrity, and rebelliousness must
also be considered. Stephen Post's suggestion that the anti-religious nature of the French Revolution is still embedded in France may be another helpful avenue for understanding the motives of Charlie Hebdo. Of greater interest to this discussion, however, is the discernment of the type of satirists these cartoonists were.

Gilbert Highet suggests that there are two types of satirists; the optimist and the pessimist. He argues that the optimist likes people and hopes to cure them of their vices. The optimist uses frank and obscene words, however, he or she does so in order to shock people into facing the truth. The primary function of this kind of satire is reform. On the other hand, Highet argues that the pessimist hates people, as he or she finds them to be incurably evil and foolish. The pessimist, thereby, does not hope for the restoration of the world, but conversely hopes to destroy the world through cruel words.

I would suggest that Highet's description of the pessimist is too strong. A pessimist is more aptly described as a person without hope. Such people sense that they cannot offer a workable solution to a social or political problem. I would then argue that the cartoons in Charlie Hebdo were closer to the destructive, pessimistic style of satire. This will become evident in the comparison with the Book of Jonah that is a satire concerning a similar political difficulty.

The Book of Jonah meets the criteria of satire, which includes: grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, rhetorical features, and irony. Moreover, the narrative of Jonah shares another striking feature with the recent cartoons in Charlie Hebdo. It is a polemic against the Assyrians of Nineveh (present day Iraq), who were spoken of as being violent and immoral. At the core of this story is the hapless prophet Jonah. He is commissioned by God to preach against the atrocities committed in Nineveh. Jonah famously runs in the other direction. A chain of fantastic events bring him to Nineveh, nonetheless. There his mission is a success, as the Ninevites change their ways and turn their hearts and behaviour from violence. However, the instant transformation of these violent terrorists is not the greatest surprise, nor the climax of the book of Jonah. Instead, the reader is shocked by Jonah's admission that he fled from God's call, not because of fear, but rather because he knew God would be merciful to the Ninevites. Jonah wished for vengeance, despite the peaceful outcome in the story.

However, regardless of Jonah's anger the message of this story is a clear narrative of hope. God's abounding and unconditional love can overcome the scourge of evil, where retributive justice and combativeness fails. This message takes away the edge or the danger of satire. This satire is plainly optimistic, as can be observed by the English translation of Jonah's name ('faithless one').

On the other hand, Charlie Hebdo's cartoons are nihilistic. This destructiveness is best observed in the casual manner in which Muhammad is depicted contrary to Islamic standards of blasphemy. Representations of Muhammad not only provoke extremists who are certain to respond with violence, but also victimise mainstream Muslims. By offending moderate Muslims Charlie Hebdo exhibited the cruelty of the pessimistic satirist. Moreover, they alienated the community with the best chance of finding a solution to the problem at hand.
The severity of this cartoon attack is a plain provocation. Charlie Hebdo provided its readers with outrage but did not offer a constructive outlet for this intense energy. From this perspective, the Pope's recent comment that a provocation may be met with a 'punch' is correct. To enrage a person without offering a non-violent solution is reprehensible. The likely outcome in this instance is violence. The truth of this claim, sadly, is evidenced in the recent carnage in France. It may even be suggested that these cartoons proved to be nihilistic and self-destructive.

The legal argument for the freedom of speech is complex. It is not the intention of this article to enter this discussion directly, nor to suggest legal boundaries for the freedom of speech and expression. I suggest it is more profitable to focus our attention on the constructive and destructive outcomes of satire. In doing so, we are aware of our freedom to speak and otherwise express ourselves with the view to positive solutions, or with foreseeable violent results. Yet, the choices we make point to our intelligence, psychological health, and civility. The optimistic satire in the book of Jonah offers us a message of love. It is powerful and constructive. The pessimistic cartoons of Charlie Hebdo deliver the destructive force of hate. Whether or not we personally accept the message of the book of Jonah, or the destructiveness of Charlie Hebdo is a matter of individual choice. However, pessimistic satire is limited; it cannot offer us a solution. On the other hand, the function of optimistic satire is reform. The book of Jonah offers us a solution to extremist violence by encouraged reform in our god understanding. To demonstrate this point, the interface of theology and psychology needs to be invoked.

Psychology can offer perspectives which heal or conversely damage a human being. The only psychologically healing image of God, is the God of unconditional, universal, and radical love; the Jonah message. If we refuse to see this we must cling to the outmoded and dangerous conception of a god who is preoccupied with defensive-aggressiveness, vengeance, and retaliatory justice. This is the position of the religious extremist. If this is the choice we make, we resign ourselves to a life of fear and anxiety, as violence is demonstrably harmful to human beings. This belief structure cannot bring forth a feeling of peace, but only apprehension of the next violent encounter.

If like Jonah, we are overtaken by a desire for vengeance, despite the clear evidence that it is love which heals and not violence, then we may be considered irrational and pathological. We are similarly so, if our stance is an extremist anti-religious one as Charlie Hebdo appeared to be. It is extremist in so far as it refuses to comply with even minimum standards of respect for what religion holds sacred.

Of course, a frank critique of religion is necessary, as the Book of Jonah suggests. However, this is only constructive if it is balanced with a sensitivity toward what is held by the religious to be sacred and an openness to the possibility that there are positive features and outcomes of religion. At present the positive outcomes are evident in the decision of faith leaders to unite in opposition to extremism, and to alleviate suffering. Consider this statement from Bishop David Murray of Perth Australia,

Since our visit to Cairo a few years ago, the Anglican Bishop in Cairo now holds regular meetings with the leaders of the other churches and also Muslim leaders. There have been some beautiful exchanges of mutual love. It could be that the single mindedness of any fundamentalist groups (Islamic, Christian, or Jewish) will drive the moderates together and therein lies the power of unity in The Spirit.

He also went on to speak of the work of the Global Freedom Network for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope, which now
includes leaders of all faiths, who have come together, for example, to eliminate slavery by the year 2020.10

'We are not Charlie', in as much, as we are not pessimistic satirists who have been annihilated by the dangers of satire, and provocation. Yet, this is no reason to abandon the recent catchphrase Je suis Charlie. The press has touted this expression as a protest in favour of freedom of speech, yet, this is not the case. Millions of people across the world are not claiming the right to be blasphemous, nihilistic and destructive satirists. If this were the case, the magazine Charlie Hebdo would have had a stronger readership prior to the assault on their offices. Plainly, this style of satire is not, ordinarily, that popular, because people are naturally more hopeful, and inclined to positive solutions. In this instance, when people speak of freedom of speech, they are arguing for the freedom to express dismay at the injustices of the world. Moreover, we want to put an end to these injustices. Freedom requires and wishes for responsible action.

The scenes of unity, hand-holding and the outpouring of love we encountered after the recent events in Paris are the real meaning of Je suis Charlie. It is an expression of transforming unity and love. The argument for an alleged moral right to speak with inflaming hatred appears contrary to this display of support. 'Love never fails' (1 Cor. 13:8).

NOTES


The Vatican and four prominent French imams issued a joint declaration that denounced the attacks but also urged the media to treat religions with respect.

Francis, who has urged Muslim leaders in particular to speak out against Islamic extremism, went a step further when asked by a French journalist about whether there were limits when freedom of expression meets freedom of religion.

Francis insisted that it was an ‘aberration’ to kill in the name of God and said religion can never be used to justify violence.

But he said there was a limit to free speech when it concerned offending someone's religious beliefs.
The need to respect more radically the dignity of persons has been an emerging sign of our times. The theological significance of this will not be lost on those of the Judeo-Christian tradition which teaches that each person is made in God's image. Its ethical significance will be recognised by those who can agree that 'natural law' means taking responsibility for making life, for ourselves and others, more authentically human.

Deeper recognition of personhood will also require a modified style of exercising authority in the Church—a style based more on catechesis than regulation; more akin to authorising or enabling others to flourish as persons. This might cause unease among some—whether in authority or subject to authority—who underestimate what it means to be fully human and fully alive. This aspect of deeper respect for persons is the focus of this essay.

Progress in the direction of greater respect for persons has had a bumpy ride. Various human and civil rights that we now take for granted were originally condemned by the Church, at highest level (Popes Pius IX and X). Closer to our own time, efforts were made by the Congregation for Rites (later called the Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacraments) to thwart the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Archbishop P. Marini, who as a young priest worked in the Congregation and saw this happening, attributes it to a 'tendency to mistrust the episcopate and its genuine loyalty to the Holy See, and an obsessive concern to return to the previous centralisation of all liturgical authority' (A Challenging Reform p. 71). Other examples could be given, but those two are recalled only to make the point that obstruction to legitimate change does not necessarily come from ill-will. Rather, it is often well-intentioned, and comes out of a highly protective mindset on the part of churchmen who seem to have difficulty moving away from social patterns more typical of feudal societies.

They have first cousins in those who feel a deep need for law and order at all costs. Jesus himself was for such people first and foremost a disturber of the peace and threat to established order. The law and order mindset of our day still reports to higher authorities anything that deviates from their own rigid interpretations of the law and perceptions of order. This can lead to the life of the Church being influenced more by their fears than by the faith, freedom and joy of the Gospel.

Devolution in the direction of greater personal responsibility will be a little messy. It does not sit easily with those who prefer more paternalistic ways of leading or of being led. But whether we like it or not, it is implicit, and even explicit, in some of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, especially concerning religious freedom, and it echoes the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, J H Newman & others concerning the paramountcy of conscience.

The paternalistic way of helping people to choose right and avoid wrong tends to be controlling—restricting people's opportunities to decide for themselves. By being restrictive and strongly regulating, it also contributes to a condition of over-dependency. On the other hand, a way of exercising authority that fosters personal responsibility prefers to offset the risk of people making wrong choices by providing a formation aimed at helping them to understand the issues and to choose well.
Such formation includes catechesis, as well as the other components of moral formation, the processes of listening and dialogue, and a supportive community.

Pope Francis rightly regrets the way secondary matters tend to usurp centre stage on the Church’s public image as a result of being more talked about; (cf The Joy of the Gospel 34-36). But perhaps the debates on 'hot button' issues go around in endless circles because they are wrongly framed as being about the difference between right and wrong when often they are more directly about different 'styles' of promoting right and discouraging wrong. The following examples might serve to illustrate the point:

1) Debate about general confession/absolution

Canons 960 and 961 concern the forgiveness of serious sins, for which individual confession and absolution is 'the only ordinary way' of being 'reconciled to God and to the Church'. In what follows, my premiss is that these canons must be fully respected. What is extraordinary should be restricted to extraordinary circumstances, which is what the canons explain.

At the same time, fully respecting the canons includes not extending them to mean more that they actually specify (canon 18 explicitly says this). Sinning of the kind that does not result in being un-reconciled to God and the Church, and that does not result in being 'deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion ...' is not the subject of these canons, or of papal teaching supporting these canons. Even allowing for the very real value of confessing lesser sins, there is no canonical obstacle to general confession/absolution for those who seek the sacrament only 'out of devotion', as many devout Catholics like to do especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent.

Some will object that the availability of penitential services involving general confession/absolution, even though advertised as being only for those who do not have grave sins to confess, might be seen as a soft option by others who do have grave sins to confess. That is a risk, and a matter for proper pastoral guidance; however, it does not change the canons. Which brings me to the point of this essay: one way of preventing that risk is to ban general confession/absolution for everybody (which the canons do not do) thereby denying people who legitimately desire the experience of communal forgiveness that opportunity. Another way of obviating the risk is to help people to understand the canons and underlying doctrines, and in this way prevent misuse of the sacrament. The former style takes the easy way out: it does not even attempt the catechesis. The latter style is more respectful of the person and of personal responsibility.

2) Welcoming wrong-doers while not condoning their wrong-doing.

It seems an obvious distinction, and one that Jesus himself lived by. Yet there are people who seem to think that when Pope Francis encourages the Catholic community to be more welcoming of all, including people of a same sex attraction, he is somehow compromising Catholic doctrine. Similarly, there are Catholics who go beyond the disapproval of irregular marital situations to presuming that all who are in irregular situations are 'living in sin'; (cf Corbett & others, in Nova et Vetera, English edition, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2014): 601-630.) This is not necessarily the case, due to influences affecting their thinking or pressures affecting their freedom; (knowledge and consent).

If people in these situations seek Holy
Communion, would allowing them to do so be perceived as meaning the Church's teaching on marriage, or its teaching on receiving Holy Communion worthily, no longer matter as much? That is how it will be perceived if the Catholic faithful are left unaware of the Church's moral tradition, which teaches that sometimes people whose actions are objectively wrong can be subjectively in good conscience. Candidates for the priesthood are taught this tradition; why would we not teach the same to the Catholic lay faithful? Again, it comes down to the need for good catechesis, which both upholds the Church's teaching and acknowledges the circumstances that can diminish or even nullify culpability (cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1735).

Again, the substantive point: one way of preventing misunderstanding and scandal is to exclude such people from Holy Communion regardless of whether or not they are guilty of serious sin. Another way, more consistent with the Church's moral tradition, both upholds the Church's teaching regarding marriage and allows for the possibility that at least some of these people might be in good conscience—which only they and God can judge! A profound respect for conscience will mean that even as we justifiably judge between right and wrong actions, we desist from judging the person. And all the more when there is so much other evidence of their goodness. It might be objected that such ones are not eligible to receive Holy Communion because their objective situation is in conflict with the full ideal of Christian marriage and its significance for the Church (Eph. 5:32). But the same could be said where the objective lack of full ecclesial communion is the reason (even greater reason) for not sharing eucharistic communion. And yet the Church allows this in particular circumstances.

Nor does this amount to moral relativism, or to saying that there is one law for some and another for others. It simply acknowledges that individuals' ability to live up to the full requirements of the law develops gradually, and that not everybody is at the same stage. That is the objective situation. Pope John Paul II was making this point when he affirmed the 'law of gradualness', which he distinguished from any supposed gradualness of the law. (Familiaris Consortio n 34)

3) The Church's teaching on contraception

The Church's teaching on the relationship between conscience and Church authority has been pithily expressed by Pope John Paul II: 'the Church puts herself always and only at the service of conscience' (Veritatis Splendor n 64). There are many married couples who have conscientiously studied the Church's teaching on contraception, and nevertheless felt allowed, or even obliged, to practise contraception, at least for periods of time. This simple fact does not make the Church's teaching wrong, nor make it redundant; those who believe that life is a gift usually do not mind being reminded that ultimately our dominion over human life, and over the giving and the taking of a human life, is limited, not unlimited dominion. That is why they include the Church's teaching in their discernment process.

The difference between 'styles' of exercising authority is more sharply illustrated in the matter of contraception outside of marriage. The Church's teaching that contraception is wrong concerns sexual intercourse freely entered into between husband and wife. Its teaching on contraception is not about activity outside of marriage (or even forced intercourse inside marriage). Sexual intercourse outside of marriage is wrong, but the use of contraceptives in that context is a different ethical question. For example, when the Holy See condoned the use of contraceptive measures by Religious sisters living in fear of being raped (in the Congo), it was not even a matter of making an exception. It was simply that intercourse in those circumstances falls outside the Church's teaching on contraception. There
was no marriage being contracepted.

Whether and when contraceptives should be used outside of marriage, *i.e.* when sexual activity should not be taking place, is a matter for prudential judgement, distinguishing between circumstances in which their easy availability will diminish people's incentive for self-restraint (chastity) and increase the risk of promiscuity and of spreading infection, and on the other hand circumstances in which the use of contraceptives might be the only realistic way of preventing the spread of infection.

The fact that the use of contraceptives can in some circumstances be moral means that to speak of them as if their use were in all circumstances wrong not only misrepresents the Church's teaching, but also deprives people of any scope for exercising their own judgement where they can be entitled to do so. The less paternalistic 'style' is equally opposed to wrongful contraception, but seeks to prevent it by means of good formation, helping people to understand the issues and make good choices.

**Summary**

In the first of the above three examples, the 'style' of exercising authority that requires good catechesis upholds the Church's law restricting general absolution, but leaves the option of communal forgiveness open for those in circumstances outside the restriction stipulated in the canons. The paternalistic style removes that option. It just excludes everybody.

In the second example, the catechetical style upholds both the Church's teaching on marriage and allows for what the Catholic moral tradition teaches about subjective morality and the law of gradualness. The paternalistic style puts that tradition aside, making no allowance for any of those in irregular situations seeking Holy Communion who might be in good conscience.

In the third example, the Church's teaching on contraception within marriage is acknowledged, and is then distinguished from the use of contraceptives in some circumstances outside of marriage. The paternalistic style ignores the difference and just makes a blanket ban, leaving no room for personal judgement even where the Church's own teaching does.

What these disparate examples all illustrate is a kind of clumsiness that results in some people being hurt or excluded. It is a lazy interpretation of canons 960 and 961 that ignores the difference between what the canons prescribe for the forgiveness of 'serious sin' and the different situation of those who seek the sacrament only 'out of devotion'. There is a kind of convenient pragmatism about excluding from Holy Communion all whose marital situations are irregular regardless of whether or not they are 'living in sin'. And it is careless and misleading to ascribe wrongness to contraceptives themselves rather than to the contracepting of marriage. A paternalistic style of exercising authority tends to acquiesce in these misunderstandings rather than correct them. A leadership that intends to help people grow will pursue the truth that sets them free—free to be themselves, and free to be for others.

Of course, there is always the risk that sometimes people will 'get it wrong', or make wrong choices. But clearly God must have thought the benefits of creating us with the gift of free will far outweighed all the evils that have ever come out of misusing that gift. Who are we—made in God's image—to diminish others' freedom when there are other ways, more respectful of personhood, to help them make good choices?

Finally, perhaps there is a question here for the psychologists: the propensity to inflate the Church's teaching on contraception and to forbid more that the Church forbids; and the propensity to inflate the Church's teaching on general absolution and to ban more than the Church bans; and the propensity to inflate the Church's teaching on receiving Holy Communion worthily and to exclude some who need not be excluded—what accounts for this propensity? And what accounts for others' acquiescence in it?
In 1964, the year I entered the Sisters of Mercy of Rockhampton, the Beatles toured Australia and New Zealand, our nation was engaged in the Vietnam War, Dawn Fraser was named Australian of the Year, and The Australian newspaper was first published.

The Mercies I joined was a vibrant group of more than two hundred and sixty sisters, engaged mainly in education and health and aged care, but also conducting or involved in numerous other ministries.

At the time I made the decision to dedicate my life in this way, it was a clearly made decision, a choice among real options but not one to take lightly. I felt called to join a group of women whom I saw as making a difference, doing a great deal of good.

It was at the time, however, a fairly simple decision, one confirmed many times since. Few Religious I know would claim to have stayed on for the reasons they first came. At the very least, they have explored the depths of that initial attraction and articulated much more clearly a theology that gives real meaning to their life choice.

The Congregation I entered was flourishing like many similar congregations in Australia at the time. In the Rockhampton Diocese, a rural Diocese of only moderate size, there were also numerous other Religious from several congregations.

Others have explored this sociological and ecclesial phenomenon at length and I will not attempt that here, but I think it is a reason for rejoicing that we have lived into an era in the Church during which lay women in particular, but lay men too, are recognised as having a real part in being Church.

This will eventually help us all clarify the place of Religious Life in the total Church.

The Pope's invitation to a Year of Consecrated Life is very timely. Great change has occurred since Vatican Council II and it is time to take stock of this particular aspect of Church Life.

At the heart of Religious Life in any of its many forms is the call to seek God and be available to God’s Mission. This is the central focus of the life.

For many it is strongly linked to support for a range of public ministries in the Church, or else to direct engagement in ministry on behalf of the Church. In the wake of Vatican II, many religious set out to realise the vision of Church to which the council pointed. Just a little more than fifty years on, the concept of Religious Life has expanded greatly even while the numbers in the Western world at least have decreased sharply.

So what are my hopes for the Year of Consecrated Life? There are many but I will focus on just two.
In the first place, I would like to see a new, deeper understanding of what Church is and how every baptised person is a herald of the Good News.

Religious Life can only be its best when it claims its own place in clear relationship to all others in the Church. It is not, as was often taught before Vatican II, a higher form of life than lay membership of the Church.

Some Religious are also clerics, but the majority (sisters and brothers) are not. All of us, clerical Religious and other, have made a public statement of our commitment to Christianity through our profession of vows. And that leads me to another of my hopes for the Year of Consecrated Life.

Much of the language around Religious Life is poorly understood, if understood at all, by the rest of the Church.

The vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience are frequently perceived as vows of having no money, having no relationships of any depth, and having no free will. The perception is entirely negative.

Yet the vows properly understood are entirely positive in their orientation. They involve an attitude of joy in sharing our material goods and a spirituality of ‘enough’; a commitment to right relationships with all others, with all that exists and with God; and a commitment to careful listening to the voice of God in our lives through prayerful attention.

It would be wonderful if we could find during the Year of Consecrated Life, in the first instance a renewed understanding of the vowed life, and secondly a new language that would speak to a wider world about what Religious Life is about.

Do not expect that the Year of Consecrated Life will lead to a sharp increase in vocations even though that is what some long to see. ‘There are not enough vocations’ is a constant cry but how many would be enough?

Many of us are observing not an increase in vocations as we have known them, but something new is happening.

There seem to be in our wider circles many women and men who are expressing a deep commitment to the message of Jesus lived through the charism of our Congregations.

These people are responding to ‘a call’ but it appears not to be a call to a traditional form of Religious Life. Perhaps the Year of Consecrated Life can take us some of the way to the recognition of new ways in which the Spirit is active in our midst, inviting the emergence of new forms of Consecrated life, and indeed this is happening. Who knows what will be learnt and experienced by the end of this wonderful period of reflection?

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OVERWHELMED BY GOD’S LOVE, EMPOWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

HANS KWAKMAN MSC

IN THE LAST issue of Compass (Summer 2014, pp.3-7) we reflected on Jesus’ experience during his early years in Nazareth. I noticed how Jesus’ heart was shaped by a deep concern with the suffering of people. Through observation and prayer, he realized that a lot of suffering was totally unnecessary and contrary to God’s will, primarily caused by a false understanding of God’s will. Jesus noticed that the poor and the sick themselves were powerless in coping with their suffering, and that the spiritual leaders did not at all support them in carrying the burden of life. On the contrary, people were taught that severe illnesses and dire poverty were a punishment from God.

Jesus felt himself sent to reach out to the people in need. However, he did not immediately take action to lighten people’s burden. He needed more time to prepare himself in finding the right way to carry out his mission. Therefore, Jesus entered into the desert for a time of reflection and discernment. In the desert, he met John the Baptist.

Jesus shows his solidarity with the crowd
On one occasion, Jesus joined the crowds near the River Jordan. Many people came to listen to the preaching of John the Baptist and to receive baptism from his hands. Mark notes: ‘From all Judea and Jerusalem crowds of people went to John. They told how sorry they were for their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River’ (Mark 1: 5). According to Luke, even the soldiers and tax collectors came to listen to John (Luke 3: 12-14). While standing in the middle of people from various social classes and backgrounds, Jesus waited for his turn to be baptized.

We should not be too surprised finding Jesus among the crowd waiting to be baptized. When still living in Nazareth, he had also joined the village community in their prayer services in the synagogue. Now too, he joins the men and women, in search of a renewal of life, once again showing his solidarity with the crowds. Moreover, Jesus himself was still in search of a clearer understanding of his vocation. Therefore, he too came to listen to John’s preaching, and asked to be baptized, just like the others. The evangelists report that Jesus had a great admiration for John the Baptist (Matt. 11: 7-15; Luke 7: 24-30).

Jesus’ Vision
Luke records that after having been baptized, Jesus was praying. While praying, he received a vision. He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove coming down upon him. At the same time he heard a voice from heaven, saying: ‘You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you’ (Luke 3: 21-22). At the moment Jesus heard his Heavenly Father saying: ‘You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you,’ he felt himself totally overwhelmed by profound love. He was captivated by the words he had heard: God is my Father and I am his beloved Son! I am dear to his Heart! And this declaration of love was accompanied by a pouring out of the Spirit. In the depth of his heart he experienced a new power in life. It was the power of divine love.

For us too, it is important to notice, that the Father does not only declare his love for
us through words, for example words spoken in Holy Scripture or in our hearts. The Father also declares his love for us through a pouring out of the Spirit of love in our hearts. God’s love is never expressed by words alone, but always reinforced by the gift of the Holy Spirit, empowering us from within, enabling us to experience love and to become a loving person by giving love.

**Jesus Praying**


Luke clearly underlines that to carry out our mission in a productive way, we need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. And this empowerment is the fruit of prayer. Also in the Acts of the Apostles, before being filled with the Holy Spirit, Luke notes that the first community in Jerusalem, including the Apostles, Mary the Mother of Jesus and his brothers, ‘gathered frequently to pray as a group’ (Acts 1:14 with 2:1-4. See also 2:21 with 2:39; 4:23-31; 8:15-17; cf. 22:16).

In Luke’s Gospel, John the Baptist speaks of Jesus as the one who, ‘will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ (Luke 3:16). That exactly happened on the day of Pentecost, when the gathered community ‘saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there.’ And so, ‘the Holy Spirit took control of everyone’ (Acts 2:3-4). The pouring out of the Spirit is a gift of the Risen Christ, empowering the disciples for their ministry. While praying, not once but many times, Jesus himself had been empowered with the Holy Spirit to carry out his mission. Now, as the Risen Lord, he has become the source of the Spirit for his disciples, gathered in prayer, by empowering them to carry out their mission.

**Sharing his Experience with Others**

Several times the evangelist Luke emphasizes that the power of the Spirit was ‘with Jesus’ and that Jesus ‘was led by the Spirit’ (Luke 4:1, 4.18; 10:21, see also 1: 27). The baptismal experience kept burning in Jesus’ heart. The first words Jesus spoke in the synagogue of Nazareth, after returning from the desert, were: ‘The Lord’s Spirit has come to me...’ (Luke 4:18). His entire ministry will be a continuous testimony to that unique experience of love. In fact, the ‘Good News’ announced by Jesus was not just a ‘new teaching’ (Mark 1: 27), but a new experience of a loving relationship with the Heavenly Father, called the Reign of God by Jesus. After his resurrection, it will become a new experience of the Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, as the great gift of the powerful love that fills our hearts.

Jesus was convinced that the declaration of love from his Father and the empowering by the Spirit was not only meant for himself, but for every human being. Therefore, Jesus desired to bring the Good News of God’s empowering love to everyone. According to Jesus’ vision, every human being could have this
powerful experience of being accepted and empowered as God’s beloved son or daughter. If people really believed that ‘Good News’, they would feel strengthened both in ordinary life and in time of hardship. The Good News would provoke in their hearts trust in God’s powerful loving presence. At the same time, they would feel empowered to deal with their own suffering and to accompany other people in their sorrow as well.

**Our Baptism**

In fact, Jesus’ prayerful experience after his baptism reveals what already occurred at the moment of his incarnation as God’s Son among us. The angel announced to Mary: ‘The Holy Spirit will come down to you, and God’s power will come over you’ (Luke 1:35). At the moment of his conception, Jesus was already filled with the Holy Spirit. In the same way; from the moment of conception, the heart of every human being is enriched by the Holy Spirit. What took place at the Baptism of Jesus shows what also happens at our own baptism and confirmation. Our baptism and confirmation are the moments that we celebrate the powerful presence of God’s Spirit within us. Baptism and confirmation are an invitation to integrate the Gifts of the Spirit in our lives and ministries.

**Different Experiences of God’s Love**

Gratefulness to God for his love for us and for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit forms certainly a core element of a Spirituality of the Heart. The greatest favors of God’s love are the Gifts of the Spirit, poured out in our hearts. St. Paul writes: ‘The Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control.’ (Gal 5:19-22) These gifts guide and strengthen us on a deeper level than our emotions are able to do. For example, the Holy Spirit equips people with the capacity to love someone sincerely, despite not being moved by affection for the person in question. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, we are able to forgive, notwithstanding still feeling hurt. It is also the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to keep performing our ministry, in spite of feeling bored by what we are doing. Thanks to the gifts of the Spirit, we are able to take decisions for the benefit of others, not because of being driven by superficial emotions or shallow considerations, but because of being guided by the Spirit of wisdom and self-control.

The Gifts of the Spirit make us aware of the fact that ‘love’ is not only a superficial emotion, but a deeply rooted power in our hearts. The gift of the Spirit in our hearts is the fulfillment of God’s promise through the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: ‘I will take away your stubborn heart and give you a new heart and a desire to be faithful..., because I will put my Spirit in you and make you eager to obey my laws and teachings’ (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

God has planted his Holy Spirit right inside our hearts and the gifts of the Spirit, are the clearest sign of God’s love for each of us. However, God’s love does not necessarily result in a felt emotion or affection of love in our hearts. Every person will experience God’s love in a different way, according to his or her own condition. But everyone may discover in him or herself an ability to give love, to serve, to forgive and to carry out responsibilities. Such a capacity is the fruit of the Spirit in our hearts.

**Belief in God’s Unconditional Love**

Do we really believe that God loves us personally, with an unconditional love? That God takes delight in creating us every moment? Or do we belong to the people, who, because of being aware of their sinfulness, feel themselves unworthy of being loved by God? Do we feel as if we do not deserve to be loved by God? St. Paul’s experience shows us what it means to be loved by God unconditionally, when he writes, ‘God has shown us how much
he loves us—it was while we were still sinners’ (Romans 5:8). St. John writes in his first letter: ‘But even if we don’t feel at ease, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything’ (1 John 3:20). And his knowledge is not condemning but loving.

**Darkness of the Heart**

There are people who sometimes feel overwhelmed by God’s love. That is a great gift. Other people however, may believe in God’s love for them, but never feel ardently touched by God’s love. Sometimes people are craving for a sign of God’s love, but find themselves in total darkness. One recent example is Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. For years she experienced a total darkness of faith. Once she wrote: ‘Where is my faith, my trust? Even in the depths of my heart I experience nothing but emptiness and darkness.’ Nevertheless, wholeheartedly she continued to serve the most destitute and needy people, empowered by the Gifts of the Spirit in her heart.

**Doubting God’s Love**

Many people are not able to believe in a God of love, or doubt the existence of God, due to the great number of men, women and children, who become victims of natural disasters, violence and war. Moreover, people feel scandalized, because often violence is even carried out in the name of God and religion. Or people feel themselves severely traumatized in their private lives by a painful loss of a loved one or a terrible accident. They no longer feel capable of believing in the love of God for themselves, or they feel as if God does not care about the fate of humankind.

People’s conscience guided by the Spirit. Nevertheless, all people are animated by God’s Spirit. Therefore, even those, who do not believe in God’s love, are still doing the works of the Spirit. Many of them are still willing and able to reach out to people in need; they remain faithful to their family and their responsibilities. Think of the humanitarian aid organization *Medicins sans Frontieres*. Such people live and act according to their conscience, often unaware of the fact that they are guided by the Spirit of God in their hearts. They draw compassion from the source of love in their hearts, not realizing that through their commitment to medical care in acute crises, it is God who manifests his care and love. As St. Paul said to the citizens of Athens, ‘You have been worshiping ‘the Unknown God’ without even knowing it’ (Acts 17:23).

**Our Mission**

Unfortunately, many people, both believers and nonbelievers, do not draw from the ‘life-giving water flowing from deep inside’ their hearts (John 7:38). They are not aware of the wealth of their hearts. It belongs to our mission to let people enjoy the riches hidden in their hearts. That means that first of all we ourselves enjoy and develop these Gifts of the Spirit planted in our hearts. Jesus’ Heart was also shaped by the Holy Spirit and empowered by his Gifts.

St. Paul considered the gifts of the Spirit, particularly the gift of love, to be God’s greatest gifts, superior to any other blessing (1 Corinthians 13: 1 and Galatians 5: 22-23). These gifts are the treasures of our hearts. They are often concealed as burning coals under the ashes of daily routine, bad habits, or unhealed inner wounds. The best way to become aware of these treasures in our hearts is, as Jesus shows us in Luke’s Gospel, by praying. Through reflective prayer, we become aware of who we are. By accepting our weaknesses and shortcomings, we also begin to realize how much we need the powerful gifts of God’s Spirit. Despite our wounds and pain, we will become attentive to the fact that we are a beloved son or daughter of God. As once to Jesus, God also says to us: ‘You are my own dear son/daughter. I am pleased with you’ (Luke 3: 22). And God is always ‘ready to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks’ (Luke 11:13).
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND GRACE

ANDREA M. DEAN

The spiritual life is really about one thing: it's about our cooperation with grace….Grace-God's love-is surging into the world at all times, according to God's purposes, God's will. Our job is pretty simple: it's to notice it and once we notice it to cooperate with it, get on board with it. Cooperate. Whether that grace is coming directly to me, or to someone else. Whether it is according to my expectations or outside my expectations…Wherever it appears, get on board, cooperate with it!

When the ego takes over, the flow of grace is blocked. That's the central tragedy of sin. God's love wants to surge into the world, but He gives us the privilege of cooperating with it. We can block it if we make our own ego central.

—(2013, a sermon by Robert Barron quoted by L.Michael, 2013)

This extract from a sermon by Fr Robert Barron speaks to the essence of this topic Spiritual Formation and Grace. Simply put, grace is God's love in the world. The goal of a Christian person and of spiritual formation is for every person to live in a way that they are awake to God in their heart and in the world around them. To enlarge our understanding of the significance of these concepts let us first look at an understanding of God that underpins these two concepts and invites us to 'an embodied and fulfilled spiritual life'. (Nouwen, 2006) Second, we will expand on the meaning of grace. Third, we will develop an understanding of spiritual formation and indicate the practical ways that we may encounter grace.

This topic is relevant for all Christians. Many Catholic organisations are taking an express interest in spiritual formation. Often this is a component of broader programs to maintain or foster the character or ethos of schools, hospitals and other such ministries or services. An investigation into these programs is a topic for consideration in the future.

What is God Like?

Despite recent positive experiences of religion and religious education, the common depiction of God in Western society is of an unreal, remote, distant and problematic figure. (Borg, 1997) I have a page of cartoons which depict caricatures of a 'God figure' who is on a cloud and variously acting like a policeman who shakes a finger and notices when we do wrong, a puppeteer who controls our lives by pulling strings, a disconnected figure who does not care to intervene in crisis situations, and so on.

These limited images of God are inadequate for adult Christian faith. They are misunderstandings of God and make it impossible for contemporary Christians to genuinely believe that God is real. Marcus Borg helpfully names this way of speaking about God as distant and remote, as 'supernatural theism'. This 'God is 'out there', created the universe a long time ago and now watches over it. Occasionally God intervenes in the world, especially in the events reported in the Bible.' (Borg, 1997) This is at the basis of a style of Christianity which is about believing in God in order to go to heaven, anticipating a judgement at the end of life on earth that involves weighing up good deeds and faith in order to access eternal reward.

Fortunately, the Christian tradition has consistently affirmed a more comprehensive understanding of God as 'the encompassing spirit'. We, and everything else, are in God.
The sacred is a nonmaterial layer or dimension of reality all around us. God is 'right here' rather than 'out there'. God is immanent, dwelling with and within us. God is also transcendent. This means that God is beyond the universe, more than the universe. Affirming both the otherness and closeness of God, acknowledging God as transcendent and immanent, is termed panentheism. 'Panentheism' affirms that God is both more than the cosmos and everywhere present. (Borg, 1997) This 'Spirit model' promotes a way of living the Christian life that stresses relationship, intimacy and belonging.

Within the Scriptures there are a number of specific metaphors for God that explain how God engages with the world. These include the key spirit metaphors of wind and breath, and other non-anthropomorphic metaphors of rock, pointing to God as a place of safety and refuge, of fire which warms, protects and purifies, and of light, which guides and reveals.

Sometimes God is envisaged as a mother, creating and nurturing. The quality of God as compassion is related to the Hebrew word for womb. God as compassionate spirit feels for us as a mother feels for the children of her womb. A common Christian metaphor for God is father. The scriptural roots of the term describe an intimate father who is close at hand and who may be trusted to give good gifts to his children.

The wisdom of God is personified as a woman, Sophia. This wise woman is important in Proverbs, Wisdom and Sirach. Sophia is especially associated with the Spirit's presence in the world right now. For the Israelites she was also Shekinah, the divine indwelling who accompanied them in their history. Sophia as a metaphor for Spirit suggests closeness and presence, guidance and nourishment. (Borg, 1997)

Images of God as lover or spouse and of us as God's beloved are found in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Hosea and Song of Songs use the lover-beloved imaginary to portray the relationship between us, the beloved and God, the lover. This is an arresting image for the divine-human relationship as it indicates a relationship of extraordinary intimacy, involving delight and yearning.

A group of images describes God as a companion who travels with us. In Exodus we read of the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the desert. God as shepherd is another such example as the shepherd travels with his or her sheep but also leads them to water, food, and shelter, protecting them and seeking out the lost.

The Spirit model of God and the various scriptural metaphors, affirm a very ancient model of God and a heartening vision of the Christian life. These metaphors emphasize the nearness of God, evoking closeness, relationship and connection. The use of human images of the sacred, for example mother and father, suggest that there is a personal dimension to the relationship with God. The non-human images, for example rock, fire and breath, maintain that God is not simply a person. Drawing on the two sets of images suggests that God is personal, while at the same time more than a person.

Unlike a set of intellectual conclusions about God, metaphors have an affective dimension. Imaging God as lover, shepherd, companion or breath has an impact on us. As a result, the central dynamic of the Christian life becomes relationship- with God, the world, and each other. The Christian life is about turning toward and entering into relationship with the one who is already in relationship with us- the
one who gave us life, who has loved us from the beginning, who loves us whether we know it or not, who journeys with us whether we know it or not.' (Borg, 1997)

**What is Grace?**

Christians believe that God has been present and active in the lives of the people whose stories form the basis of the Scriptures. Christians believe too that the action of God continues to be experienced in human life. The words of Rahner eloquently describe how a person experiences grace.

When someone experiences laughter or tears, bears responsibility, stands by the truth, breaks through the egoism in his or her life with other people; where someone hopes against hope, faces the shallowness and stupidity of the daily rush and bustle with humour and patience, refusing to become embittered; where someone learns to be silent and in the inner silence lets the evil in his or her heart die rather than spread outwards; in a word, where someone lives as he or she would like to live, combating his or her own egoism and the continual temptation to inner despair—there is the event of grace. (Rahner, 1971)

Grace operates in people and is manifest in their lives.

Grace is … a divine life source, a source of God's revelation, life, and love communicated and offered to all human beings freely by a God who longs for human beings and communities to love God back in all ways at all times. (Ekstrom, 1995)

There are a great variety of ways in which individuals experience God's grace. Grace is God's love for human beings, a love that affects, converts and transforms human freedom and loving into a love that is accepting and forgiving. This love enables a person to live with more depth and capacity. This love is offered to all and operates in all people. God's grace is at work transforming individuals and through people's actions, the world is being transformed. (Haight, 1979)

As a concept, grace emphasizes the qualities of the love of God for human beings. This love is experienced as merciful and forgiving. God's love is a positive force that heals and cures selfishness and enables one to love God in return. The effect of God's love is transforming and enriches life as a result of being touched with God's love. God's grace frees people from their sin, from fear and from the limits that they can put on themselves. Experiencing God's love engenders a security that frees a person for others and the world. Grace liberates people from a terror of death and releases a constructive energy for hope in people's hearts. (Haight, 1979)

The effect of grace is essentially social and urges the human person toward expansiveness and self-transcendence. God's grace is driving and sustaining all human goodness and love. God is at work in the world in loving human freedom and in the lives of self-transcending persons, thus God's action becomes visible and real in the world. Those who are dedicated to the concerns of the poor and those who are neglected are effective agents of God's action in the world. God's action in and through human loving is moving toward the goal of creating a world or kingdom of communion, harmony, peace and reconciliation. (Haight, 1979)

**What is Spiritual Formation?**

The goal of spiritual formation is that the person lives in such a way that he or she is awake to God in his or her heart and in the world around him or her. The heart is the place where the essence of the person exists. 'The heart is our hidden centre...the place of decision, ...the place of truth...the place of encounter, ...the place of covenant.' (Catholic Church, 1994)

The heart is that secret, deepest place within us where our spirit, soul, and body come together in a unity of self.

Spiritual formation involves an inward journey to the heart. The first task is to look within, reflect on life and seek God and God's activity right there. People who identify and articulate the movements of their inner lives...
are able to slowly remove obstacles to seeing and responding to the presence of grace in their day to day experiences.

Similarly, Borg speaks of the purpose of the spiritual life as 'the opening of the heart.' (Borg, 2004) To understand what it means to have an open heart, let us look firstly at the metaphor of the closed heart. Borg expands on what it means in human experience by making connections with other key biblical metaphors.

When we have a closed heart we are blind, that is we have limited vision. We are closed in our own world and we do not perceive accurately.

- A closed heart affects the mind and the reasoning process. We can deceive ourselves and justify positions that support our own self-interest.
- A closed heart lacks gratitude and is insensitive to wonder and awe. The world looks ordinary when our hearts are closed.
- A closed heart and exile go together. Self-centered, the heart is cut off from the larger reality. Separated and disconnected, it is estranged and in exile.
- A closed heart lacks compassion and is unable to feel the suffering of others. Similarly the closed heart is insensitive to injustice.

To a certain degree, and at particular times, we all experience 'closed hearts'. On some days we sense we are more open than others. Busyness, tiredness, preoccupation may limit our capacity to be open. The mild form of closed heartedness results in a critical stance, insensitivity, self-centeredness and self-interest. The more extreme expressions of closed or hard hearts are seen in violence, brutality, arrogance and greed.

The opening of the self to God, the sacred, is the essential task of the Christian life. How do hearts become open? Hearts become open through the grace of God, through the action of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God operates in 'thin places'. This term comes to us from Celtic spirituality and the belief that God is right here where we are as well as beyond us. The Celts named particular geographic places as 'thin places' because that was where had they experienced God as particularly close, suggesting that the divine reality broke through into the ordinary world. 'Thin places are places where the veil momentarily lifts, and we behold God, experience the one in whom we live and move and have our being.'(Borg, 2004)

Thin places can be physical places such as the traditional places for pilgrimage in the Christian tradition, including Jerusalem and Rome. Mountains and high places are also important in many religious traditions. In general people are aware of environmental locations that are significant because they are associated with their own encounters with God, for example, waterfalls, the seaside, the desert, the night sky.

The concept of a 'thin place' refers to more than a physical location. 'A thin place is anywhere our hearts are opened' (Borg, 2004). Thus a thin place is any means by which we become present to the sacred. This can include music, poetry, literature, visual arts and dance as they can all mediate an encounter with God. The encounter can happen anywhere and at any time. Moments of grief, hardship and illness can become thin places.

Particular people can be thin places. Persons through whom we experience the presence of the Spirit of God are a thin place for us. Jesus, the saints and the many admired people of all faiths are thin places.

Many Christian practices, serve to mediate an encounter with God. The use of sacred words and rituals in liturgy and sacramental actions serve to awaken us to God's action and to separate us from the everyday. Within liturgy, music can become a thin place, sometimes this it is through the performance of music or it may be in participatory singing.

All the sacraments are means of grace, symbols of how we encounter God. Homilies too can be thin places. The preaching of the
Word is meant to create a place where our hearts can open. The Scriptures themselves are a thin place for individuals and groups. When read well, the readings can become sacramental. Key words of the liturgy are thin places. It may be that The Lord's Prayer or other phrases that we know 'by heart' move us and open our hearts. Repeating words at the level of our hearts and not our heads can shift us into a thin place. The liturgical seasons and celebrations of the Church year also have great power using symbols and rituals to awaken us to God's action.

Individual spiritual practices also help us to become receptive. Personal prayer, meditation, times of silence, journaling, retreats and fasting all bring our attention to the opening of our hearts or the action of grace.

When formal opportunities are provided for Christian spiritual formation, participants are introduced to practices and disciplines that enable the journey to the heart or the opening of the heart. Particular traditions offer a range of practices that suit particular personalities. Throughout life's journey certain practices may become helpful for a time. The important thing is that the people live in a way that they are awake to God in their hearts and in the world around them.

Conclusion

Cooperation with grace, opening ourselves to God's love, is essential not only for the spiritual life but for life itself. As humans we struggle to keep our hearts open to God's action, we struggle to cooperate with grace. 'The problem is not to make a spiritual life happen but to see where it actually is happening'. (Nouwen et al., 2010) Our task is to recognize that God acts in such a way as to enrich and nourish us and that we are already in the spiritual life. Once we accept the reality that God is speaking to us, that God is present to us we begin to see the greatness of God in daily events.

Living with an open heart is a pathway to an embodied and fulfilled life. When we have open hearts we can see more clearly. We are alive to wonder, we are full of gratitude. With an open heart we are capable of compassion and have a passion for justice. We are alive with grace and in relationship with our God. By following the inner movements of the spiritual life, we are led by the Spirit of God, again and again, to the place of the heart where we can be made whole. (Nouwen et al., 2010)

For those involved in the work of spiritual formation it is essential that programs include opportunities to clarify and develop an understanding of God that is informed by tradition and that promotes 'an embodied and fulfilled spiritual life'. (Nouwen, 2006) Spiritual formation and spiritual formation programs ultimately affirm that all of life, all of Christian spiritual formation is really about one thing, our cooperation with grace…. 'Grace-God's love surging into the world at all times.' (Michael, 2013)

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Let’s start by doing a brief exercise. Think back to an occasion when someone confided in you. It may be a family member, a friend, colleague at work, even a stranger sitting next to you on a plane. They may tell you of a loss they have had recently, or of a disappointment in their job or of hurt caused by someone close.

As you reflect on that incident, consider these questions for a moment. Perhaps jot down a few words or phrases as you do so.

• What did I feel as that person shared something painful with me?
• Was I different at the end of the conversation and how?
• Was the other person different and how?
• What does this incident tell me about sharing of personal confidences?

There will be as many answers to these questions as there are readers of this article. But it would be a safe bet we can find some common threads.

• Part of me would probably resonate with the person’s hurt. Perhaps a memory from my own life would hover in the background. I may feel something of the other person’s anger. But most of all, I think I would feel trusted. The other person felt safe enough to reveal something of their personal and inner self.

• Looking back I may see how I had shifted even slightly in my attitude to the other person. I tried not only to hear. But I tried to ‘hear’ in the sense of listen and understand. I think I had more sympathy and understanding of her. I can see that I was a bit more sensitive and careful about not judging people too hastily or putting them into compartments.

• I am also aware that sharing the burden meant that my conversation partner felt better. Talking about what happened, without removing it as an event in life, lightened its impact in some way. It was summed up in ‘thank you for listening.’

• As for being a partner in confidences, two things stand out.

First, in a strange way, listening to the sharing of the pain nourishes us. My horizons and my heart expand just a little. I sense somehow I am more human and even better for the experience. I feel that in ‘hearing the word’ from another I am ‘not living on bread alone.’ Moments of personal revelation, even with a stranger, touch and feed our inner depths.

Second, a condition must be fulfilled for such disclosures to happen. The person must freely choose to do so. A personal revelation cannot be demanded or forced. It is a gift that is offered (which tells us something very important about God and Revelation). It is a risk which involves being vulnerable. There is the possibility of rejection. Patrick O’Sullivan sums this up neatly:

When vulnerability meets power the result is alienation; but when vulnerability is met by vulnerability, the result is intimacy. The only way into intimacy is through vulnerability.1

What does this have to do with the sense of Hearing and God? I will explore this in four stages: hearing and listening to God in the Scriptures; call and response in Jesus and then in Mary; finally, God’s listening and silence as presence and absence.

Hearing and Listening to God

Read Mark 12: 29-34 (Jesus and loving God
with all one’s heart). Note the first two words in Mark: ‘Listen Israel.’ Jesus’ reply is from Deuteronomy 6:5, one of the three texts of the Shema—the principal expression of Jewish faith—which His listeners, and all observant Jews, recited each morning and evening. This expressed faithfulness by acts of remembering regularly what was most important—what was dear and near to one’s heart. It was also a practice that constantly reminded them of God’s fidelity in what He had given them (His Torah or Way) and what God had done for them (past and present).

But Jesus goes further by combining Deut. 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18 ‘The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself.’ Jesus is saying that neither commandment can find its full meaning without the other. Further, in combining these two ‘laws’, some scholars consider that Jesus is doing something that seems to be distinctive to him in his time. To love God and to love one’s neighbour are two wings of the Covenant. They are far more important than ‘holocaust or sacrifice’ since they animate and direct our worship and actions (Mark 12: 33).

As we know, talking and listening are at the heart of an oral culture. Until the advent of printing, for Jesus and the bulk of human history, most communication has been through speech. In an oral society, then, listening intently is important. There are no typed versions, recordings, YouTube or computer storage to double check what is said.

In the Christian tradition, the culmination of our spiritual quest is expressed predominantly in terms of sight, i.e., the beatific vision. Nevertheless, there is something about the sense of hearing (and associated speech) that makes it a particularly apt metaphor for being open to God. Even in regard to human virtue, Aristotle held that, in relation to wisdom, hearing makes the largest contribution indirectly since it serves as means of verbal communication. Listening and being receptive are, to a large extent, then, the heart of prayer. This is seen as a quality both of God and ourselves. The Psalmist prays ‘I call with all my heart, Lord hear me…I rise before dawn and cry for help. I hope in your word’ (Ps. 118): Two-way listening and responding is seen as part of the relationship with God.

Foundationally, it is captured in the first Beatitude. ‘How happy are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 5:3). I once saw that translated as ‘happy are those who admit their need for God.’ Brendan Byrne is helpful here when he notes ‘while the sense of economic poverty is not excluded, Matthew’s formulation reflects a biblical tradition in which the ‘poor’ is an honorific name for the faithful of Israel, who, conscious of lack of resources on their own part, look to YHWH for salvation.’

This admission of need for God finds resonances of the summons to ‘choose life’ by a love that obeys God and ‘clings’ to Him in trust (Deut. 30: 19). This puts the spotlight on one aspect of the personal relationship with God that characterizes faith. We have seen earlier that faith can entail sight and light. Faith can be understood as believing what God reveals or objective faith. But there is also subjective faith, namely, that ‘by which we believe.’ Since faith is about God, then, to say yes to God we need God to give us the ‘yes’ to do so.

But Aquinas also defines faith, in a third sense, as personal trust in, and surrender to, God. This is faith understood as a form of willing or desire, namely, as an affective movement, which underlies faith as a cognitive reality. Faith as trust, then, is even
more basic. ‘I believe in you’ can be said about someone else, even when they have revealed nothing of themselves nor communicated something they claim to be true. In other words, we trust someone (‘I believe in you’) even before we say ‘I believe you.’ Admitting our need for (‘clinging to’) God seems to underpin prayer as a cry to be heard, for God to ‘hear the cry of the poor’.

Attentive listening, then, is a mark someone who is faithful whether we are speaking of God or a disciple. Deafness denotes hardness of heart and unfaithfulness. Just as being profoundly deaf isolates a person, so it is in our relationship with God and with life itself. Genevieve Lacey captures what means to listen and to hear, for a musician and artist and, more generally in everyday life:

Listening is an activity that connects us deeply with others. It can change how we perceive the world, and then, how we decide to live in it. To listen suggests an open, receptive stance, without necessarily knowing what will arrive. It suggests alertness, willingness. Listening is essentially an act of respect and generosity...6

Let’s probe this a bit more in relation to Jesus and Mary.

Call and Response: Jesus the Word

Anthony Kelly points out that Aquinas, for instance, ‘insists on the biblical priority of hearing, for, in all revelatory experiences, hearing precedes the seeing—even in the original experiences of seeing related to the risen Jesus.’7 While, at times, hearing the Word of God is superseded by a seeing and a touching (as in 1 John 1:1-3), Kelly continues with an important observation in the light of our discussion:

It remains, however, that the experience of hearing is still basic in the economy of faith since, while sight and touch play their parts, they are less able to register either the excess of God’s self-giving or to underline the essential self-surrendering receptivity of faith. To hear the word of God places the hearer in a profoundly interpersonal context of relationships which occur in time, as a call and response.8

We have a variety of theological models to understand Jesus and also the Christian Life. When we discussed ‘sight’ the emphasis was on Jesus as Logos, the Incarnate Word or the Prototypical Image for all creation. Growing in our relationship with God was growing ‘into’ the likeness of Jesus, sharing in the divine life through seeking and seeing the ‘face’ of Jesus. Again, we use analogical discourse to see the Trinity in terms generation of life through love. The Father as origin expresses his love in the person of the Son and communicates his love in the Spirit. This process is also couched in terms of speech: the God who is essentially love finds self-expression in the Word—the affirmation of God’s unique ‘self’ as lover and giver. The Word is the divine ‘yes’, the definitive utterance of God as one of love ‘overflowing.’ As Aquinas says: ‘The beauty conceived in the heart of the Father is the Word.’9

Drawing on Kelly and Moloney we see how the first thee verses of the Prologue of John’s Gospel illuminate this from a specific angle. These authors ask: Who is the God of this Gospel? They suggest that the answer must be framed in reference to ‘the Word’ where ‘God is primarily the one who speaks, and is spoken’ by ‘Word-ing’ creation into existence but, beyond time and from the depths of the eternal silence, ‘the divine mystery words itself.’10

The Word, then, exists outside time and creation (‘in the beginning’), ‘as something spoken, something communicable, the source of revelation about God, but it stands in its utter originality as ‘turned towards God.’ This original turning is so complete and the relationship so is so communicative and receptive, that ‘what God was, the Word was such that God will be revealed in a new originality through this Word that will be spoken into creation and into human history.’11

We will focus here on ‘incarnate’ Word, the embodied divine statement that is ‘communicative and receptive’ in time and history. At the same time, He is a testimony about,
and a call, from God. The Word spoken in Jesus is to be heard and requires a response. He is ‘the Beloved: Listen to him’ (Mk. 9:7).

As we consider hearing and listening, Kelly’s suggestion above is appropriate: the receptivity of faith in call and response is a model applicable to Jesus as it is to discipleship and prayer. In that context, what does ‘attentive listening’ look like? Let’s consider Jesus.

Jesus, understood through the call-response lens, is paradigmatically the Prophet, who is called by God to proclaim his word. The Prophet’s response is as much through his life as is the ‘yes’ to the divine summons. Like Moses, Jesus’ prophetic role is captured primarily in his relationship as ‘turned towards’ his Abba Father. Whereas Moses spoke to God face to face ‘as a man speaks with his friend’ (Ex. 33:11), Jesus is the One who is, in the fullest sense, the Beloved, the one ‘closest to the Father’s heart.’ Nevertheless, this was not done without a struggle on Jesus’ part. Such struggle, even resistance, was applicable to the Prophets in general, as it applies, clearly, to all of us. The paradigmatic expression of resistance to the call is found dramatised in the Book of Jonah. It offers a mixture of satire, humour with the Israelite community’s humble and self-deprecating insight into itself and the limits of its horizons compared to the scope of divine mercy.

In sharing in our humanity, we know that Jesus ‘was tested’ (Mark 1:12-13). Drawing on Israel’s testing in the desert (Deut. 6-8), this testing is dramatised in the three ‘temptation in the wilderness’ scenarios in Matthew (4:1-11). Murphy-O’Connor suggests these are backgrounded by Gospel scenes where Jesus was pulled in two directions. Jesus had to ‘struggle to remain faithful to his Father’s call’, to steel himself and remain alert in to be faithful to his mission. But in each situation, His response to his Father is one of loving obedience such that he says ‘I always do what pleases him’ (John 8:29). Perhaps Jesus’ response to the first wilderness ‘temptation’ is foundational: ‘Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Deut. 8:3). In this, He reaffirms His complete trust in his Father: that His heart was not divided. It is through his attentive listening that Jesus entrusts himself into the hands of his Father who is worthy of such trust. This is his primary form of nourishment. Ultimately, he walks the path of his passion and death in self-surrender, revealing to the world the self-giving life and trust-worthy love of God.

**Call and Response: Mary**

Let’s now turn to Mary and Luke 1: 26-38. In this Annunciation scene, there is the underlying hint of the Shema noted above. More importantly, there are resonances with the first Creation Account of Genesis where God’s spirit hovered over the water (darkness). Creation emerges from the divine power bringing light and order (cosmos) out of chaos (darkness and disorder). It is the action of God’s Word in a performative utterance; as ‘Word-ing,’ it makes things happen and is life-changing. In this ‘new’ creation, it is the same Spirit of God at work in Mary as one fully open to receiving God (capax dei). From the beginning of her life, Mary was enveloped in the love of God, God’s self communication with the gift of grace, namely, the Immaculate Conception. Elizabeth Johnson points out that one German phrase for the celebration of December 8th ‘felicitously’ captures this meaning: it is called ‘the feast of the be-gracing of Mary.’

What is striking about Mary’s response of ‘yes’ to God’s call in Luke’s portrayal? First, it is an expression of whole-hearted and self-surrendering faith that offers a picture of the model believer. She represents those who ‘hear the word of God and put it into practice’ (Lk. 8: 21). Second, it is an act of consent that has past and future implications: she joins company with those women in Israel’s history who
have consented to cooperate in God’s desires and plans; she is the ‘forerunner of Luke’s rogues’ gallery, i.e., women, sinners, little people whom not one would expect to respond favorably to God’s revelation.’

Third, Elizabeth Johnson’s distillation of recent studies by women scholars offers an interpretation that has contemporary and a more universal significance. In this scene with Mary, we have a young peasant girl who rises above the constraints of her culture and her position. In discerning the call of God in her life, she exercises ‘independent thought and action….asks questions, takes counsel with her own soul. In a self-determining act of personal autonomy, she decides to go for it.’ Rather than a passive and timid reaction, hers is ‘a free and autonomous act [that] encourages women’s efforts to take responsibility for their own lives.’

Further, Mary’s attentive listening has a centrifugal trajectory. She makes the journey to be with her cousin Elizabeth. Contemplation, worship and prayer must move towards others in responsibility for making our world a better place. Most importantly, the attentive listening that has led her to be in solidarity with the ‘project of the reign of God’ is now completed by ‘the radical depiction of Mary’s no to oppression’ in the Magnificat. This brings us to another phase of our discussion.

God Listens to Us

‘O Lord hear my prayer’ sings Psalm 55, a sentiment conveyed often in the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 137 or Ps. 17:1-5. Perhaps to cry out to God in need most reveals the meaning of being open to God. It is the attitude that is most appealing to God, seen in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Or the Psalmist: ‘my eyes are drawn to them man of humble and contrite heart who trembles at my word.’

But there is still the question ‘does God answer our prayers?’ Sometimes, yes, but sometimes it seems ‘no.’ God’s response may be different from what we expect. Or perhaps God gives us the strength and insight to cope with the difficulty or pain that prompts our prayer for help. In that sense, ‘how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him’ (Luke 11:13).

It is this promise of God’s attentive listening that encourages us in intercessory prayer. As Patrick O’Sullivan points out in the book noted above:

If something is of concern to us and so becomes part of our life, and if we pray about it, we make it possible for Jesus to be at work in that area. We enable him to be effectively present, establishing the Kingdom.

But what about listening that meets silence or attention that is met by silence? We can consider briefly silence as presence (understood in the affirmative sense).

We are reminded by the psalmist ‘Be still and know that I am God (Ps. 46:10). Meredith Secomb’s illuminating discussion on silence reminds us that the ‘saints cherish silence and monasteries maintain a ‘Great Silence.’ Such silence develops an interiority that is foundational to the spirituality manifested by the withdrawn contemplative and the person in active ministry alike.’ In the spiritual life, silence gives external shape to a ‘more profound dynamics that can be both healing and freeing.’ The silence of contemplative prayer ‘is a portal through which we touch the depths of reality. Isaiah tells us: ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength’ (Is 30:15).’ While silence can reach us through many of the senses, Secomb points out that, in the experience of ‘the poet and mystic silence reaches us through hearing’ and cites Hopkins:

Elected Silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorled ear,
Pipe me to pastures still and be
The music that I care to hear.

And Secomb, then, reminds that the ‘silent music’ of St John of the Cross is another instance of the spiritual capacity to ‘hear’ silence.

But what about silence as absence, spe-
specifically, as a sense of the absence of God, of a God who is not listening or responding? This is an area that has drawn increasing interest in the past two decades. Experiences of silence and darkness understood as negative or apophatic forms of encounter with the divine are probed theologically and spiritually at the personal, social and cultural levels.20 A comprehensive discussion is beyond our scope here so I will offer one comment in the light of the main focus of this article.

Dark night or ‘impasse’ (‘no way round it’) experiences can involve suffering, life-crises, loss, powerlessness, ‘hitting a wall’, with an accompanying inability to draw on accustomed resources for normal ways of functioning, for instance, in prayer and in relationships.21 Such moments or ‘passage’ events, while experienced as dark, as a form of death, can, in reality, be signs of, or occasions of, new life. They can be points of growth or transformation if they are engaged and appropriated consciously. This will mean that the limitations and existential powerlessness of the human condition are accepted and, even, embraced. It really means a surrendering of the controlling ‘ego’ and the ‘willingness to admit the mystery of its own being and submit itself to that mystery’ such that one freely chooses a path into the uncontrolled and unpredictable margins of life…when the path of deadly clarity fades.22

Listening to the call in self-receptivity and responding in self-surrender is a conscious allowing of the self to be drawn to a deeper love and trust that is no longer received in the accustomed way. Its situation and communication are perceived as ‘darkness.’ What is experienced as a lessening of commitment or love, a point when everything seems to be falling apart and ‘limitation looms large’, is, in reality, the context within which occurs the call to a ‘new vision and to deeper, more genuine intimacy with God.’23 Perhaps it is to be with Peter who is led where he ‘would rather not go’ (John 21: 18). Even more, it is joining company with the experience of the crucified Lord: from the darkness of ‘My God, why have you deserted me’ (Mk. 15:34), with Jesus to move to ‘into your hands I commit my spirit’ (Lk. 23:46).

Conclusion

In our extended meditation on the sense of hearing, we are, perhaps, more consciousness of how much listening involves learning, being affected, silence, and, how these are inescapably connected with words. From that, three final thoughts arise.

First, there is the extent that we need to be nourished by the ‘words’ of others in moments of self-disclosure. Think of the dinner gathering where we get so engrossed in a conversation that our meal gets cold. Clearly, we do not live on bread alone. Second, we are reminded of the central place of language with its scope and also its limits. These are captured so elegantly and eloquently by Gustave Flaubert:

Language is a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity.

Finally, we return to St. Anselm mentioned the first article on Desire. He begins writing theology by praying that God will help him find God. Love seeks to understand what it already loves. John Caputo says this quest is like a blind person who asks someone to keep talking so that they can follow the sound.24

That is attentive listening. Its goal is to be filled ‘with the utter fullness of God.’

NOTES


2. Moloney lists scholars who support or dissent from this view. He notes that it is 'not clear' whether the combing of these two 'love' commandments 12. See
When Jesus gave us his body, he was expressing the deepest meaning of what it is to be a body. To be a body is to receive all that this body is from one's parents and their parents before them. It is ultimately to receive one's being from God. Our existence is a gift in every moment. God gives me being now. So our sexual relations should be expressive of the gift of oneself to another, and the acceptance of the gift which is the being of the other person.

Jesus' words at the Last Supper take us to the heart of a sexual ethic. Sexuality is about communion; it speaks. And what it should express is mutual generosity, the giving and the receiving of gifts...

The Last Supper teaches us that the heart of a Christian sexual ethics is the renunciation of violence. We seek mutuality and equality. When someone desires the body of another person, then that desire should not be rapacious, seeking to take possession of the body, as if it were a piece of meat to be devoured. We must learn to desire in a way that delights in the other; that treasures their vulnerability, that takes pleasure in their very existence. We must delight in another as God delights in us, tenderly and without dominion.

THE CREATION OF A PROTESTANT LITURGY

The development of the Eucharistic rites of the First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI

ROBERT M. ANDREWS

Over the years some Anglicans have expressed problems with the assertion that individuals who were committed to the main tenets of classical Protestant theology founded and shaped the early development of Anglican theology. In 1852, for example, the Anglo-Catholic luminary, John Mason Neale (1818-1866), could declare with confidence that the Church of England never was, is not now, and I trust in God never will be, Protestant. Similarly, in 1923 Kenneth D. Mackenzie could, in his 1923 manual of Anglo-Catholic thought, The Way of the Church, write that the all-important point which distinguishes the Reformation in this country from that adopted in other lands was that in England a serious attempt was made to purge Catholicism without destroying it.

Thus the Anglo-Catholic myth of the late nineteenth century—namely, that Anglicanism escaped being founded on Protestant principles—has remained influential among some conservative Anglo-Catholics, even if recent scholarship has questioned most of its factual basis. Indeed, as Eamon Duffy asserted in 1995: 'The Founding Fathers of the Church of England saw themselves first and foremost as Protestants, and as different from the Church of Rome as chalk from cheese.'

As this paper will further elucidate, this is the most honest reading of the historic period that saw the beginnings of Anglicanism. Representing a study of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's (1489-1556) liturgical revisions: the Eucharistic Rites of 1549 and 1552 (as contained within the First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI), this essay shows that classical Protestant beliefs were influential in shaping the English Reformation and the beginnings of Anglican theology.

Of course, Anglicanism changed and developed immensely during the centuries following its sixteenth-century origins, and it is problematic to characterize it as anything other than theologically pluralistic; nonetheless, as a theological tradition its genesis lies in a fundamentally Protestant milieu— a sharp reaction against the world of late medieval English Catholic piety and belief that it emerged from.

**Background**

For almost a century prior to Cranmer's liturgical revisions of 1549 and 1552, the most widely used Eucharistic rite of the pre-Reformation Catholic Church in England was that commonly referred to as the 'Sarum Use'. Like most of the Eucharistic rites that had developed in medieval England, the Sarum Use was named as such after its origins at the Cathedral of Salisbury (in Latin: Sarum). Previous to Sarum's dominance, there had been a number of local rites scattered throughout England, these also similarly...
named after their places of origin (in theory the metropolitan Church of the province). Thus Cranmer, in his preface to the First Prayer Book of 1549, states that there existed in England prior to the Reformation at least five different usages: those of Salisbury, Hereford, Bangor, York, and Lincoln—and this was not even an exhaustive listing.

When Cranmer drew up the first Eucharistic rite of 1549, he drew heavily upon the Sarum Use. Though this reliance upon Sarum changed significantly with the advent of the second Eucharistic Rite of 1552, it was, in the beginning, dominant. Like all Eucharistic rites then in use in the Catholic Church, the Sarum Use was a liturgy that expressed a Eucharistic theology that was definite and clear as to its nature and purpose. This theological purpose principally revolved around two doctrines that essentially made the Mass the Sacrament that it was: those being the doctrines of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Real Presence (or, as it had been termed in the West from around the thirteenth century onwards: ‘Transubstantiation’). The Eucharistic Sacrifice was the belief that in the Eucharist, Christ's one and only sacrifice on the cross was made substantially present on the altar. The following quotations from the Sarum Use illustrate the presence of these two doctrines. The first, that being the Prayer of Oblation, asserts quite unambiguously the doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice:

> Receive, O Holy Trinity, this oblation, which I, unworthy sinner, offer to Thy honour, and that of Blessed Mary and All Saints, for my sins and offences: for the health of the living and the repose of all the faithful departed.

Regarding the real presence, the prayer said by the priest to the consecrated Host prior to receiving Communion suffices:

> Hail through all eternity, most Holy Flesh of CHRIST, my chiefest delight, before all things and above all things. May the body of our LORD JESUS CHRIST be to me a sinner the way and the life.

Numerous other references could be given to show that the Sarum Use conveyed both the Catholic doctrines concerning the Eucharistic sacrifice and the real presence. As recent scholarship has shown, within the context of late medieval English Catholicism, such doctrines were popular and widely believed. In other words, they did not represent abstract theological teachings divorced from the reality of living a Christian life far from it; instead, embodied within the liturgy of the Mass, such doctrines represented the heart of Catholic belief and piety, which, prior to the Reformation in England, had little in the way of popular discontent.

**Henry VIII**

When Henry VIII broke from Rome in 1534 religious convictions had not been his main impetus, at least in the way they had been on the Continent. As Diarmaid MacCulloch puts it, ‘the King's quarrel was only ambiguously with traditional religion, and much more straightforwardly with the Pope’. A break from Rome was, of course, a religious conviction in the sense that the king no longer believed the Pope to possess the divine right to ecclesiastically govern England, but, apart from this issue, Henry's quarrel and eventual break from Rome was not over the fundamental points of the Catholic faith. Of course, this does not mean that Henry was not in any way influenced by Protestantism. The Ten Articles of 1536, for example, were a
clear instance of how Protestantism did—if only moderately—influence his actions. Yet despite this Henry was, for the most part, a religious conservative who for most of his reign resisted the Protestant ideas that were slowly gaining hold in England (this was especially true regarding his unwavering belief in Transubstantiation).

One of the key figures central to Henry VIII's break from Rome was the Cambridge scholar and eventual Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. Born in 1489 to a family of humble but respectful parentage, Cranmer had taken Holy Orders sometime prior to 1523 after many years of study at Cambridge. In 1532, after having formed a working relationship with the Henry VIII, Cranmer was sent abroad as the resident ambassador to the Court of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Charles V. It was abroad that Cranmer came under the influence of Lutheranism, effectively becoming Protestant in his convictions. In true Lutheran style, Cranmer also took a wife (the niece of Nuremberg's leading Lutheran theologian, Andreas Osiander). She would, however, have to remain a secret, for in 1533 Cranmer was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury.

In England, Cranmer became a key player in Henry's desire to annul his marriage (which subsequently occurred), as well as giving the king the theological arguments needed for declaring himself the supreme governor of the Church of England. Yet owing to Henry's religious conservatism, Cranmer's desires for Church reform along more explicit Protestant lines remained largely unfulfilled for well over a decade, that is, until Henry died in 1547 leaving the English Crown in the hands Edward VI.

Edward VI

Unlike Henry VIII, Edward VI was no conservative when it came to the traditional religion of England. Having been schooled in Protestantism, he was one of those who, in the words of Kenneth Clark, 'owed nothing to the past' (one could, perhaps, make allowances for his age, but it must be said that the young King demonstrated a remarkable clarity of conviction when it came to his religious preferences). Under his reign the familiar Sarum Use of the Mass, said in Latin and familiar to all, would, in the space of five years, be replaced with a service that looked, sounded, and read, like something completely foreign. And at the centre of all this—suggesting, advising, encouraging, and for all intents and purposes, orchestrating the whole affair—was the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer.

Under the reign of Edward VI liturgical change began to take place rapidly. The first thing to go was Latin, which was removed from the liturgy through a number of rapid—but nonetheless staged—insertions of the vernacular, until, by mid 1548, entire Masses were being said in English. Earlier in that same year, a short document authored by Cranmer and entitled: The Order of the Communion, was published. This was not a new Eucharistic rite as such, simply a booklet that was to supplement the Mass with vernacular exhortations to those receiving Communion to receive it worthily and in a spiritual manner. The booklet also contained a ritual for the administration of Communion under both kinds. Though it is important to note that none of these changes, in and of themselves, went against anything the pre-Reformation Church had taught in a dogmatic sense, it is, however, likely that such changes were intended by Cranmer to be calculated steps in the direction away from traditional Catholic belief and practice, a means of introducing Protestantism in stages, so as not to impose beliefs and practices that the vast majority of Englishmen and women would not have accepted had they been forced on them quickly and without preparation.
tent of Cranmer's first major liturgical revision, that being the first Prayer Book of Edward VI. Made law on 21 January 1549 and printed on 7 March, its full title was: *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, after the Use of the Church of England.* Mainly the work of Cranmer and composed entirely in English, the 1549 Prayer Book contained all the basic rubrics, prayers, and services of the Church (*e.g. Table, Calendar, Daily Offices, Order of Baptism, etc.*). The famous late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Anglo-Catholic writer, Percy Dearmer (1867-1936), once described the 1549 Prayer Book as 'an English simplification, condensation, and reform of the old Latin services, done with care and reverence in a genuine desire to remove the difficulties of the Medieval rites by a return to antiquity'. This, however, was only half true. That it was a 'simplification, condensation, and reform of the old Latin services' was correct. The revision of the Breviary, for example, into two simple offices of Mattins and Evensong was a classic example of this process (and, it must be said, hadd much to commend it). But to describe the 1549 Prayer Book as a work 'done with care and reverence in a genuine desire to remove the difficulties of the medieval rites by a return to antiquity' is an inaccurate assessment. The reality of the nature and content of the 1549 Prayer Book has been better put by A. G. Dickens. For him, the 1549 Prayer Book was 'a masterpiece of compromise, even of studied ambiguity. While it did not specifically deny Catholic doctrine, its ambiguous phrases were understood by its author in a Protestant sense and intended to enable Protestants to use it with a good conscience'. The reality is that the 1549 Prayer Book was not written as an end in and of itself, that is, out of a simple and genuine desire to return the late medieval services to the more simple and workable forms, or as Dearmer sentimentally puts it, as 'a return to antiquity'. It was, instead, a political compromise, a negotiated first step on the part of Cranmer that was intended to pacify—if only for a time—those who did not hold to his own more developed Protestant beliefs.

This is seen, especially, through Cranmer's creation of the Eucharistic rite of 1549, which was entitled: 'The Supper of the Lorde and The Holy Communion, Commonly Called the Masse.' This, in and of itself, was evidence of compromise and ambiguity. The Protestantism of the service is evident in the fact that the rite is given three different names. The first: 'The Supper of the Lorde', was a direct import from Continental Protestant liturgies, most specifically, the 1545 Lutheran revision of the Mass, the ‘Church Order for Cologne’, in which the phrase, 'The Supper of the Lord', was used extensively. 'Holy Communion' was a neutral vernacular phrase, but the retention of the title, 'Masse' [*sic*], was evidence that the Eucharist's traditional medieval title had to stay—at least for a time.

Outwardly, the Eucharistic rite of 1549 followed closely the order of service found in Sarum. Take, for example, the beginning of the service where, after the recitation of the 'Collect for Purity' (*a prayer taken directly out of the Sarum Use*), the rite of 1549 moves straight to the Introit Psalm and then immediately into an abbreviated Kyrie. This is contrasted with the Sarum Use which, though also reciting the Collect for Purity, then prescribes that a litany of private prayers be said by the priest in dialogue with his ministers. Cranmer, instead of revising the prayers, simply removed them. This methodology generally runs throughout the entirety of the rite of 1549. Had Cranmer simply limited himself to this, Dearmer's claims regarding the changes made to the rite of 1549 would have been correct. There would have been nothing compromising or ambiguous about such a revision—it would
simply have represented a simplification of the existing rite. Such, however, was not the case. This is most clearly seen through the changes Cranmer made to the Offertory and the Canon.

The Offertory was that part of the liturgy where the alms of the faithful were collected and, in turn, offered to God. Historically, this had included the bread and wine that was to be consecrated at the Eucharist (though this practice was eventually phased out). Within the history of liturgical development the symbolism of the Offertory had come to be seen as being linked to the Eucharistic offering of Christ. Thus in the Sarum Use, the priest prayed the above-cited Prayer of Oblation in which the doctrine of the Eucharistic sacrifice was clearly evident. Luther had called the Offertory an 'abomination', and had done away with it entirely in his revision of the Mass. In the Eucharistic rite of 1549, however, Cranmer had retained a form of it, but his version had removed the Prayer of Oblation along with the entirety of prayers up to the Canon that clearly conveyed the doctrine of the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the place of these prayers was the simple reception of alms, to be done whilst verses of Scripture were being read.

Following the Offertory in the Sarum Use was the Canon, the most sacred part of the Mass. The Eucharistic rite of 1549 had retained a Canon, which in and of itself was remarkable, especially considering the fact that amongst the Continental Reformers its abolition was practically 'an article of faith'. Thus Luther, in a manner similar to the Offertory, had simply removed the Canon entirely, but Cranmer, operating along a modus operandi of 'studied ambiguity', had made a number of changes to it—or, more appropriately, omissions. These centered chiefly on the removal of any notion of a Eucharistic sacrifice. In and of itself, Cranmer's reworking of the Canon is a masterful piece of English prose and contains within it much that is beautiful and true (a fact now recognized by the Catholic Church), but its absence of any real allusion to the doctrine of the Eucharistic sacrifice is evidence that Cranmer was attempting to divest the Mass of its sacrificial nature whilst at the same time attempting to present to his fellow bishops and clergy—notwithstanding the English laity—a version of the Mass that still retained an adequate resemblance to its Sarum predecessor.

To be granted, not all notions of sacrifice were removed from the rite of 1549, only those notions that related to a Eucharistic sacrifice. For example, Cranmer makes reference to the sacrifice of Christ, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and the sacrifice of the people. These notions of sacrifice, however, are not quite the same as that of the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which it was believed that Christ's one sacrifice of Himself on the Cross was made corporally present on the altar. The reality of the rite of 1549 was that in place of the traditional Canon contained within Sarum, Cranmer had, in the words of Francis Aidan Gasquet, 'substituted a new prayer of about the same length as the old canon, leaving in it a few shreds of the ancient one, but divesting it of its character of sacrifice and oblation.'

Though Anglo-Catholics such as Dearmer have often attempted to convince their followers and opponents that the Eucharistic rite of 1549 was a genuine attempt at liturgical reform, the reality of the situation was less idyllic. The rite of 1549, along with the liturgical book it was issued within, was, as G. J. Cuming asserted, nothing more than 'a first step, following the precedent of the older Reformers, who all began with a conservative revision, and gave full liturgical expression to their opinions only when they felt the time to be ripe'. Of course, like Cranmer's reworking of the Canon, one can see within the rite of 1549 much that is of sublime beauty, holiness and truth. Cranmer was, without question, a master of English prose—ranking alongside writers such as Shakespeare and the
translators of the King James Bible. Who, for example, can fault 'the Prayer of Humble Access':

We do not presume to come to this thy table (0 merciful Lord) trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies: we be not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table: but thou art the same lord whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore (gracious Lord) so to eat the flesh of thy dear son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood in these holy Mysteries, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood. Amen.

Yet despite this, it still needs to be said that the primary motive and purpose for Cranmer's revision of the traditional Sarum Use was a thorough commitment to Protestant theology—a theology that was held back by the political obstacle of the 1540s, in addition to the social need to pacify a nation that remained committed to a late medieval piety that the Reformers detested.

The accession of Edward VI to the English throne, however, had allowed Cranmer to exercise a greater independence regarding his own Protestant beliefs and ability to enact liturgical reform. Thus by the early 1550s Cranmer was beginning to publicly speak his mind regarding what it was he really believed about the Eucharist and its relationship with the traditional Mass of the medieval Church. This was most clearly evident in his publication: An Answer unto a Crafty and Sophistical Cavillation Devised by Stephen Gardiner...Against the True and Godly Doctrine of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Saviour Jesus Christ (1551), which, as the title implied, was written against the views of the more traditionalist Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner (1483-1555). In that work, Cranmer's explicit avowal of a Protestant sacramentalism was clear and unambiguous:

But what availeth it to take away beads, pardons, pilgrimages, and such other like popery, so long as the two chief roots remain unpulled up? Whereof, so long as they remain, will spring again all former impediments of the Lord's harvest, and corruption of his flock. The rest is but branches and leaves, the cutting away whereof is but like topping and lopping of a tree ... leaving the body standing and the roots in the ground; but the very body of the tree ... is the popish doctrine of transubstantiation, of the real presence of Christ's flesh and blood in the sacrament of the altar (as they call it); and of the sacrifice and oblation of Christ made by the priest, for the salvation of the quick and the dead.

Cranmer was not alone in his views; another prominent English reformer, Hugh Latimer (1487-1555), had referred to the Mass as 'the most horrible blasphemy that could be devised'. This was simply following in the views of Continental reformers such as Luther and Calvin, both of whom made comments similar to the above.

1552

An awareness of Cranmer's views on the old Mass are important for they provide the context needed in order to understand the drastic changes that were made to the Eucharistic rite of 1549 when, in 1552, Edward VI issued his Second Prayer Book. If the chief characteristic of the rite of 1549 had been the absence of any notion of a Eucharistic sacrifice, then the chief characteristic of the rite of 1552 was the complete absence of any notion of the real presence or Transubstantiation. The rite of 1549, for all its faults, had nonetheless retained enough language that would have allowed for a belief in a corporal doctrine of the real presence. The rite of 1552, however, was unambiguous on this point. For example, in the rite of 1549, when the consecrated Host was given out to the faithful, the words of the priest were as follows: 'The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life.' In the rite of 1552, however, the words had been changed to the following: 'Take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with
The phrases 'in remembrance that Christ died for thee', as well as, 'feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving', all being intended to remove any notion of a corporal presence of Christ in the Eucharistic elements.

The many changes to the liturgy that emphasize the removal of any notion of the real presence are too numerous to individually list. However a different—but nonetheless highly noticeable—change to the Eucharistic rite of 1552, were the imposition of new ceremonial directions. The rite of 1549 had contained little in the way of ceremonial directions. No doubt this had been done in an effort to simplify. Nevertheless, it did retain the use of traditional Eucharistic vestments—most notably the chasuble. Other than a ban upon the elevation of the Host and Chalice after consecration (traditionally referred to as the 'sacring'), the rite of 1549 had generally maintained—albeit in a very abbreviated and simplified form—the basic ceremonial directions of the Sarum Use. Thus, celebrated in a very traditional manner, one could have been forgiven for thinking the rite of 1549 to be nothing but the Sarum Use reformed and simplified.

The Eucharistic rite of 1552, however, contained drastic changes to the ceremonial directions of how the Eucharist was to be celebrated. To begin with, gone were the distinctive Eucharistic vestments of the alb and chasuble. In their place priests were to wear only a cassock and surplice, whereas bishops were to wear a rochet. Additionally, no longer was the Eucharist to be celebrated on an altar; now, the Eucharist was to be celebrated on a 'Table', which at Communion time was to have only a white linen cloth upon it and would be positioned within the middle of the church, or within the chancel. The priest would also no longer celebrate facing East (ad orientem) but would stand 'at the north side of the Table'. Interestingly, kneeling whilst receiving Communion was retained, though, it must be added, not without Cranmer adding a strict rubric (found at the very end of the service) lest ignorant members of the laity interpret such a posture as signaling a belief in the Catholic doctrine of the real presence.

For as concernynge the Sacramentall bread and wine, they remain styll in theyr verye naturall substantes, and therefore may not be adored, for that were Idolatrye to be abhorred of all faythful christians. And as concernynge the naturall body and blood of our sauiour Christ, they are in heauen and not here. For it is agaynst the trueth of Christes true natural bodye, to be in moe places then in one, at one tyme.

The result was a service that, predictably, bore little resemblance to the rite of 1549, let alone the Sarum Use.

**Conclusion**

All of these convulsive liturgical changes occurred amidst a period known for its intensely iconoclastic attitudes and practices towards those signs and symbols that represented England's Catholic past. Though it is not within the confines of this paper to enter into great detail concerning what amounted to the practical destruction of centuries of tradition and piety, it suffices to note that from the late 1540s (practically from the moment Edward VI had come to the throne) to 1553 (the accession of Queen Mary), the majority of England's parish churches, as well as cathedrals, were plundered of their crucifixes, crosses, and other items used in the traditional ceremonies and rights of the medieval Church, as well as being whitewashed (in some cases completely) of their various sacred images. Today the archeological results of this period remain for all to see.

More than simply an episode in liturgical revision or ecclesial reform, the English Reformation witnessed the destruction of a culture, a civilization—even if the cultural achievements of the Anglican tradition (most notably, Cranmer's gift of sacral English and the King James Bible)
can be said to have—at least in part—redeemed this iconoclastic beginning. Nonetheless, as the art historian Kenneth Clark, Lord Clark of Saltwood (1903-1983), put it late last century:

We all know about the destruction of images, what we nowadays call works of art; how commissioners went round to even the humblest parish church and smashed everything of beauty it contained, not only images, but carved font covers, reredoses, anything within reach, because it didn't pay them to stay too long on a single job. You can see the results in almost every old church and cathedral in England, and a good many in France. For example, in the Lady Chapel of Ely, all the glass was smashed, and as the beautiful series of carvings of the life of the Virgin was in reach they knocked off every head, made a thorough job of it. I suppose the motive wasn't so much religious as an instinct to destroy anything comely, anything that reflected a state of mind that an unevolved man couldn't share.

The existence of these incomprehensible values enraged them.66

Into this atmosphere of destruction fitted Cranmer's Eucharistic rite of 1552. An iconoclastic faith needed an iconoclastic expression of worship and Cranmer's method of liturgical revision, as well as his own theological beliefs, fitted such a criteria. From the 'studied ambiguity' of the rite of 1549, to the open Protestantism of the rite of 1552, Cranmer's liturgical revisions represented the sometimes subtle, and sometimes explicit, imposition of deeply held Protestant convictions. Though it is wrong to characterize Anglicanism solely through this one historical epoch (as some Catholic polemicists are wont to do), the beginnings of this English theological tradition are nonetheless rooted in this liturgically iconoclastic atmosphere.

NOTES

16. Robert M. Andrews, 'Devotion in late medieval English Catholicism', Connor Court Quarterly,


32. In fact, has recently become an accepted part of Rome's incorporation of 'Anglican patrimony' into the Ordinariates for former Anglicans (see Andrew Burnham & Aidan Nichols (eds), *Customary of Our Lady of Walsingham: Daily Prayer for the Ordinariate*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012).


35. See especially Dearmer's comments: '[T]he First Prayer Book ...Is indeed throughout an exemplar of what we proudly claim as one of the best elements in the English character ...it endeavours to avoid the extremes of bigots and fanatics, seeking to establish what is true and right without regard to prejudices, reactions, and the cruel generalizations so characteristic of the period. Catholic conservatism there is, but it is the conservatism which is not afraid of new ideas; Protestantism there is, but it is the Protestantism that will not throw away the gold with the dross' (Dearmer, *Everyman's History of the Prayer Book*, 72).


37. The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward IV, 212.


39. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 52. 40. 'Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy holy spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name: through Christ our Lord. Amen' (The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward IV, 212).


46. The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward IV, 222-223.


50. The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward IV, 225.


SOME YEARS back a Lasallian confrère engaged with the in-service formation of religious educators wrote for his students: 'Unless a biblical book is listened to or read it remains a lifeless object...It is when the book is being listened to in a community which believes it to be the inspired word, that it becomes the inspired word...Moreover, it is in the context of a Christian community that the meaning of a biblical text is interpreted and applied to the particular day-to-day life situations of that community.' (Br Peter Heaney fsc)

When I was wrestling in years gone by with topics like inspiration or revelation and how to present them in the formation of religious educators, I found I came to invoking the analogous cases of great literary texts or great musical texts, on the good old pedagogical principle of proceeding from the known to the unknown.

Shakespeare's manuscript, in which the Hamlet soliloquy on existence occurs, 'remains a lifeless object' until, for example, a Sydney actor in 2015, backed by a production team, declares ('interprets') it to an audience who interpret and apply it 'to the particular day-to-day life situations of that community' just as a Garrick did for 18th century Londoners. A Biblical text needs not just a translator (the term 'interpreter' is used more and more these days by professional translators) to move it from one language form to another, as the interpreter stands between them, but the printed word needs bringing to life by being vocalised, and not just vocalised any old how but interpreted by proper declamation. The production team enhances good declamation by lighting, props, sets, etc. A good liturgical setting enhances the ecclesial proclamation of the Word of God. The lector is like a midwife aiding birth.

Beethoven's score, in which the 4th movement of the 9th symphony appears, 'remains a lifeless object' until, for example, Herbert von Karajan, in Berlin in 1980, backed by a production team, directed the
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and associated soloist and choir in a rousing rendition of the 'Song of Joy'. The audience hears the sung and accompanied words of the Schiller ode and applies it 'to the particular day-to-day life situations of that community'.

'Hamlet' continues to be performed and needs to be performed (interpreted) continually so that the 'sitz im leben' of the Prince of Denmark (and of the Bard of Avon) can be interpreted into every other 'sitz im leben' of place and time (just as long as the text is not misrepresented)—similarly for Beethoven's 9th.

The basic error of fundamentalism becomes evident, as does the basic error of subjectivism in textual interpretation. The scripture scholars rack their brains to get the authentic text, but that rigorously (re-)established text 'remains a lifeless object', as the confrère wrote, unless and until it is proclaimed in a community of believers. Subjectivism vitiates the text by introducing elements not present in the original. 'Private interpretation' is a well-known problem.

New performances (interpretations) of Beethoven (for example) are not only justifiable but required. Varying performances (interpretations) are not only justifiable but required (as long as the score is not misrepresented).

What is said here of Shakespeare and Beethoven applies equally of course to contemporary playwrights or composers.

Private reading of the biblical, literary or musical text is not to be denied. It also gives life to the text and equally becomes an inspired text for the reader or private 'performer'. Public reading of a biblical text in a faith assembly is not the only locus of revelation though it is paradigmatic and to be valued higher than the private reading.

It must be said that Christ himself 'is present in his word, since it is he who speaks when Scripture is read in Church'. Indeed, 'the liturgical celebration becomes the continuing, complete and effective proclamation of God's word. The word of God, constantly proclaimed in the liturgy, is always a living and effective word through the power of the Holy spirit. It expresses the Father's love that never fails in its effectiveness towards us.' The Church has always realised that in the liturgical action the word of God is accomplished by the interior working of the Holy Spirit who makes it effective in the hearts of the faithful.

—*Verbum Domini*, no. 52
MOST, IF NOT all, the New Atheists are fervently libertarian, perhaps libertarian even before being atheists, because historically they inherited a view of God as the great enemy of human liberty, an inheritance that came to them through Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, as Michael Buckley shows:

Each of these formative thinkers argued that the human and the divine are antithetical, that God preys on the human, that one must die if the other is to live. Historically and psychologically, they are posed in ineluctable threat and hostility. The affirmation of one necessarily means the denial of the other. One can only choose between them.¹

Dogma and absolutism are the marks of religion according to Richard Dawkins: for him the rational ideal is to be found in 'liberal, enlightened decent people' as against 'religious absolutists who advocate sanctity of life, oppose homosexuality, abortion and euthanasia, and seek to indoctrinate tiny children in the religion of their parents.'² While Sam Harris maintains:

Faith drives a wedge between ethics and suffering. Where certain actions cause no suffering at all, religious dogmatists still maintain that they are evil and worthy of punishment...³

In this same vein, A.C. Grayling's manifesto embraces the gamut of love, sex, drugs, life and death:

forbidding people to eat or drink what they wish, however silly or dangerous to themselves, or forbidding them to seek certain pleasures, however degraded, is a flagrant violation—a breathtaking one—of the privacy of the individual.⁴

Grayling labels religious views to the contrary as 'the superstitions of illiterate herdsmen living several thousand years ago'.⁵ When the debate is pitched in such opposing terms as 'enlightenment' and 'superstition', tolerance is stretched to breaking point, as is shown in Sam Harris' statement that 'the very ideal of religious tolerance... is one of the principal forces driving towards the abyss.'⁶ Here tolerance is sliding into intolerance and rendering dialogue problematic.

There is, of course, some justification behind this exceedingly unattractive portrayal of religion's do's and don'ts, which often do seem to be conjured out of the air. But before ceding too much ground, we should consider whether Harris' 'abyss' lies more in the hole dug by human freedom pushed to its limits as it is in anything else.

There seems to be a logic of progression in the modern concept of freedom which steamrolls over anything that stands in its way. It begins with the 'pursuit of happiness' understood as an individual right, which then quickly, in turn, morphs into the satisfaction of individual wants, needs and pleasures - to which, of course, there can never be an end, except death or running out of material resources to satisfy the ever clamorous wants!

Once on this treadmill, such a pursuit requires maximum individual liberty, understood as freedom from all restraint (reminiscent of adolescence), especially from the restrictions of religion, which put a dampener on the party by injudiciously introducing the topic of 'sin'. For Grayling, with tongue-in-cheek, the 'great sin' is harming others.⁷

The ideal then becomes self-assertion which is practically unlimited when adults consent to neutralise any idea of 'harm'. The desires, needs and pleasures involved can also be mass produced, manipulated, and chemically enhanced, as well as being given full scope as entrepreneurial freedom and market competition to change the fabric of society. It has created a very different world and a very different set of expectations about the meaning of life and our individual entitlements.
Freedom thus understood is a heady mixture that pushes us to be always testing the limits of experience and gearing up to sensory overdrive. We seem surprised when self-assertion spills over into violence and aggression, and accept the inevitable increased surveillance and regulation this brings with it, just as we also accept the consequences of social and family bonds and lives unravelling, leaving more and more individuals in need of institutional and therapeutic support.

The New Atheists assume that modern society should be governed by their liberal values and be entirely secular. This may be their goal, but in reality modern multicultural societies are much more complex than they suppose.

While there are strong currents of thinking along those liberal lines in modern democracies, in fact such societies are pluralist and becoming increasingly so, where many widely divergent opinions, religious views, and lifestyles, live, sometimes uneasily, side by side, with the liberal view being only one among many, and all needing to work out how to cooperate to solve their common problems.

The liberal view is not neutral ground in such societies, nor is it a minimum view acceptable to all. Divergent viewpoints espouse different values and principles, and have their own reasons for their positions, even while acknowledging they must live and work with others who do not share their views. People are not able to put their fundamental beliefs into cold storage simply to please liberals.

There are in pluralist societies inescapably different views about the extent the common good should impinge on individual liberty, the degree to preserve equality in a society driven by entrepreneurial freedom, and the extent to which the market should be allowed to dictate to social life.

What is needed in a pluralist society is not necessarily the libertarian viewpoint, but more fundamentally, a respect for each and every person's equal dignity and associated rights by other citizens and by government, and a place where citizens have an equal voice in a process that involves respect for the law, democratic principles, due process, fair procedures and a willingness to compromise. As the philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff states:

Given our disagreements, the equal right of all adult citizens to full political voice, within constitutional limits, on the scope of governmental authority and legal protections against the impairment of a citizen's right to full political voice by his fellow citizens, is as fair to all points of view as any arrangement could possibly be.8

Modern societies exhibit a cacophony of such voices—atheists, people of no religion, Christian groups alongside Moslem, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist communities, many ethnic groups, political parties, special interest groups, commercial interests, and the power of mass media. Freedom will in principle need to be broad enough to accommodate such a range of views, but will also need to be gauged and articulated with a view to different views about freedom, justice, equality and the common good.

One skirmish quickly follows another on this battleground—abortion, same sex marriage, euthanasia, both voluntary and involuntary, pornography, drug decriminalisation, public health issues, surrogacy, and the more things become technologically possible, the longer the list will become. We are now wrestling biological control of our own makeup from nature and altering the conditions of our lives in unheard of ways—how do we negotiate this trajectory?

Core values, such as marriage, family, be-
Beliefs about the beginning and end of life, the common good, individual freedom, public and individual health, privacy, and equality, are at stake in these disputes about how far legislation should be allowed to intrude into citizens' lives. Often the religious institutions in these disputes come across as the enemies of individual freedom and public health, and so far they have chalked up a long string of losses. Obviously their arguments are not convincing the majority of their fellow citizens.

Given the widely divergent views in modern pluralist societies, government cannot be about any particular conception of the 'good', but is rather concerned with the freedom of all its citizens to pursue their own conceptions of the 'good', provided that pursuit does not undermine society itself or harm others.

Libertarians push this proviso as far as possible towards the maximum of individual liberty, while other groups may see society being weakened much before that extreme is reached. The challenge for such groups is to achieve a consensus about the harm being done. No easy task as can be seen by the spectacular failures in this regard to date.

There are, however, a number of deeper issues involved in these disputes, which rarely surface, because each dispute remains tethered to the issue itself, without ever going deeper into what is at stake.

Firstly, a quality of freedom is achievable only if it is harnessed and channelled so as to be able to achieve goals and enhance life and relationships. Such freedom is both a personal and social construct—it requires family nurture and social support if the right choices are to be made. It does not happen automatically—in fact, it will self-destruct if left to itself. It also requires the right kind of beliefs and values to motivate its achievement, which is the particular task of community groups, and to which task, of course, faith-based groups make an important contribution.

Individual freedom in this deeper and wider sense depends on a fragile set of personal and social skills. Given the number of people, especially young people, who fall through the cracks of our highly individualistic society, it seems obvious that these skills are more and more at risk.

Legislation may not be the best solution, but at least it can be argued that preventing these fragile skills being further weakened is a real need in many of these disputes. In any case, it is an argument for greater freedom, not against it.

Secondly, growing inequality is just as toxic to individual freedom as any proposed change to legislation might be. As inequality increases some voices become louder, especially if they control modern media, and other voices are drowned out or fall silent entirely. From his study of three hundred years of wealth distribution, Thomas Piketty concludes:

Today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, inequalities of wealth that had supposedly disappeared are close to regaining or even surpassing their historical highs. The new global economy has brought with it both immense hopes (such as the eradication of poverty) and equally immense inequalities (some individuals are now as wealthy as entire countries).9

Inequality corrodes the skills required for individual freedom, imprisoning those it affects in a vicious cycle of voiceless poverty. The issue of equality broadens the debate about freedom beyond the narrow issues and introduces a note of social reality, which has long been a concern of the churches, particularly of the Catholic Church's social teaching.

Thirdly, we live in a society where the scientific, technological and commercial viewpoints are dominant, and the personal, internal, relational viewpoint is increasingly sidelined. Values, beliefs, including religious beliefs, and individual freedom, all have their origin and are nurtured in strong relationships, which need to be protected from the inside, not just the outside. When everyone is seen simply in terms of numbers and statistics, public opinion polls, and commercial interests, the personal viewpoint and its need for healthy relationships is lost. As the
philosopher, Roger Scruton, warns: 'By remaking human beings and their habitat as objects to consume rather than subjects to revere we invite the degradation of both.'

This personal viewpoint has both social and ecological consequences thus again placing the freedom debate in the wider context of what kind of society do we want to live in and how much do we want to preserve of our environment.

A further question is what kind of people do we want to become? There is the danger that society is being remade along market lines—self-assertion, acquisitiveness, superficiality, competitiveness, and instant gratification, all characteristics of freedom in the narrow, individual sense of being free from all restraint. Lost in this mix are compassion, generosity, faithfulness, empathy and social responsibility, which are all marks of freedom in the more comprehensive sense of being enabled to fulfil life's goals.

Fourthly, and this is more an internal matter for the churches, God is the freedom that makes our freedom in this wider sense possible—a fact that is lost if faith becomes saddled in the popular imagination with innumerable rules and prohibitions. We need to reclaim more of the original welcoming spirit of the gospels: 'And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him.' (Mk 2:15); and also Paul's generous concept of freedom—'For freedom Christ has set us free' (Gal 5:1).

For too long as Christians we have allowed ourselves to be caught up in single issues, without attending to the broader picture, where our basic stances are to be located. We need to be able to present a clear choice, as Timothy Keller shows:

which account of the world has the most 'explanatory power' to make sense of what we see in the world and ourselves? We have a sense that we are very flawed and yet very great. We have a longing for love and beauty that nothing in this world can fulfil. We have a deep need to know meaning and purpose. Which world view best accounts for these things?

Atheism has presented the choice of either God or human freedom. We need to show that is not the case. The choice is rather between a freedom that locks us within our own needs and wants or a freedom that allows us to reach our God-given potential as human beings. To do that effectively we need to re-shape our mission and message.

People's freedom in a pluralist society should only be curtailed for serious reasons to do with freedom itself. Arguments formulated in terms of a group's own particular views or doctrines will always fail. Sometimes non-intervention may be the right decision. If the Church decides that intervention is needed, its approach, therefore, needs to be in terms of its holistic view of freedom and humanity. Instead of being jarringly out of step, its message then may have a chance of winning over hearts and minds.

NOTES
5. ibid., 135.
6. The End of Faith, 15.
BOOK REVIEW


The book is actually about ten people: Job, St. Paul, Shankara, Rumi, Julian of Norwich, Giordano Bruno, Anne Hutchinson, Baal Shem Tov and Rabindranath Tagore. The argument is that it is not faith which binds the ten together, but consciousness. That is controversial, but it contains a fascinating contrast of cultures. The great surprise of the book is that Bishop Berkeley, who in the West is regarded as a philosophical curio, has a position which is mainstream in Hinduism. Berkeley argued that what we see around us is internal to our minds, just as a dream is. Physical reality is an illusion.

Similarly, Shankara[788-820] held that consciousness creates the world, just as the mind creates a dream. Shankara became seminal in Hinduism. Tagore put Shankara’s position to Einstein in a three day meeting they had at Einstein’s home in Potsdam. Einstein did not accept it. ‘I cannot prove that my conception is right’, he said, ‘but it is my religion.’

Chopra believes that Einstein is out of date. Chopra argues that quantum physics implies Berkeley. Be that as it may, Shankara’s objectives were more directly religious than Berkeley’s, who was trying to prove that matter does not exist, in order to undermine Newtonian physics, thereby nullifying science as an ideological threat.

Tagore maintained that human nature is infinite and part of the divine. Later in India, an opponent of Shankara, Ramanuja [1017-1137], argued that being one with the universe is not the same as becoming one with God in the unity of love. Shankara’s God is impersonal, Ramanuja’s God is profoundly and warmly personal. We are having a similar debate now.

At the end of the book, Chopra remarks that now that the age of faith is well and truly over, modern people make a reasonable demand: If God exists, we should be able to verify him. How do we do that? Here, ancient Hinduism has something to offer viz., the four paths to God. The first path the way of devotion, involves prayer. The devotee sends out love and gets Love back. "The great advantage of the devotional path is its joy", writes Chopra.

The second path is the way of understanding or thinking. Its greatest exponent in our day is probably Richard Swinburne, lately Nolloth Professor of natural philosophy at Oxford. "Thinking brings its own joys", writes Chopra aptly, "but no one would say that this way is blissful”[p.273], though there are people who find that knowing the truth about higher reality satisfies them more than devotional bliss can. The path of service is the third way. It involves doing good for others, in the myriad ways that is done. This way could do with further investigation. Do people working in West Africa to combat ebola, find that their work brings them closer to God? Perhaps further conditions are needed.

The fourth way is meditation. The claim is that it can open a window onto other spiritual realities. Only the way of thinking is conceptual. On the other three, enlightenment takes place on the non-conceptual level. The closest analogy would be listening to great music.

Hinduism, with its hundreds of God’s, has provided an enormous target for western critics. Chopra does not hit back. This is a wise and delightful book.

—Reg Naulty
PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

From April to July 2015

From Holy Week to the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary time (Year B)

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from Holy Week to the Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year B. For the sake of including the whole of Holy Week, these notes also include the March 29 celebration of Passion (Palm) Sunday. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

• **Holy Week**: Further to the notes offered in the previous *Compass* edition, as we move through Holy Week and enter into Mark's story of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, we come to the heart of the Gospel. Everything in the liturgical year focuses on this narrative which frames Holy Week and the intervening Gospel readings from John (for Holy Thursday and Good Friday).

  There are two key questions that pervade Mark's narrative: Who is Jesus? What does it mean to follow him? Mark's answer: Jesus is God's revealed suffering and abandoned one, and those who follow are invited to be with him in his suffering and death as they wrestle against failure and fear. In the season of Easter which follows (up to May 24 and the celebration of Pentecost) and our return to the readings of Ordinary Time (June 14), we continue to accompany Jesus powerfully revealed in Holy Week and reflect on our personal and communal call to discipleship.

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

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

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

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

2. The Gospel: As noted in the last Compass edition, we continue into Year B and read from Mark's Gospel, though John's Gospel is preferred during Easter. Even within the Markan cycle, though, John reappears. The Markan portrait of the more human Jesus seems to be 'filled out' by John's more 'spiritual' Gospel that emphasizes Jesus' transcendence and divine origins. This is clear in the Jn 6 reading in OT 17.

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

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

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

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

March 29-Passion/Palm Sunday: Mk 11:1-10. Jesus' disciples welcome him into Jerusalem. Is 50:4-7. God's servant is attentive and trusts God, despite rejection and suffering. Phil 2:6-11. One of the great songs of Holy Week: Jesus is God's servant, who chooses to be like all human beings, and God exalts him. Mk 14-15. This is the climax of Mk, the passion story of Jesus' suffering and ultimate abandonment. Theme-Abandonment. Jesus comes to claim his people as their leader and his leadership is one of suffering; Jesus' who dies abandoned is able to identify with all who feel abandoned, desolate and lonely. Mk's Jesus is not an exalted figure, but misunderstood and rejected. The passion story from Mk offers an opportunity to identify with Jesus in this week, and to be with those who experience abandonment and isolation in our world. What is the loneliness that I experience?

April 2-The Lord's Supper: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14. The first Passover is remembered: God delivers Israel through the blood of the Passover Lamb. 1 Cor 11:23-26. Paul reminds the divided household of Jesus followers at Corinth about what lies at the
heart of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Jn 13:1-15. In the act of washing his disciples' feet, John's Jesus offers the model of active, community service.

Theme-Service: This celebration reaches into the heart of every parish and faith community: selfless service focused on the Eucharist. How can we celebrate this happening in our midst and encourage it to deepen?

April 3-Good Friday: Is 52:13-53:12. This is the climactic 'servant song' celebrating the vicarious nature of the servant's suffering, for the welfare of all. Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Jesus is the compassionate High Priest, with God, who knows our sufferings and weaknesses. Jn 18:1-19:42. John's passion narrative, unlike Mk's, is a true celebration of victory over death. In fourteen dramatic scenes Jesus is presented as Lamb, judge, victor, source of Church's life. Theme-Victory: Jesus, as the Passover Lamb who brings people to life, is victorious over death. Rather than a sombre or mournful liturgy, the readings encourage a confidence in God who is able to bring victory from death. This is a much-needed focus in a world preoccupied with war and retaliation. What are the suffering and death-dealing experiences from which I seek release by the God of Jesus?

April 3/4-Easter: Feast of the Resurrection: Mk 16:1-8. This is the most important gospel proclamation in the whole year: Mark's Jesus is resurrected and the women are encouraged to ponder the place of emptiness, the tomb (see above). Resurrection occurs in the most unlikely setting and moment—the place of death and hopelessness. Where would I like God to bring me life?

April 12-Easter 2: Acts 4:32-35. The power of the resurrection is evident in the fledgling Jesus household of Jerusalem disciples. 1 Jn 5:1-6. Faith in Jesus and his resurrection makes us 'begotten by God.' We are in tune with God and experience God's life within. Jn 20:19-31. The resurrected Jesus offers his frightened disciples peace. He empowers them with authority to forgive sin. Theme-Forgiveness. The resurrected Jesus continues to breathe into his community today the spirit of peace and forgiveness. Where is this seen, identified and celebrated? What is my sin from which I seek forgiveness and release?

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

April 26-Easter 4: Acts 4:8-12. Peter announces to all (and us): An experience of goodness and healing is an encounter with the Risen Jesus. I Jn 3:1-2. We are God's beloved daughters and sons; God will be revealed to us fully, transparently, happily. Jn 10:11-18. Jesus is like a shepherd to us. He cares about us, protects us, loves us and 'knows' us. God is intimately close to us. Theme-God's closeness. God is revealed through Jesus who is present in our world through signs of goodness and acts of kindness (First reading). God's intimacy with us revealed through Jesus (gospel) makes us whole and happy. What images of God do I find sustaining? What helps me deepen my friendship with Jesus?

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

As Luke describes it, this is a watershed moment in the growth of the Israelite Jesus household as they move beyond their Jewish roots to embrace new non-Israelite (‘Gentile’) followers; Peter baptises a Gentile Roman household. Jn 4:7-10. Jesus reveals God's love for us, to the point of death. Jn 15: 9-17. God's love for Jesus spills over into the hearts of his disciples so that they may experience God's joy. Theme-God's joy: An abiding spirit of joy may be difficult to identify in our world. God's desire is for all to be happy. This 'joy' is celebrated and revealed at the heart of the Christian community. What are tangible signs of this joy, an Easter joy?

May 17- Ascension: Acts 1:1-11. Luke's second volume, the story of the geographical spread of the household of Jesus followers into the wider Greco-Roman world, begins with this angelic promise of Jesus' ongoing presence, which will come again in power. Eph 4:1-13. Jesus' communion with God ('ascension') is the source of the ministerial gifts of today's household of Jesus followers. Mk 16:15-20. This later ending of Mk's gospel (written generations after Mark's gospel was originally concluded at 16.8) emphasises the risen and ascended Jesus' victory over evil and the confident proclamation of the Gospel. Theme-Jesus' ongoing presence: Jesus' presence is revealed in surprising and unexpected ways, less physical but no less real. Who in the local community reveal this presence?


May 31- Trinity: Dt 4:32-34, 39-40. Moses reminds the Israelites about the nature of their God: creator, powerful presence and liberator. Rom 8:14-17. God's Spirit enables our spirit to know God as the intimate One, whom we can call 'Abba.' Mt 28:16-20. These are the final words in Mt, of the Risen Jesus, encouraging his followers to make disciples of all nations in the name of the triune God. Theme-God's revealing: God's Spirit is revealed in human history, among human beings and creation. This Spirit invites intimacy. How can we open ourselves to God's Spirit today? Where do we see God's Spirit already being revealed?

June 7- Body and Blood: Ex 24:3-8. Moses' symbolic act with stones, burnt offerings and blood ratifies God's communion with the Israelites. Heb 9:11-15. Heard by Jewish followers of Jesus, Jesus is portrayed as the eternal high priest mediating a new covenant with God on behalf of the people. Mk 14:12-16, 22-26. This is the story in Mark of Jesus' final meal with his disciples. Theme-God dines with us: The Israelite meal was a symbol of kinship, solidarity and communion. God's meals echoed throughout history and especially practiced in the meal ministry of Jesus (highlighted in Mk's final meal with his disciples) symbolise God's passion for humanity. God celebrates creation, including us. Our eucharistic gatherings reflect God's delight.

June 14-Ordinary Time 11: Ez 17:22-24. God will do the impossible. This truth is told using imagery of trees. 2 Cor 5:6-10. Paul's ultimate focus is on God, no matter what happens. Mk 4:26-34. Jesus continues to teach in parables. God's presence ('kingdom') is like growing and sprouting seed, or the smallest imperceptible seed that grows to provide shelter for birds. Theme-God's presence: God is present in ways that appear imperceptible. The eyes of faith enable us to see this presence. What are some of the signs of God's presence today? Who are those who sharpen our eyes to see God's presence?

June 21- Ordinary Time 12: Job 38:1-4, 8-11. This powerful reading raises the key theological question: Who is God? 2 Cor 5:14-17. Because of Jesus how we see and understand the world and our lives alters. Mk 4: 35-41 Leaders of the Jesus household (symbolised by the disciples in a boat) struggle with fear and the possibility of disaster and annihilation. They turn to Jesus. Theme-Who is God?
Who is Jesus? These two questions from today's readings, which link us back to Holy Week, lead us to reflect on the heart of Christian faith. The gospel reveals the need to focus on Jesus in cosmic, ecclesial and personal struggle. He reveals the loving and confident presence of God.

**June 28-Ordinary Time 13:** Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24. God's creative presence gives life and goodness. 2 Cor 8:7,9,13-15. Paul encourages sharing with others in need, in the spirit of Jesus. Mk 5:21-43. Two intertwined stories reveal women healed and the faith that brings about that healing. Theme-God's healing. This theme follows naturally from last weekend. Jesus is the revealer of God's healing presence that restores and forms an inclusive faith community. Our liturgy allows a celebration of that healing presence still powerfully active today. Where do we see this? Where do we want to be healed?

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

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

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

**July 29- Ordinary Time 17:** 2 Kings 4:42-44. The prophet Elijah takes a few loaves and gives them to his servant. The hunger of a large number of people is satisfied. Eph 4:1-6. The writer urges unity within the faith community. The source of such a bond of peace comes from God's Spirit. Jn 6:1-15. Jesus feeds the hungry crowd. (With this selection from John's Gospel begins several Sundays drawn from Jn 6 and the 'Bread of Life' discourse.) Theme-God feeds our hungers. God desires to feed us deeply in our life's journey. What are the struggles and difficulties that we face and seek God's nurturing care?

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