



THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNICATION

A THEME RUNNING through the early contributions of this issue of *Compass* is the challenge of communicating the Good News. Australia is a particularly challenging terrain for this endeavour. Our people are often pre-Christian or once-were-Christian, and only the strongly-committed Christians persevere in living their faith at any depth. In our culture the Christian voice and message often—but not always, it is good to be able to say—struggles to get a sympathetic hearing.

Christ, the Australian bishops pointed out earlier this year in their pastoral letter on the Church and the Media, *Go Tell Everyone*, was the ultimate communicator. That is also the theme of John's Gospel. It is recommended that we read St John's Gospel at a sitting, keeping in mind as we read that Jesus is the revealer of his Father, and every word and deed of Jesus is expressive of God in our world. The climactic revelatory event, the ultimate communication of the Good News, was his 'hour', when he was lifted up on the cross for us, having spent all his blood and yielded up his spirit, having given everything he had to give. He spoke the Word fully on Calvary.

Every Christian is sent to 'go tell everyone'. We are sent to communicate what we have come to know to all the nations in whatever age or culture we find ourselves. Communicating is much more than just speaking or even shouting. Communicating means reaching and teaching across the psychological and cultural divides there may be between ourselves and our potential hearers. It means learning to speak other people's 'language' or, at least, speaking our own language choosing words that others might be able to relate to and understand.

Thus the Lord's command to go and teach

all nations expressed only half of what he was telling us to do: he meant that we had to *reach* and teach all nations. In the words of Pope Paul VI, quoted in the Australian bishop's pastoral letter already mentioned:

...the evangelical message should reach vast numbers of people, but with the capacity of piercing the conscience of each individual, of implanting itself in his [sic] heart as though he were the only person being addressed, with all his most individual and personal qualities, and evoke an entirely personal adherence and commitment. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.45.)

Communication of the Good News has been a challenge in every age. At the first Pentecost Peter needed the Spirit's gift of courage before he could stand up and tell people about Jesus of Nazareth and how he had risen from the dead. Today we face immense challenges. According to the bishops in their pastoral letter the challenges have 'never been greater'.

The recent report of the findings of *The Spirit of Generation Y* project (2003-2006) on the attitudes and beliefs of young people in Australia lends support to this judgment of the bishops. (To access the report enter 'genyrep' in Google.) This report outlines the findings of a national study of spirituality among Australian young people in their teens and twenties (born between 1976 and 1990) conducted by researchers from Australian Catholic University, Monash University and the Christian Research Association.

The first conclusion from the research is that 'Generation Y are what their parents and Australian culture have made them'. They have known only the pluralism of 'the post-traditional social order', they share a sense of greater risk, are affected by rampant consumerism, often come from dislocated families,



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and are presented with a smorgasbord of 'spiritualities'.

Like their elders Generation Y are often secular humanists (31%). The percentage of the whole population that attends religious services at least monthly has dropped from 39% in 1960 to 20% in 1998, consequently the majority of Generation Y have not lived in a context of frequent church attendance.

A large proportion of Generation Y have little appreciation and indeed, a diminishing appreciation, of transcendence of any kind. They make their own choices, do things their way, believe and do what they choose and consider it to be no business of anybody else as long as they are not hurting anyone. Many see little truth in any religion. They rely purely on friendship networks which they find or make for themselves.

Generation Y, we might say, as we read about these findings, are the new Australia. One feels like calling it the Brave New Australia. It is a depressing scene for Christians who know that there is so much more to life and reality than this representative generation of Australians believes. In the words of the opening prayer for the Twentieth Week in Ordinary time, after praying:

...that the love of God
may raise us beyond what we see

to the unseen glory of his kingdom.

...we pray:

God our Father,
May we love you in all things and above all things
And reach the joy you have prepared for us
Beyond all our imagining.

We are called to tell them, all these pre-Christians and once-were-Christians, about the gift of God, how Wisdom is spreading a feast and we are all invited. We are to tell them about the goodness of God that is beyond and above our wildest dreams, that God is offering us something that is very important and necessary, something sublime. It is not something anyone can afford to be off-handed about.

We need to tell them that they are called to join us in the People of God, called together—*ecclesia*, 'church' means 'called—to form a community that is God's creation. We are not a free association of people finding our own support networks; we are answering an invitation and allowing ourselves to be led by the Spirit of God to belong to God's own People, for our benefit and completeness.

We need good communication skills since we have such a great message to share.

—**Barry Brundell MSC, Editor**

In my preparations for a parish event at the end of this year I came to the conclusion that we need a Parish Communications Committee. The bishop's pastoral *Go Tell Everyone* refers us to a helpful Parish Media Kit. See: www.acbc.catholic.org.au/documents/200503064.pdf.



DRAW THEM WITH THE BONDS OF LOVE

The Practice of Heart Spirituality

BARRY BRUNDELL MSC

JUST TWO preliminary remarks before I launch into what I have to present. First, all of us are in some way tuned into the Heart Spirituality Movement. We respond to the revelation of God's love in the human heart of Jesus. The Heart Spirituality Movement can be traced to the early days of Christianity, even to the churches of the New Testament times.

I am writing from my particular foothold in the Heart Spirituality Movement: I am a professed member of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, a congregation of priests and brothers who have sought for the last 150 years to spread the word about this love. That is who I am and where I am coming from. But I am confident that you will not read me as writing only for my fellow professed MSC but for all who are part of the movement; you will be able to relate beyond the particular references to my life experience to our common experience.

Second, this is the seventh annual Bishop EJ Cuskelly MSC Memorial Lecture. Bishop Cuskelly – 'Cus' to us who were privileged to know him that well—was guide and teacher to us in our training, Superior General of the MSC Congregation, then auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. He left his mark in all spheres of his endeavours: on us students, on the whole MSC Society, and on the Brisbane Archdiocese, especially in its pastoral organization. He edited and wrote very popular texts on Heart Spirituality, e.g. *Man With A Mission*, on Jules Chevalier, Founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, and a collection of articles entitled *With A Human Heart*.¹

I feel deeply honoured to have this chance to do something in his memory.

We held a combined meeting in our parish church of the Sydney MSC Parishes Pastoral Councils, and one of the visitors from another parish said: 'Your church is forbidding on the outside, but beautiful inside!' It struck me that that might often be said for the Catholic Church as a whole. From the outside it can look like an unattractive institution, but when we have penetrated beyond the façade we dis-

cover great beauty. My reflections are directed towards assisting our task of enabling people on the outside to discover that beauty at the heart of our Church.

'Catholic', 'Catholic Church', even 'Church' pure and simple—for many these are barrier-raising terms. We could list all kinds of reasons why people respond to them as they do. Some reasons do us credit—we do chal-



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lunge the wider society on a number of issues in the name of the Gospel. Other reasons do us less credit for they alert us to regrettable blocks to our communication of the Good News. Jesus was immediately attractive to the crowds who came pressing about him to hear his words and receive his healing touch. There were some, though, who reacted badly even to Jesus (e.g. Mk 6:1-6)—a reminder that we should not be too disheartened if we cannot get the message through to absolutely everyone.

I want to talk about the MSC way of trying to get the message out to those who are not ‘of the fold’.

I have been part of the MSC Australian province contemporaneously with all but thirty-seven priests, brothers and bishops who lived and died before I came along at the early age of thirteen to begin my training at Douglas Park. I have known many MSC priests and brothers and many people who have associated themselves with us over a long time. In my earliest days I came to the conclusion, which I still agree with, that the quality that most readily springs to mind when describing a Missionary of the Sacred Heart is *kindness*. My subsequent encounters with MSC of other nationalities have only further supported my conclusion.

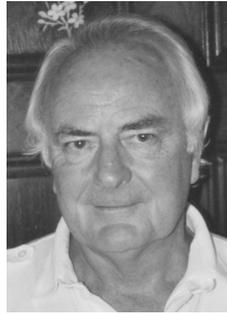
What this says is that the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart have been striving to live out our rule of life as set out in our *Constitutions*.

Our MSC *Constitutions* describe and prescribe the MSC way:

The spirit of our Society
is one of love and kindness,
humility and simplicity. (no. 13)

Following the example of Jesus,
we will strive to lead others to God
with kindness and gentleness,
to unite them to him by love
and to free them from fear. (no. 12)

These are the words used in our current *Constitutions*, revised according to the directives



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of the Second Vatican Council. (PC 2) and approved in 1984. Our earlier, 1891, *Constitutions* told us to ‘draw them [people] with the bonds of love’, which I read as conveying the same meaning. The reference is to the loving God of Hosea 11.3-4, who said through the prophet:

I myself taught Ephraim to walk,
I myself took them by the arm,
but they did not know that I was the one caring
for them,
that I was leading them with human ties,
with leading strings of love,
that, with them, I was like someone lifting an
infant to his cheek
and that I bent down to feed him.

The ‘leading strings of love’ refer to the way fathers and mothers used to teach their infants to take their first steps. The mother and father held on to the ends of two strings; the toddler was tied by each of the strings in such a way that the parents were able to keep it upright on its feet; and the parents would in turn pull in and let out the strings so that the toddler would take steps, and so begin to walk with a lot of help from its parents.²

We MSC obviously cannot claim to have a monopoly on kindness; it is not as if we claim kindness as our own thing/virtue and everyone else has to find something different. But ‘above-all-be kind’ is the maxim for communicating with each other and with everyone else that is typically MSC. As a maxim, it is an ideal for behaving that is presented to us. That sometimes we live up to the ideal is a reason for



giving glory to God. That at other times we do not live up to the ideal means that we need to repent and resolve to do better. But kindness is our aim. That is the MSC way when we walk it and when we do not—kindness above all.

No doubt we can all think of counter-instances, of individuals who were not especially kind. Hopefully these instances are rare in our personal experiences. One of the stories I heard was of an MSC priest teacher in one of our Colleges who had given a certain boy cause to think the teacher was *not* kind. This boy saw the priest stroking the college cat, and was heard to remark loudly to one of his mates: ‘Well, at least he’s kind to animals!’

Kindness is a virtue that flows directly from our MSC core spirituality and mission: to make the heart of God known and loved everywhere. The heart of God is the divine love, compassion, kindness that is incarnated in Jesus. But before I seek to develop that line of thought there are a number of questions and objections that I would like to respond to early in my reflections rather than later, for instance:

Is this kindness-above-all policy not too soft for our hard times? Is it ever going to work? Or is it doomed to failure because it is inadequate for meeting the challenges we are facing? Have we not ample evidence already that it is a failure—for instance, from the collapse of Church discipline over the past forty years? Just look at the results of taking the soft line in the Church: religious observance is now much more casual and often near to non-existent. Do we not need to tighten up again, insist on firm and clear discipline, restore some religious obligations—weekly Mass and frequent attendance at sacraments, especially the sacrament of Penance—introduce some new, and re-introduce some traditional, practices and make them obligatory?

And what about people’s grasp of the faith? Do we not need to present clear teachings, and insist on them as to-be-believed if one is to remain in the Catholic community? Is there not too much free-thinking going on, too much questioning even of basic truths of the faith?

What is being suggested is that we need to take a more authoritarian approach—indeed, that we are forced to do so by the alleged failure of a less authoritarian approach.

The quick response I would make to such questions is: even though I see the evidence and feel the pain, even though I am dealing with the difficulties at first hand, and even though there might be some momentary personal relief in pounding the table about the things I believe are going wrong, nevertheless, in our day such methods simply will not work. This is not a time for telling people off or commanding people to do things. It is not a time for teaching in dogmatic fashion. People will not take any notice.

Our world has moved on in recent decades. No longer are people passively faithful. For better or for worse we are all affected by the politico-social world we live in, which is democratic and emphasises personal judgment, personal conscience and individual autonomy, and which encourages in us an expectation of being involved in decision-making.

That people respond to authority differently in our times is accepted in Church documents and by Church leaders. We find it in the opening words of the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* of Vatican II (*Dignitatis Humanae*):

Contemporary men and women are becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person; more and more people are demanding that they should exercise fully their own judgment and a responsible freedom in their actions and should not be subject to the pressure of coercion but be inspired by a sense of duty.

In his first message for the World Day of Peace (2006) (par. 9) Benedict XVI repeated the words of John Paul II in his peace message of 2002 who warned against ‘attempts to impose, rather than to propose for others freely to accept, one’s own convictions about the truth’:

To try to impose on others by violent means what we consider to be the truth is an offence



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against the dignity of the human being, and ultimately an offence against God in whose image he [she] is made.

Some years ago the bishops of Quebec summed up well what is needed:

It is not sufficient to insist that the Church is not a democracy, even if that statement is correct. Integration into the Church in a democratic society leads to a new relation to authority and a different manner of proclaiming the gospel. What is required is a certain degree of participation and a careful listening to all the voices that want to be heard. Nothing can be imposed simply by authority'. (*Annoncer l'évangile dans la culture actuelle au Québec*, Fides: Montreal, 1999.)

My more considered reply to the question whether the gentle approach should be abandoned in the face of its seeming general failure and whether we should return to more authoritarian methods is somewhat lengthier. I begin by posing a counter-question: should we even try such stronger methods? Are heavy-handed responses to the spirit of our times the right and Christian way to deal with people, especially when we are trying to help them find God and live as followers of Jesus? I answer my own question with a short 'No!' Further, I claim that the gentle approach is the only way to serve God's people, not just for our times but for always: it is the only way *allowed* for a follower of Christ.

To support my contention I argue from the example of Jesus' practice, from the pastoral approach opted for by the Church in the Second Vatican Council, and from some fundamental principles of contemporary moral theology. My conclusion will be that our MSC approach—kindness always and above all else—is perfectly aligned with best Christian practice. It characterises the pastoral approach that is presented to us as the correct one.

The Way of Jesus

So, let us reflect a little on Jesus' pastoral approach, on his way of dealing with people and

enabling them to hear his Good News.

Jesus was the Good Shepherd who went out to seek and bring back a recalcitrant sheep. St Asterius of Amasea (*ca.* 400 AD) gave a beautiful little homily on this gospel parable in which he exhorted his hearers to be shepherds after the style of Our Lord, to learn from him to be considerate and kind. When one of the sheep wandered off, St Asterius tells us, the shepherd:

Followed it through countless valleys and ravines, climbed many difficult mountains, searched with great trouble in lonely places, until he found it. When he had found the lost sheep, far from beating it or driving it to return to the flock, he laid it on his shoulders and gently carried it back and returned it to its fellows...

The whole story has a sacred meaning and it warns us not to think of any man as lost or beyond hope. We must not easily despair of those who are in danger or be slow to help them. If they stray from the path of virtue, we should lead them back and rejoice in their return and make it easy for them to rejoin the community of those who lead good and holy lives. (Asterius of Amasea, Hom. 13; *Prayer of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 109-110.)

The Good Shepherd story describes the incarnation and redemption. Just as the Good Shepherd followed the lost sheep through countless valleys and ravines, climbed many steep mountains, searched with great trouble in lonely places, till he found the lost sheep—so, in Incarnation language, the Son of God bridged the great chasm that had opened up through human sinfulness down the ages. Jesus left his glory behind, the glory that he had with his Father. He 'emptied himself'—we call this the *kenosis* or 'emptying of himself'—to assume the form of a servant, taking on our human condition. We had become a lost human race and in Jesus the Saviour God reached out to us and joined himself to us.

Through the Incarnation Jesus entered into solidarity with the whole human race. He came to where the lost sheep was, and shared the lot of the sheep. The Letter to the Hebrews medi-



tates on that truth, emphasising that this was the way he had to take in order to redeem us:

Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested. (Heb. 2:17-18)

Jesus has been through what we experience, he has been here and knows what we are going through. He has experienced human pain, weakness, darkness:

He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness. (5:2)

Jesus Feels for us. He sympathises with us. He feels compassion for us.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (4:15-16)

Echoing the words of St Asterius, he did not easily despair of those who are in danger, nor was he slow to help them. When we strayed from the path of virtue he came to lead us back, rejoicing in our return, our rescue, and made it easy for us to rejoin the community of those who lead good and holy lives.

Jesus' way is the way of all followers of Christ. We are to be shepherds, as St Asterius told us, after the style of Our Lord, and learn from him to be considerate and kind.

The Way of Vatican II

I now wish to focus our attention on the approach deliberately adopted by the Fathers in the Second Vatican Council. When one reads the documents of Vatican II along with some of the speeches of the Fathers during the sessions of the Council and in the meetings of the various preparatory Commissions, one finds

abundant material for encouragement and assurance that the 'gently-gently' approach was the one officially adopted by the Council.

The Council Fathers rejected calls for heavy-handed methods of dealing with modern ills and with all that Catholics saw as going wrong in the world. They rejected calls to denounce and anathematize as other Councils had done. For instance, they rejected calls to condemn atheism and Communism, though many Italian Fathers, influenced by the political situation in Italy of the time, were agitating for such a condemnation. In the final draft of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* we do not find a condemnation of communism, simply a firm statement of why the Church opposed systematic atheism (*LG* pars. 19-21).

Cardinal Seper, who was later to become the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, made an impassioned speech in the Preparatory Commission for the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* which well represented the collective mind of the Council Fathers. 'We are pastors', he said to the assembly. We must today speak to people whose lives are largely if not entirely lived outside the Church: there must be no condemnations.

As the title of the document *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* suggests, the Council aimed to be a pastoral Council, not a dogmatic Council that talks down to the world from on high. As one bishop, speaking for many, said, there had been in the past too much *potestas* (exercise of power by Church authorities) at the expense of service and responsibility.

A new spirit was moving in the Council, a spirit of dialogue, of reaching out for dialogue, of readiness to enter into dialogue. Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (successor in this role to Cardinal Cassidy) reflected on this recently when speaking about the Council *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio)* forty years after its promulga-



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tion. He said:

Because of the differences that remain, the Council warned against superficiality and imprudent zeal.

He then quoted the Decree itself:

Ecumenical activity cannot be other than fully and sincerely Catholic, that is, loyal to the truth we have received from the Apostles and the Fathers, and in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed. (*UR* 24; *EV* 1/571)

Thus, we must state our beliefs clearly and faithfully. We owe that to our partners in the dialogue. He continued:

But the Church also puts us on our guard against polemics. It is significant that the word ‘dialogue’ is repeated like a refrain at the conclusion of all the sections of this part of the decree (*UR* 19; 21; 22; 23). That expresses once more the new spirit in which the Council intended to overcome the [ecumenical] differences. (Walter Kasper, ‘*Le Décret sur l’oecuménisme—Une nouvelle lecture quarante ans après*’. Rocca di Papa, 11-13 November 2004.)

Another important theme during the Council and afterwards was the need to discern the signs of the times. Originally put onto the Council’s agenda by Pope John XXIII, the phrase ‘signs of the times’ is a reference to Jesus’ complaint to the Pharisees and Sadducees in *Mth* 16.3 ‘You know how to read the face of the sky, but you cannot read the signs of the times’.

The signs that the Council Fathers were seeking to discern were especially the aspirations of peoples, their spiritual uneasiness, their hopes and anxieties in this modern, industrialised, urbanized world of today. (*LG* 4-10) Then, having discerned what people were aspiring for—their deepest longings—the Church was called to be of service to the world, to go out and join the world in its struggles. The Church, the Council Fathers affirmed, is a Servant Church, modeled on Christ the Servant. The Church is to serve the world.

So, Vatican II put the Church on the course of joining the human race. The task of the fol-

lowers of Christ, the Fathers stated, was to join in solidarity with the whole human race in its struggles to overcome the shortcomings of human existence and reach a higher form of life. This was expressed in the famous opening words of the Council’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.

In this statement the Fathers affirm that Christian believers are in solidarity with all human beings, especially those who are afflicted.

The phrase ‘followers of Christ’ is a key phrase. By now we should be hearing the Good Shepherd theme echoing loudly. The followers of Christ are followers of Christ the Good Shepherd. The Vatican Council stated that, as followers of Christ—with Christ as our model—we are in complete solidarity with our brothers and sisters and feel for them and with them in all that happens to them.

We might also add: our human hearts are to be like the human heart of Jesus. Like Jesus—as followers of Christ—we are to feel for, sympathise with, and feel compassion for our afflicted brothers and sisters.

It is worth pausing a moment to reflect on the meaning of compassion.

The word *compassion* is derived from the Latin words *pati* and *cum*, which together mean ‘to suffer with’. Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.⁷⁸

Moved with compassion, the followers of Christ will want to do something for their suf-



fering brothers and sisters. Jesus was moved with compassion and a desire to aid suffering humanity, which desire led him to action—he brought the Kingdom of God into our history; he gave up his life for suffering humanity. So, also, we are to be moved with compassion and a desire to aid suffering humanity, which desire must lead us to action.

To those who wanted the Church to teach the world its doctrine, the Council's reply was: in dialogue we express our truth, maintain that we *have* truth, for the Church knows in Christ what is the truth about humankind. We do not sermonize or moralise, or preach; but we do seek to lead our contemporaries to discover the Creator and in so doing discover the truth about themselves. The Church gives its witness, speaks from its faith, and seeks to speak to all peoples in a language they can hear.

The person and spirit of John XXIII was in the background throughout this major shift by the Council away from previous Church practice to a new way of speaking and relating to people. (Congar 2002, I, 383). Pope Paul VI was to follow adopting the same pastoral approach, as is especially evidenced in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelisation in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)*.

Thus, in the Second Vatican Council, the Church declared that Jesus' way, the way of the followers of Christ, was its way also.

Our MSC way, I suggest, is fully in harmony with Jesus the Good Shepherd and with the Teaching Church.

Now I make a further claim: *there is no other way permitted to us*. To support my claim I appeal to some fundamental principles of contemporary moral theology.

Contemporary Moral Theology

In the parable of the Good Shepherd the wandering sheep is not compelled to return—it returns because it wants to, and the shepherd would have returned without it if the sheep had refused to come.

God has given us the gift of freedom. Considering the havoc that has ensued through

misuse of that gift, God took an almighty risk in giving it. But God will not take back his gift, even when we abuse it to enslave ourselves and harm others.

God only loves; God does not compel. He wants a response to his love. The shepherd loves the sheep and if it responds to the shepherd's love, the sheep will come back with him. Humanising the sheep for a moment—or, rather, bearing in mind that the sheep in the parable refers to human beings—the response of the wandering sheep, letting itself be brought back home, needs to be a response from the heart. No lesser response will do.

Moral theologians have been reacting for some years now against schools of ethics and moral theology in which 'heart' is not mentioned. They criticize moral theologies which were not based on Scripture, and which did not reflect the rich scriptural presentation of the heart as the place of communication between God and the human person, where the call of God is heard, and whence (from the heart) the person's response is awaited.

Since the seventeenth century morality was usually presented as knowing what was right and doing it, the application of moral principles to concrete situations. The emphasis was on using our intelligence to know moral principles and apply them. Even the cognitive-development approach of Kohlberg has been criticized for over-emphasising the place of intelligence and reason in moral life. Lawrence Hinman wrote, for instance:

I certainly do not want to argue that the standard view of morality is completely wrong. Clearly it captures something important about the moral life, namely, that it is in part constituted by rules, impartiality, and specific choices. Yet at the same time, it is equally clear that it leaves out an important aspect of the moral life, namely the development of character, moral sensitivity, and vision.⁹

The term 'morality of the heart' is now in use among moral theologians (cf. Shelton 1990). And this term reflects Scripture. The heart is the place of true faithfulness to the will of God. Nothing less will do than conver-



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sion of the heart. It is to the hearts of people that we must speak, and they are to respond from their hearts.

To speak to the hearts of people, though, the moralists point out, we need to empathise with people. Empathy precedes compassion. Empathy is ‘an affective response that is more appropriate to someone else’s situation than to one’s own’ (Hoffman 1981, cf. Shelton 1990, 42.). Empathy engenders compassion, a feeling of sympathetic distress, from which develops concern and a desire to aid others. The spring of our (moral) response to other people and their situations, especially of ‘those who are poor or afflicted in any way’ is *empathy*. Concern for the poor and needy, action for justice and for the promotion of human dignity, and morality of the heart belong together. We speak of a morality of care with empathy as its basis, acknowledging the vital role empathy has in forming caring responses—this is heart spirituality in action.

It is to the hearts of people that we must speak, and they are to respond from their hearts. Will they respond from the heart? It will be for them to do so or not. We can only reach out from our hearts. But Jesus is our model in all this. What we have been describing—empathy, compassion and action for people—was his way.

Conclusion

Thus Jesus, the Good Shepherd—our model as we strive to be shepherds ourselves (and we are all called to be shepherds, whether we are ordained or not)—the Church, servant of humankind, which seeks to be part of the struggles and aspirations of the whole human race—and as well, the moral theologians who are to help us discern right from wrong—all tell us that our pastoral practice in seeking to ‘draw them with the bonds of love’ is correct practice, best practice—indeed the only practice permitted.

Other ways have been tried, as we can all remember; ways of impatience; ways of com-

pulsion; ways of ... *panic*. They are ways of *reaction*: ultra-conservative reactions, relying on dogmatism, suppression, and fundamentalism of one kind or another. It is difficult to convince people that these ways are wrong when they are already persuaded that more disciplinarian ways are needed if we are to set the Church and world in order ‘again’.

But we must remind ourselves that we are all on a journey. We can only grow in ourselves if we are allowed to be free, thinking and responsible subjects. We are called to accept responsibility for our own lives. We cannot hand over this responsibility to anyone.

On the other hand, it is easier now to promote the message and pursue the way of kindness. Over many centuries the Church has been closely aligned with one form of political government or other. At one time—the time of Christendom—Church and government were closely allied, so that Church authorities had to be involved in keeping order, waging wars, punishing and imprisoning people. Since the late nineteenth century, however, that link with secular powers has been removed, and the Church is free to operate more in accordance with its true self. We are now in a ‘post-Christendom context’.

The *’ndrangheta*, the criminal organization of Calabria in southern Italy, which corresponds to the *Mafia* and the *Comorra* in other parts of Italy, has raised the barrier in recent times, with murders, including that of the Vice-President of the Calabrian Regional Council. I want to read to you the statement of Bishop Raffaele Nogaro, bishop of Caserta, a diocese in the area dominated by the *’ndrangheta*:

I am more and more convinced that denunciations corrode and depress and do not edify. Absolutely we must be indignant in face of evil, and we must defeat it wherever possible. It is important that we Christian believers commit ourselves and replace evil with good. I believe that in every society there is a stream of the resurrection. It is proper to accompany it with all understanding and with pardon. By pardoning we build new lives. Our Church must not be



primarily one of condemnation of criminality, but always acceptance of the person who, as well as being apparently bad, is suffering. And human suffering is always greater than sin. Only the Church which responds with mercy is the true Church. (Bishop Raffaele Nogaro, bishop of Caserta, *Il Regno* 20/2005, 654.)

Postscript: There Are Limits

Only when all hope is lost does the time come to take other approaches. There *are* limits.

There was a sequel to the above. The 'ndrangheta committed a further series of acts of ferocity. The last straw was their concerted attacks on farming communes established by the bishop of Locri-Gerace, employing hundreds of young people, some of them ex-prisoners. Employment meant they were sheltered from the mafia organization. In March this year someone poured weed-killer in the storage tank containing the fertilizer, causing the entire harvest to be lost as well as 10,000 raspberry

plants. The damage was estimated at 200,000 Euros. The bishop of Locri-Gerace, Bishop Giancarlo Maria Bregantini, excommunicated the perpetrators on the 2nd April.

On the 8th April there was another strike by the 'ndrangheta on another farming commune inspired by the bishop. Clearly their aim was to destroy the whole co-operative movement that was connected with the bishop, to make a statement in response to the public outrage expressed in Calabria and throughout the whole of Italy, and to regain their hold on the youth.

Sometimes, as Jesus discovered, strong actions have to be taken. But that is so only when all else has failed.

I give the final word to our MSC *Constitutions*:

We learn from [Jesus the Good Shepherd] who is gentle and humble of heart. (No. 7)

We share the sentiments of the Heart of Christ. (No. 11)

NOTES

1. Publications by Bishop Cuskelly are: (1963) *A Heart to Know Thee: A Practical Summa of the Spiritual Life*, The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland; (1965) *God's Gracious Design*, The Newman Press, Westminster, Maryland; (1965) *The Kindness of God: A New Look at Catholic Doctrine*, The Mercier Press, Cork; (1975) *Jules Chevalier: Man with a Mission 1824-1907*, Casa Generalizia MSC, Roma; (1978) *A New Heart and a New Spirit: Reflections on MSC Spirituality*, Casa Generalizia MSC, Roma; (1999) *Walking the Way of Jesus: An Essay on Christian Spirituality*, St Pauls Publications, Strathfield.
2. The text and interpretation of this passage in Hosea is much discussed. The interpretation I have accepted fits the majority of modern translations.
3. For example, calls by Bishop de Mello in Vati-

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4. Bishop Franic in Congar, Y., 2002, *Mon Journal du Concile*, 2 vols, Editions du Cerf, Paris, vol. 1, p. 422; *AS* II, I, 442-4.
5. Congar, *op. cit.* II, 110; [6th June, 1964].
6. Bishop Pont y Gol, *AS* II, II, 479-481.
7. *AS* II, I, 425-7; Cardinal Léger, *AS* II, II, 223-5; Congar, *op. cit.* I, 438.
8. McNeill, D., Morrison, DA, and Nouwen, HJ, 1983, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, Garden City, NY: Image Books, p. 4.
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A PAPACY COMMUNICATED

Pope John Paul II

GERARD KELLY

THE PONTIFICATE of Pope John Paul II occurred at a remarkable time in history. It began just fourteen years after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, and lasted for twenty-six years. Over those years the whole world lived through rapid change, most notably in the area of technology and communications. There probably weren't the great intellectual movements that other generations had lived through, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, but there were significant social and political changes. This pope was undoubtedly the most photographed pope in history. He was the most travelled pope, and seen by more people than any pope before him. All of us have many images of him ingrained on our mind's eye. In this article I want to highlight some of the images that have been important to me, and reflect on what they tell us about John Paul II and the way he exercised the papal office.

The first snapshot that would be in my album would be the one where he is standing with his hands shaped like binoculars, raised to his eyes. It was probably taken at a gathering with young people, as a way of communicating something back to them. This gesture – and we've probably all often used it – is a sign that you want to have a closer look at something, or that you want to see some far distant object more clearly. This, I believe, characterised the papacy of John Paul II: he liked to have a close look at the church in all of its local manifestations, which was why he visited so many local churches and met with local people. But he also liked to offer a long-term vision and hope, which was why he put so much energy into the Jubilee celebrations

and the advent of the third Christian millennium. In my mind though, this image serves as a good symbol of the meaning of the papacy. Throughout the great Tradition of the Church the role of the pope, as the Bishop of Rome, has been to keep watch. Even in the New Testament, the word we translate as bishop is also translated as overseer. In the ancient literature this office was likened to the sentry who stood guard in the watchtower over the city gate. The role of the bishop of Rome is to keep watch over the faith of the apostles by handing it on faithfully and ensuring that it is a point of unity for all the people. All popes, including John Paul II, refer back to that text in Luke's gospel that speaks of Peter strengthening his brothers and sisters in the faith (Lk 22:32). John Paul would have seen his mission in terms of keeping the spark of faith alive throughout the whole church. He was supremely confident in the power of faith to sustain whole peoples.

This is a good point to turn the page and look at the next snapshot in the album. It is his first foreign trip. He returns to his native Poland, and is greeted by huge crowds – much to the embarrassment of the local government authorities. There, as he stepped off the plane, we saw for the first time a gesture that would become familiar. He bent down and kissed the ground. What did it mean? On that occasion it signalled that he was a son of Poland and he was there to honour the land, the people, and the culture that had made him who he was. The faith he professed, even as bishop of Rome, was truly the faith of the apostles, but handed down through the Slavic culture. His background would always shape his life and



his vision of Christianity.

The gesture as he descends the steps of the plane reminds me of the fact that the pope should never be seen as the bishop of the whole world. He is a local bishop, who has been formed by a local church and expresses his faith in the worship and piety of his own culture. The significant thing about John Paul II was that he was the first non-Italian pope in over four hundred years. As he assumed the role of bishop of Rome he was in a unique position to place in sharp relief for us the meaning of being 'Catholic'. To affirm that the church is catholic is to affirm that it is local, and that it is embedded in a particular place. The pope has a special task of holding in a true unity these diverse expressions of the faith in the local churches. When John Paul II kissed the ground he symbolically highlighted the connection, and indeed the affection, between that local place and the Church of Rome.

History will probably tell us that his visit to Poland was a turning point not only in the affairs of that country, but of the whole Eastern bloc. Within ten years the Berlin Wall had come down and the geo-political configuration of the world had changed forever. I won't try to attempt to analyse what happened. But I am interested in the vision of humankind the John Paul taught so strongly. It was preached in Poland, and came alive in the Solidarity movement, and eventually spawned a new breed of leaders. This vision is grounded in his faith, and the story of redemption. It was expounded in his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*, 'Redeemer of Humankind'. The world usually awaits the first encyclical of a new pope with anticipation and expectation because it is taken as a signpost pointing to the directions that the papacy will take. There is something programmatic about it: it analyses the situation of the world and the church, reflects on it in the light of the Christian Mystery, and offers a teaching for the times.

In *Redemptor hominis* we have a clear teaching that is probably best labelled as Christian humanism. It is a teaching that derives



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from the Mystery of the Incarnation: because Jesus was truly God and truly human we find in him the image of the authentic human life. John Paul developed his teaching out of the context of the situation of the world as he observed it. We should not forget that this bishop of Rome had two perspectives on the world. One was that gained from living under communist rule in Poland, the other was witnessing certain developments in the West. When reflecting on human progress, particularly technological and social progress he felt the need to place it in the context of authentic human development, and to ask questions that call for reflection rather than quick answers. Let me give a taste of what he said:

The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilisation, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportional development of morals and ethics. For the present, this last development seems unfortunately to be always left behind ... The first reason for disquiet concerns the essential and fundamental question: Does this progress, which has a human author and promoter, make human life on earth 'more human' in every aspect of that life?... There can be no doubt that in various aspects it does. But the question keeps coming back with regard to what is most essential—whether in the context of this progress human beings are becoming truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of their humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all (n.15).

His emphasis on human dignity and human



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potential was also the context for speaking of the mission of the church. In the same encyclical he spoke of that mission:

The church of our time—a time particularly hungry for the Spirit, because it is hungry for justice, peace, love, goodness, fortitude, responsibility, and human dignity—must concentrate and gather around that Mystery (of the redemption), finding in it the light and the strength that are indispensable for her mission. For if, as was already said, the human person is the way for the church's daily life, the church must always be aware of the dignity of the divine adoption received by humankind in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit and of the human destination to grace and glory (n.18)

Human beings are destined to grace and glory. This is what he also preached in Poland, and this is what shaped the mission of the church there.

This leads me to the next photo in the album. It is of another trip—a trip that was very unlike that first one to Poland, but a trip that had the same message about human dignity and the mission of the church. The image is of the 1986 visit to Australia. The particular photo is at the end of his sixth day. This was a remarkable day because he left Melbourne early in the morning and flew to Darwin where he addressed the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the Katherine School of the Air. After Mass he flew to Alice Springs where he gave what has become his most celebrated speech in Australia, namely to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Then he flew to Adelaide and arrived when it was already dark. This is the photo I want to focus on; it was taken at the end of the day as he drove from Adelaide airport to the Town Hall. For the whole journey he passed through a phalanx of people holding lighted candles, and arrived to participate in a ceremony where he lit the Advent candle for peace. He addressed the people:

The lighted candles which you hold and the candles of the Advent wreath are symbols of Jesus Christ, who is for ever the Light of the world.¹

At the end of his prepared speech he added words that conveyed his own deep-felt emotion:

I express to all the city and the citizens of Adelaide my deep gratitude for this splendid reception. It was a reception in the spirit of faith and the candles in your hearts were the signs of this faith.²

The symbolic is at the heart of being catholic. John Paul was acutely aware that symbols carry a culture and thus have the power to take us to the core of the faith, to that place that even words cannot go. Lighted candles had expressed the hope of a local church.

Earlier in the day, his speech at Alice Springs had recognised the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This pope who was so imbued with his own Slavic culture, encouraged Aboriginal Australians to sustain their culture, because it will be the only vehicle they have for handing on the faith. One of the most quoted passages from the speech is this one:

Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost. ... The Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christians. It meets your deepest desires. You do not have to be a people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them. Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.³

Because the church is earthed in a particular place, his words here to Aboriginal Australians need to be heard by all Australians. Let me quote one more section of the speech:

Your Christian faith calls you to become the best kind of aboriginal people you can be. This is possible only if reconciliation and forgiveness are part of your lives. Only then will you find



happiness. Only then will you make your best contribution to all your brothers and sisters in this great nation. You are part of Australia and Australia is part of you. And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.⁴

The vision of John Paul II, right from the beginning, included a vision of the human community, and the unity of the Church. It is also seen in the next photo in the album. The year is 1982, and he is on another of his trips. This time to England, and he meets the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, at Canterbury Cathedral. The photo shows the two of them kneeling side by side in prayer. There is no doubt that they prayed for the unity of all the churches. I wonder if they both thought about their respective local churches and the ancient connection between them. Perhaps John Paul remembered his predecessor Gregory the Great who sent Augustine from Rome to Canterbury. Perhaps Robert Runcie looked at the list of Archbishops of Canterbury on the wall of the Cathedral, and saw his own name at the top, and that of Augustine at the bottom. Maybe they both recalled Gregory's farewell instructions to Augustine:

My brother, you are familiar with the usage of the Roman Church, in which you were brought up. But if you have found customs, whether in the Church of Rome or of Gaul or any other that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of the English, which is still young in the faith, whatever you have been able to learn with profit from the various churches. For things should not be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things.⁵

This Polish pope was keenly aware of the importance of local culture and customs for expressing the faith. He understood the particular role that was his as the bishop of Rome to be a bridge builder (*pontifex*) between cultures and different practices so that the riches of the church in one location might assist churches in other locations to develop their

own understanding and practice of the faith. This is why the unity of the church was so central to the way he understood his own mission as pope. In 1995 he published an encyclical on Christian unity, *Ut unum sint*. I am willing to predict that in the years ahead, as there is further reflection on the impact of his papacy, this encyclical may well be judged his most important. It is there that he states what is essential to the papacy, and calls for a patient and fraternal dialogue with Christians from other churches about how it might become a more effective instrument for the unity of the church. He clearly sees that he has a duty to promote the unity of the church, and to 'watch over' even those churches that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Since the meeting in Canterbury Cathedral in 1982 some Anglicans, as well as members of other churches, have suggested that there might be a way for the Bishop of Rome to exercise some sort of primacy even in our current divided state.⁶ John Paul implicitly acknowledged this in the encyclical:

Whatever relates to the unity of all Christian communities clearly forms part of the concerns of the primacy. As Bishop of Rome I am fully aware, as I have reaffirmed in the present Encyclical Letter, that Christ ardently desires the full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God's faithfulness, his Spirit dwells. I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation (n.95).

He went on:

This is an immense task, which we cannot refuse and which I cannot carry out by myself. Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us



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only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea 'that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (n.96).

Unity was a passion of Pope John Paul II. He liked the public gesture that would signal an important step towards unity. For him, a step towards Christian unity was also a step towards the unity of the human family.

There is one last snapshot to consider. It is towards the end of his life. He is in a wheel chair at the window of his apartments in the Vatican. He is now feeble, afflicted with Parkinsons Disease, and no longer able to speak. He releases from his window some doves that will fly out into the piazza below. They symbolise peace and his long-held desire for peace. They symbolise the peace that brings reconciliation between peoples and restores the communion of the human family. They are the gift of a dying man, one whose thoughts are now more clearly on his destiny beyond this world. His thoughts are on communion with God. But it is a communion which has marked his life, and shaped his papacy. His first encyclical was a meditation on the communion between Jesus and human beings,

and the consequences for the relationship between human beings. Let me suggest that his last encyclical gathers up the whole of his ministry as bishop of Rome. This was the encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Allow me to conclude with a few sentences from the conclusion to that encyclical:

Allow me, dear brothers and sisters, to share with deep emotion, as a means of accompanying and strengthening your faith, my own testimony of faith in the Most Holy Eucharist... Here is the Church's treasure, the heart of the world, the pledge of the fulfilment for which each man and woman, even unconsciously, yearns. A great and transcendent mystery, indeed, and one that taxes our mind's ability to pass beyond appearances. ... In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope (n.59).

There can be little doubt that in John Paul II we did in fact see a new way of exercising the primacy. He looked closely at the local churches, and in doing so called them to share his vision—or rather God's vision—of a new humanity, a true communion with God and with each other.

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2. *Ibid.*, 175.
3. *Ibid.*, 167.
4. *Ibid.*, 171-172.
5. Cited in Bede, *A History of the English Church and People* I.27.2 (Penguin, 1968), 73.
6. See, for example, *The Gift of Authority*, an Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1999), n.60.

This article is the text of an address given at the Knights of the Southern Cross (Bulli Branch) dinner on 27 May 2006.



BRINGING LIFE TO FAITH AND FAITH TO LIFE

For a Shared Christian Praxis Approach and Against a Detractor

THOMAS GROOME

WHETHER DESERVED or not, my work has become one instance of the contemporary practice of religious education and catechesis. What I've described technically as a 'shared Christian praxis approach' can be portrayed quite simply as 'bringing life to Faith, and bringing Faith to life.' Perhaps its simplicity and effectiveness toward Christian discipleship is why it is being used—often with creative adaptation—as the underlying pedagogy in many faith education curricula throughout the English-speaking world. Indeed, translations of my scholarly writings into other European and some Oriental languages have made it a familiar approach throughout the Church.

Beginning with my first visit to Australia in 1980, and continuing through the influence of the many Australian students who have studied with me at Boston College over the years, a shared Christian praxis approach has had widespread influence on the catechetical education of the Australian Catholic community. The diocese of Parramatta has been a leader in its implementation but many others have also used it or have adopted aspects of this approach.

Now an ultra-conservative element in the Australian Catholic community has made a concerted attack on a shared Christian praxis approach, and on me personally. The chief spokesperson is a Mr Eamonn Keane, a high school religion teacher in NSW. In his book, *A Generation Betrayed* (Heatherleigh Press:

NY, 2002), Mr Keane pretends to offer a scholarly critique of my published work. Instead, by misrepresentation and manipulation of my writings, couched in a collage of false accusations, innuendo, and guilt by association, he makes a calumnious attack on my character, falsely accusing me of being 'a dissenter' from *de fide* aspects—constitutive truths—of Catholic faith. His book would be more accurately titled, *Truth Betrayed*.

Mr Keane has made it a mission to ripple his lies out across the world-wide Catholic community. People who are familiar with me and my work have dismissed his accusations for what they *are*—slandorous falsehoods. Yet, he has found a sympathetic audience among other ultra conservative Catholics. Now, when further attacks on me personally appear, and oftentimes those on contemporary catechesis, they regularly footnote Mr Keane's book as their 'authority.'

In this essay I will lay out a brief summary of my efforts these many years to forge an effective approach to religious education and catechesis. In so far as this approach has been widely employed, my defence is not simply of my own good name and work but also of the renewal of catechetical education that was catalyzed by the Second Vatican Council. After defending a shared praxis approach, I will give some examples of the more egregious misrepresentations and manipulations of it by Mr Keane in *A Generation Betrayed* (hereafter *GB*).



For A Shared Christian Praxis Approach

Though I have written lengthy books to describe this approach, I can state its rationale and summarize it quite briefly.

The Second Vatican Council lamented intensely the separation that Catholics make between their Faith and their life. ‘This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age’ (*Constitution on Church in Modern World*, no. 43, Abbott 243). I vividly remember reading this as a college student and taking it very much to heart; in many ways, my core commitment as a Catholic catechist over the years has been to bridge this gap and to help myself and others to integrate the two—life and Faith—into lived, living, and life-giving Christian faith.

I condense a *shared Christian praxis approach* into ‘bringing life to Faith, and Faith to life.’ Here I use ‘life’ and reflection on it as synonymous with the term praxis. By ‘Faith’ (often with a capital) I mean the Christian Story and Vision, all that has been handed down to us through Scripture and Tradition and what this demands of and promises to our lives. Then more than ‘correlating’ Faith and life, the ‘shared’ word in the title calls for a real integration, so that the Faith people profess and the lives they lead become, by God’s grace, integrated in their heads, hearts, and hands. The ‘learning outcome’ of this approach is that Catholic Christian faith might become the core commitment of their lives, the identity by which they live.

This foundational conviction—that catechetical education must enable people to integrate life and Faith into lived Faith—is echoed throughout the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997, hereafter GDC), the most recent expression of the official ‘mind’ of the Catholic Church on the dynamics of educating in faith. I note parenthetically that the *Directory* uses the term ‘experience’ whereas I prefer the stronger term ‘praxis.’ Experience



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often implies something one ‘undergoes—as if quite passive. Praxis, on the other hand, captures all of life and reflection on it, both what we undergo and what we initiate, our reception and our agency, what comes our way and what we help to create. Likewise, the *GDC* uses the word term ‘correlate’ as what is needed between ‘experience’ and ‘faith’; again, I don’t find this term strong enough—given its typical English connotation. We must encourage people to ‘integrate’ the two, so that Christian faith defines who they are as disciples of Jesus within a community of disciples, the Church, permeating every nook and cranny of their lives in the world.

This being said, the *GDC* repeatedly calls for catechesis that encourages ‘a correlation and interaction between profound human experiences and the revealed message’ (no. 153). For it is by ‘correlating faith and life’ (no. 207) that ‘catechesis...bridges the gap between belief and life, between the Christian message and the cultural context’ (no. 205). Religious educators must not only teach the Faith tradition but also engage people’s lives in the world because ‘experience is a necessary medium for exploring and assimilating the truths which constitute the objective content of Revelation’ (no. 152). Thus, effective catechesis presents every aspect of Christian faith ‘to refer clearly to the fundamental experiences of people’s lives’ (no. 133). To encourage ‘lived’ faith, catechists must engage participants’ own lives as integral to the curriculum; ‘one must start with praxis to be able to arrive at praxis’ (no. 245; one of my favorites).



This commitment of mine and of contemporary catechesis to engage people's praxis—reflection on life—in the pedagogy of Christian faith education reflects the Catholic principle of sacramentality. This is the deep Catholic conviction that God takes the initiative with divine presence and grace through the ordinary and everyday of our lives. The Spirit is ever moving in our hearts, communities, and world; we can truly 'come to see God in all things' (Ignatius of Loyola) and we must respond through the ordinary and everyday as well. If such a methodology is 'built into' the pedagogy of catechesis—constantly encouraging people to bring 'their lives to Faith and their Faith to life'—then, by God's grace, 'lived faith' would seem a little more likely. My hope for a shared Christian praxis approach is that participants will learn the *habitus* (Aquinas) of integrating their lives and their Faith, and do so by their own willed commitment rather than depending on an authority figure to 'tell' them what to do. In this way, they may become agents of their Faith, taking responsibility for a 'new evangelization' (JP II) of joyful and lived faith in every arena and on every level of their lives.

Then, by way of the formal content of catechesis, I emphasize that we must give people ready access to the 'whole Story' of Catholic Christian faith and, within the catechetical process, explicitly point to its Vision—the demand and promise that this Faith reveals to our lives. Further, we must do so with real persuasion and 'according to the mode of the receivers.' In other words, we must ever 'tell the Christian Story' and 'propose its Vision' in such a way that people are likely to personally recognize the great truths and wisdom of this Faith and take it to heart with personal conviction.

Further, I describe the Catholic faith for which we educate as 'total'—as engaging people's heads, hearts, and hands. Or, as the old Catechisms put it, God made us 'to know, love, and serve God in this life and to be happy forever in the next.' This Faith has cognitive, af-

fective, and behavioral aspects; thus, its catechesis demands information, formation, and transformation—life-long Christian conversion. Indeed we must bring people to know well and with conviction the beliefs of their faith, but also help to form them in Christian identity, and beyond this, dispose them to live the values and virtues that constitute Catholic morality and ethics. Our catechesis must convince them that Jesus is indeed 'the way, the truth, and the life,' in other words that discipleship to him within a community of disciples, the Church—functioning effectively as sacrament of God's reign in the world—is the surest path to true happiness in this life and eternal happiness in the next. This is the best hope I have for a shared Christian praxis approach to religious education and catechesis.

By way of integrating these two—life and Faith—I reiterate that I've long proposed a pedagogy that encourages people, within a Christian community of conversation, to come to see for themselves the wisdom and truth of Christian faith, to embrace it with personal conviction, so that they might 'make the Faith their own' and choose to live it in their lives. This appropriation and integration is precisely the intent of the fourth and fifth movements of the shared praxis approach (see my *Sharing Faith* Chapters 9 and 10, hereafter *SF*).

The dynamic of people appropriating Christian faith to their lives and making it their own is essential if they are to take on Christian discipleship as their identity and with conviction. Among other things, it requires that they think for themselves within a Christian community about their faith and about their lives, that they notice, reflect, remember, imagine, make judgments and decisions that integrate the two. The great Catholic philosopher/theologian Bernard Lonergan, building upon the work of Thomas Aquinas, described 'authentic human cognition' as demanding the cumulative activities of paying *attention*, coming to *understand*, making *judgments* about what is true or false, good or bad, and then reaching *decisions* as an agent of one's own



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life and faith.

This is precisely the cognitive dynamic of a shared Christian praxis approach to catechesis and religious education. It is eminently Catholic in both its origins and intentions. It can enable people to move beyond simply 'knowing about' their Catholic faith to embracing its spiritual wisdom as their own; to move beyond knowing the 'formulas' of faith to living as disciples of Jesus Christ (note: to 'move beyond' does not mean to 'leave behind'). Yet, the fundamentalist attitude of Mr. Keane toward both scripture and tradition would discourage such a cognitive dynamic and integration of life and Faith. Ironically, he thinks that a pedagogy which refuses people the opportunity to think about their lives and their Faith will make better Catholics out of them; in this day and age, he is greatly mistaken.

On this note, and to transition into a rebuttal of some of Mr Keane's more egregious misrepresentations of my work, I challenge a false myth that he shares with ultra-conservatives in the Church that there was once a golden age when Catholics 'knew' their faith well, whereas now they do not. It is true that pre-Vatican II Catholics were typically quite capable of repeating the questions and answers memorized from their national catechism. But that they 'knew' the 'constitutive truths' of their Faith better than today's generation is a false myth for at least two reasons.

First, it settles for a too limited understanding of what it means 'to know.' Essentially, the old catechism approach was intent that people 'know about' their Faith in that they could repeat what was presumed to be its essential truths. But such knowing could be simply memorized—and typically was. Now, I'm convinced that there is a place for memorization in catechesis (see my essay 'Learning by Heart,' *Church*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Fall, 1991, 38-40). However, if people are to take on Catholic faith as their personal identity and modus operandi in this post-modern world, they need much more than knowing about it and accept-

ing it 'on authority.' They need to 'know' their Faith in the biblical sense of knowing—a total engagement of the whole person. As Lonergan would insist, this requires that they pay great attention to it, come to understand it well, move to deep conviction about it, and choose to live as Christians in their daily lives. This is the 'knowing' of Catholic faith to which I am deeply committed; it calls for something akin to a shared Christian praxis approach to catechetical education.

Second, the 'penny catechism' version of the Faith that a previous generation of Catholics could readily recite, often missed the mark. To begin with, it made every question/answer seem equally constitutive of Catholic faith; this could be very misleading. Then, it often skewed the faith by what it highlighted or failed to highlight. For example, the original Baltimore Catechism had eleven questions and answers on limbo and purgatory; meanwhile, it had no direct question/answer and only one oblique one on Easter. Note, too, that a 1960's survey of how well American 'Catechism' Catholics knew their faith found that over 80% of them could not name the first book of the Bible and more than 70% could not say who preached the Sermon on the Mount. In other words, Catholics catechized through the question/answer catechisms could have a memorized knowledge of their faith as if everything was equally important, as if subsidiary teachings were central, and be nigh biblically illiterate.

It seems true that this current generation of young Catholics cannot repeat the central formulas of their Faith the way my generation could, like the definitions of the Blessed Trinity as one God and yet three divine persons, distinct and equal, or of the two natures—fully divine and fully human—in the one person of Jesus, or that the outer appearance of the bread and wine remain but their substance is changed into the body and blood of Christ. I wish they could recite such summaries, and likewise the central lists—like the ten commandments, the seven sacraments, the corporal and spiritual



works of mercy. A shared praxis approach is entirely consonant with such memorization; in fact, all of the K to 8 religion curricula I have authored and that are used widely throughout the US Catholic community have a ‘learn by heart’ exercise at the end of each lesson—after students have been through the dynamics of attention, understanding, appropriating, and deciding.

On the other hand, this generation of Catholic youth and young adults seem to have a ‘performative’ knowledge of faith that my generation did not have. Of last year’s graduating seniors from Boston College, over 80% participated in some work of compassion or justice throughout their four years of university, and did so out of faith conviction. My generation could readily explain the difference between calumny and detraction but we had little awareness that the works of social justice are a mandate of Catholic faith.

Against a Detractor: Rebutting the Calumny of Eamonn Keane

I have published a lengthy rebuttal of Mr Keane’s false claims against me and a shared praxis approach; the full text can be read at www.bc.edu/irepm (hit on ‘Faculty and Staff’ and then my name). Here I give two major examples of how he misrepresents my work; I then add more briefly some additional instances of his false accusations.

Concerning Revelation:

Mr Keane claims that I repudiate ‘the Catholic understanding of Divine Revelation’ (GB13) because I allegedly reject ‘Revelation as doctrine’ (GB 234). In fact, I clearly affirm the assets of a doctrinal notion of revelation but say that this model *alone* could diminish the richness of Catholic faith. In broadening beyond a doctrinal understanding, my primary mentor is Avery Cardinal Dulles; I embrace Dulles’s theology of revelation throughout *Sharing Faith*, footnoting him repeatedly. How could Mr Keane have missed this!

Readers of Dulles will recall that he lays out five acceptable models of revelation, reviewing the strengths and limitations of each one (see *SF* 489–490 for a summary). Following his lead, I try to draw upon what Dulles notes as each one’s strengths while avoiding its weaknesses. Even as I appropriate the merits of each model to catechetical education, I state repeatedly that my defining theology of revelation is Dulles’ own favored model of ‘symbolic mediation.’ (*SF* 197, 218, etc). How Mr Keane manages to portray my theology of revelation as ‘dissenting’ is a feat of manipulation and misrepresentation.

In Chapter 8 of *Sharing Faith* I outline Dulles’ description of ‘revelation as doctrine.’ Though this model has assets, Dulles also finds it inadequate in that ‘it overlooks the historicity of God’s self-disclosure, ‘forgets God’s presence in one’s own life and experience,’ excludes a ‘faith that probes and questions,’ and prevents dialogue with people of other faiths’ (*SF* 219 with a footnote to Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 46 ff).

In one of the most flagrant misrepresentations in his book—quite a claim—Mr Keane quotes my quotation of Dulles’ reservations as if they are my own words (though my text has clear quotation marks and footnote), and presents this critique by Dulles as *my whole theology of revelation* (GB 87 and passim). He makes no mention that I draw repeatedly from Dulles’ other four models, and never acknowledges that I favor Dulles’ overall proposal of revelation as ‘symbolically mediated.’ From his caricature of my position, Mr Keane proceeds to claim that I reject all doctrines of Christian faith and that I encourage others to do the same (see GB 234 and 298). How irresponsible!

Concerning Hermeneutics:

Hermeneutics of scripture and Christian tradition—*interpreting, explaining, and appropriating* the Faith—is ever a task of the catechetical educator. In *Sharing Faith*, I recommend *three* hermeneutical attitudes for re-



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ligious educators; I call them hermeneutics of *retrieval*, of *suspicion*, and of creative *commitment*. Placing emphasis first and foremost on *retrieval*, I say that the prime hermeneutical task of the catechetical educator is ‘to recognize and affirm the truths and values’ of Christian faith, helping people to ‘retrieve and reclaim’ them to their lives now. Then, the intended outcome of the whole process is *commitment* - that people make the Faith their own and embrace ‘creative commitment to more faithful ways of living Christian faith’ (*SF* 230-235).

By contrast, Mr Keane repeatedly charges me with encouraging only a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ toward Catholic faith. He *never even mentions hermeneutics of retrieval and creative commitment*, though I announce all three with a bold heading (see *SF* 230). Further, he totally *misrepresents what I mean by a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ and ignores the context in which I wrote about it*. He then makes the egregious claim that I recommend that Catholic faith ‘be introduced to the students as something to be critically dismantled (‘hermeneutics of suspicion’) in order to identify its ‘distortions’ and ‘untruth’” (*GB* 240).

In fact, I present a hermeneutics of suspicion as a very positive exercise ‘to uncover from the texts of tradition the subjugated or forgotten memories that can give new life’ (*SF* 232). Establishing such hermeneutics as the antithesis of ‘negative criticism’ (*SF* 232), I draw upon the notion of ‘dangerous memories’ as developed by Johann Baptist Metz and other Catholic scholars. These are aspects of Christian faith that to recall them deeply can cause people to ‘suspect’ their own taken for granted attitudes and practices and to imagine more faithful ways of living as disciples of Jesus. I cite the Exodus as the most ‘dangerous memory’ from the Hebrew Scriptures, and the paschal mystery—Christ’s death and resurrection—as likewise from the New Testament. Instead of encouraging dissent, such memories call us to greater faithfulness in Christian living.

With the hindsight of twenty years (I began writing *SF* in 1985), I recognize that a term like ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ plays into the hands of people with an agenda like Mr Keane. It could be heard to imply dissent—as he constantly but falsely charges. Meanwhile, he never identifies the context in which I use it. *Sharing Faith* was an academic work that drew upon and engaged the scholarship of its time. Within the scholarly conversation on hermeneutics, led by such great thinkers as Hans Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and David Tracy, ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ was a common phrase that all its authors understood as a positive exercise; it had no implication of dissent or denial of the truths of Faith. I would never insert such language into a catechetical text for children, but it was appropriate in a graduate level text book of that era.

I will now list more briefly four misrepresentations by Mr Keane of my work; my essay on the website www.bc.edu/irepm reviews many more.

* Mr. Keane constantly links my work with that of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. In particular, he claims that I follow her theology of revelation. I have already refuted this false claim above; Avery Cardinal Dulles was my primary mentor on revelation, as well as for my theology of Church. Now, scripture scholars vary greatly in their response to the writings of ESF but none ever disparage her scholarship. The fact that I draw insights from her work—as I do from a vast and diverse array of authors (see the bibliography of *SF*)—does not mean that I agree with all of her positions, far from it. Otherwise we can take it that Mr. Keane’s own citing of Aristotle means that he still favors slavery.

* Then, by associating me with Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, while lamenting her ‘trenchant support for abortion on demand’ (*GB* 4), Mr. Keane constantly infers that I support abortion as well. Msgr. Michael Wrenn, writing in the Foreword of *GB*, even implies that I support partial birth abortion. This implying throughout *GB* that I favor abortion is



as personally painful to me as his false accusation that I deny the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Abortion is a moral issue on which I have remained most conservative all my life. I have worked for the repeal of Roe V Wade, the US Supreme Court decision of 1971 that gave America the most liberal abortion law in the world. I abhor the very notion of partial-birth abortion; a society that could even consider it has lost its moral compass. Mr. Keane even claims that Schussler Fiorenza opposes adoption as an alternative to abortion (GB 212). I find this hard to believe, and having experienced Mr Keane's ability to manipulate and misrepresent my own work, he has likely done the same to hers. Be this as it may, I take the opposite position; I actively advocate adoption as an alternative to abortion, and my spouse and I are proud adoptive parents.

* Mr Keane writes that the term 'praxis...has a long history—stretching from the philosophers of ancient Greece, through Marxism, and into the philosophy of Karol Wojtyla' (GB 82). First, an aside: Mr Keane is correct that the notion of praxis passes through Marxism into the philosophy of Pope John II (see Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II, *Toward a Philosophy of Praxis*, New York; Crossroads, 1981); of course, this is entirely acceptable to Mr Keane. But then, he goes on to misrepresent my understanding of praxis as if inevitably Marxist; in Ch. 10 he gives a lengthy critique of Marx (much of which I agree with) as if refuting my position. In my writings I recognize Marx, as did Pope John Paul II, for keeping alive the notion of a praxis way of knowing while the rest of the philosophical world forgot it, favoring purely theoretical knowledge instead. This being said, many times I make clear that I disagree with Marx's deficient notion of praxis (see SF 72-74).

* A central aspect of a shared praxis approach is my comprehensive description of 'Christian Story' to represent the totality of Christian faith and to encourage a narrative style in catechetical education. Further, I rarely write of Christian Story without adding the

word 'Vision'; I do so to encourage faith educators to make explicit what Christian Story demands of and means for people's lives. So, the Story testifies that God loves us, the Vision demands that we love God and neighbor as ourselves; the Story teaches that God forgives us, the Vision demands that 'we forgive those who trespass against us,' and so on. In quoting—with disparagement—from my description of Christian Story, Mr Keane leaves out some crucial aspects that are clearly stated in the text from which he quotes (see GB 85 and compare with SF 113-114). Further, nowhere does he refer to my term Vision—though I use it repeatedly in my writings and the metaphor of 'Story' is incomplete without it. Meanwhile, having ignored this central aspect of my work, he claims that my approach is not committed to encouraging people to live their faith—precisely what I intend by pairing Christian Story with Christian Vision.

Regarding Women's Ordination

The only accurate charge that Mr Keane makes against me is that I have long favoured the ordination of women in the Catholic church. Mr Keane claims that the prohibition against ordaining women is an infallible aspect of Catholic faith, whereas I claim that this has not been taught infallibly. Here I'm in company with many respected Catholic theologians, of left, right, and centre; I'm also confident that it never will be so taught.

It is true that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) stated in its *Responsum ad Dubium* of Oct 28, 1995, signed by then Cardinal Ratzinger, that 'the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women' and that this is 'to be held definitively' and 'as belonging to the deposit of faith.' But the CDF cannot teach infallibly on its own authority and its claim that Pope John Paul II in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was merely confirming a teaching already taught infallibly by the bishops of the world has been challenged by many respected and



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faithful theologians. In this light, Canon 749 §3 makes a very important statement: ‘no doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless it is clearly established as such.’ The Church’s teaching that women should not be ordained does not meet this criterion for infallibility. This heartens me to continue to respectfully call for reconsideration of the Church’s present position.

Note, however, that Mr Keane doesn’t simply disagree with my favoring the ordination of women; he uses my position to extrapolate all kinds of outlandish claims. For example, ‘Groome is thereby implying that the male-only ministerial priesthood is not of divine origin’; from this he concludes that I deny the divinity of Jesus Christ (GB 101), and thus the dogma of the Blessed Trinity. Or again, ‘To call into question the divine origin of...male-only ministerial priesthood is equivalent to calling into question the integrity of the Catholic Church’s claim to have been founded by Christ himself’ (GB 107). From this he extrapolates that I deny the effectiveness of the sacraments, the teaching authority of the Church, and so on. Such claims are ridiculous, to put it mildly.

Let me be clear here as I am in my many books and essays: *I now hold and have always held fully orthodox positions on all the central matters of Catholic faith and morals.* Further, in twenty-five years of writing children’s curriculum, my publishers have never returned a manuscript for rewrite, nor any part of one, because their theological advisors had

found heresy in it. I know that WH Sadlier, my primary curriculum publisher, will verify this upon request. Never, in all the thousands of pages of curriculum I have written, has anyone ever had occasion to accuse me of ‘dissent from defined dogma’ (GB 96), a constant charge by Mr Keane.

I also note that while I favor a respectful and open communal re-consideration of the question of the ordination of women in the Catholic church, I have limited my discussion of this issue to a scholarly level and in academic contexts. I do not raise this question in any of my children’s curricula; there I faithfully represent what is the present position and practice of the Catholic Church. Should the Church ever explicitly state its opposition to women’s ordination as infallible, and the conditions for infallibility are fulfilled, then I will submit to its teaching, precisely because I accept and respect the Church’s teaching *magisterium*.

In conclusion, I hope and pray that Mr Keane will try to undo the damage he has done, not only to me personally but to the whole movement of contemporary catechesis. I express this sentiment out of Christian charity. I remind him that, ‘They who have lied about their neighbor and seriously injured his character must repair the injury done as far as they are able, otherwise they will not be forgiven’ (*Baltimore Catechism*, 1885 edition, 66). By this catechism *caveat*, Mr Keane has placed in hazard his eternal welfare.

Have humans dulled their senses to a point where they no longer perceive wonder? It is human nature to question but do we still do this today in a way that humanity used to? *Mystery: The Heart of Life and the Core of Faith* [Gerard Moore, Ed., St Paul’s Publications, Strathfield, PB \$19.95; ISBN 192103209X; 2006] asks this question and challenges that habitual Church practices and the secular world are dulling our sense of wonder and mystery. If this is true then there are implications for faith and religion which, by their nature, are based in mystery.

(Media Release)



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Part I: 'Ministry' and 'Common Priesthood'

ANTHONY GOOLEY

THE TERMS 'Ministry', 'common priesthood', 'ordained' and 'lay apostolate' help us to understand the relationship and roles of the laity and clergy in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The author attempts to provide an account of each of the terms as a guide to understanding what the Council sought to teach. Correct understanding is important if the laity are to take on their full apostolate which is to transform the world through Gospel living. Perhaps too much of the renewal of the laity has been to focus on 'ministry' within the Church and not to the world. The four terms are considered in parts one and two of the article.

* * * *

In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* we soon come to realise that a name means everything. Names, like many other words can create confusions and divisions as much as they can bring clarity. In the post-Vatican II Church Roman Catholics were introduced to some new names and some older ones were used in new ways, some of which have brought confusion and created tensions where they should not exist. In this two-part essay I will consider four terms which are important for our understanding of the role of the laity and clergy in the Church. These terms are 'common priesthood', 'ministry', 'ordained' and 'lay apostolate'.

I believe that the first of the terms in our list was a remarkable recovery of a deeply Biblical phrase that Luther had tried to draw to the attention of the Church in the sixteenth century but which Roman Catholics tended to reject as 'too Protestant'. In the less ecumenical times before the Second Vatican Council,

to describe something as 'too Protestant' was enough for many Roman Catholics to reject the idea as being close to heresy. It is a pity that the attitude took so long to shake because, as we have witnessed since the Council, the recovery of the term was a boost to activating the laity to become involved in the Church in ways that many could not have thought possible before. However, a downside of the recovery of the term and of the new ways of interpreting the old ones meant that much of the focus of the active involvement of the laity was focused on intra-Church activity rather than mission, to the detriment of the proclamation of the gospel in our day. I will develop this theme after we have considered the four terms individually. We consider the first two terms in this article and conclude our reflection in Part II.

Common Priesthood

Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, introduces the term in a number of different ways in paragraph 10. Quoting the Scriptures the Council teaches that Christ created the Church as a new people, 'a Kingdom of priests' (Rev 1:6; 5:9-10) and that 'through baptism and the anointing of the Holy Spirit they are consecrated to be a spiritual household and a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God' (1 Peter 2:4-10). The same theme is repeated in the Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests (par. 2) and the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (par. 3). The documents use a number of synonymous terms to describe this common priesthood: royal priesthood, holy people, holy priesthood and holy temple. The terms as they are used in



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Scripture and in the documents of the Council refer to the whole people of God, not only to the ordained.

In the world in which the Scriptures were formed the Christians knew of only two kinds of priesthood; the priesthood of Judaism and the priesthood of the official Roman/pagan religions. The first of these priesthoods was a hereditary priesthood descending through the line of priestly families. Being a priest was not a matter of choice but of birth and gender (only men could take up the office of priest). The second form of priesthood was mostly entered into by public election or because of some prior right to a priestly position. In ancient Greek and Roman culture of the first centuries of Christianity the pagan priesthood stood apart from the people. Generally worshippers had to approach the Temple and place their offerings in the *profanum*, (it is from this word that we get our profane) the space outside the temple proper, and the priest would conduct the offering inside to the gods.

What is truly profound in the texts from the book of Revelation and the epistles of Peter is that priesthood in the Christian view is a characteristic of all the baptised and anointed women and men. Secondly, a people who were not related by heredity or common language, nationality or culture are made into one people through the Body of Christ. These first communities were conscious that in baptism they had entered the Body of Christ and as such were parts of one another (Rom 12:4-5). Christ, in the Holy Spirit, formed them into his own body and continued to offer his prayer to the Father through them. The Scriptures speak of Christ as the High Priest who continues to offer sacrifice through his body the Church (Heb 5:1-5 and Rom 12:1-2) through the very lives of the people who had been baptised. Given that these first Christians knew of only the two priesthoods discussed above, we can see how this concept of a common priesthood shared by all the baptised would have come as a radical departure from dominant religious views. Because of their baptism



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in Christ every aspect of their lives participated in Christ's great Eucharistic prayer and through them the world could be consecrated to God.

Roman Catholics have preserved this sense of the idea of common priesthood in our liturgy. When they ask the question, 'Who offers the Mass?' the answer is, 'Christ does'. When they ask, 'How does he offer the Mass?' The answer is, 'Through his body the Church in head and members'. The language of our liturgical prayers convey this communal sense; 'we ask this..', 'we make this prayer..' and 'we offer you ...' Celebration of the Mass requires (under normal circumstances) at least a priest and a lay person because Christ prays through us, with us and in us as his body. A priest presides at Mass as one who stands, as Christ the head of the Church, with the whole congregation which is Christ's body. The full, active participation of the laity is not a liturgical innovation of the Second Vatican Council but a profound theological statement about the liturgical activity of the people made new in Christ. Each one offers the Eucharist for the peace and salvation of all the world. Without such a conscious awareness many people will believe that they come to Mass to hear Father say Mass and to receive Holy Communion and leave without knowing that in them Christ offered himself to the Father for the world which God loves so much (John 3:16).

Consciousness of the new dignity as part of the priestly people is possible when we really take in the full implications of the meaning of the common priesthood. The basis for this common priesthood is the sacrament of



baptism. Christians stand in the midst of the world offering continual prayer to the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The pinnacle of this prayer of the Church, for Roman Catholics, is the celebration of Sunday Eucharist. Sunday Eucharist is the summit and source of the whole of the Christian life; it leads us into the mystery of the Trinity, communion with each other and mission to our world (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 4).

Ministry

Ministry comes from the word *diakonia* (pronounce dee-a-kone-e-a) in the New Testament. Recent studies have shown that the word is best translated by such terms as ‘delegate’, ‘representative’ and ‘commission’ (Collins, 1990). That is, the one who exercises an office does so as representative of the one who sent him or her. In the New Testament ministry and minister (*diakonos*) is used to refer to the work of some who are called from among the community to build it up through leadership, proclamation of the Gospel and teaching. The word *diakonos* was used of some women and some men. *Diakonos* was chosen by the Christian community because of its religious significance in the Greek speaking culture in which they lived. It conveyed for them their understanding of what ministry is, making real in the community the Word of God spoken in Jesus Christ, so that he would continue to be among his people as Shepherd. From this initial broadly-defined ministry the Roman Catholic Church developed, over many centuries, the ministries of deacon, priest and bishop. How this development took place is beyond the scope of this essay. The threefold ministry is maintained by other Churches, such as the Orthodox and Anglican churches.

Ministry is a gift (*charisma*) of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church which is not given to all Christians but only some (Eph 4:11-13). Collins demonstrates that all Christians are not ministers (Collins 1992). Ministry in the New Testament required a call-

ing or sense of vocation to the work but also required commissioning which the Church did through the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6) as a clear sign that the one who was to minister did so in relation to the community which had passed on the apostolic mandate to him or her. Ministry required three elements, a sense of call from God, confirmation by the Church and a sign of delegation for the ministry. Vatican II taught that ministry is a gift of the Spirit through which the unique ministry of Christ is present and which ‘from ancient times (*ab antiquo*) has been called deacon, priest and bishop’ (*Lumen Gentium* 28). It is significant that the Council Fathers chose *ab antiquo* (from antiquity) and not *ab initio* (from the beginning) because it tells us that while ministry is a gift for the building up of the Church it has not always had the present shape it has. It may in the future, take on a new shape. Vatican II wants to acknowledge the divine origin of ministry but acknowledge that historical consciousness allows us to know that these divinely-established ministries developed in form.

There are many important texts that should be considered when trying to get an understanding that ministry and being a minister is the responsibility of some and not all. We will consider Ephesians 4:11-13 because it is a key text. Recent translations obscure the intention of the text and overlook a basic point of grammar to produce a very different outcome (Collins, 1992, p17-20). I have placed two translations beside each other to illustrate the significance of a comma. (See next page.)

The removal of the comma in the new translation (not limited to New Revised Standard translations but almost universally now in modern translations) shifts the focus away from the intended meaning of the Scripture that *some* are called to equip the saints, to the work of ministry, to building up the Church. The second translation says that the *saints* (i.e. the church) are to be equipped for ministry and building up the Church. Collins, in the works already cited, indicates the new translation



Ephesians 4:11-13 RSV 1946

And his gifts were
that some should be apostles,
some prophets,
some evangelists,
some pastors and teachers,
for the equipment of the saints,
for the work of ministry,
for the building up the body of Christ,
until we all attain to the unity of faith
and the knowledge of the Son of God...

Ephesians 4:11-13 RSV 1971

And his gifts were
that some should be apostles,
some prophets,
some evangelists,
some pastors and teachers,
for the equipment of the saints for
the work of ministry,
for the building up the body of Christ,
until we all attain to the unity of faith
and the knowledge of the Son of God...

cannot be justified from the grammar.

Luther and Calvin were equally convinced, on the basis of this text, that the order of minister was part of the Spirit-given structure of the Church (Ainslie, 1940). Calvin's commentary on Ephesians 4:11-13 is that the task of ministers is to build up the Church and that 'anyone who seeks to abolish this order or disparage it as of little importance plots the destruction and ruin of the Church'. Luther also held that 'the people as a whole cannot do these things but that they should be entrusted to the care of one person', a minister. The Reformers knew that priesthood by virtue of baptism was different from ministry by virtue of office and they did not wish to see the ministry abolished on the basis of a common priesthood of all believers. This important distinction is somewhat more difficult to overcome in the

Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Churches because they use the term priest for the whole people and for their ministers and so the names blur the distinctions. To complicate matters even further, not everything ministers do in these Churches is priestly, *i.e.* restricted to the altar and presiding at Eucharist. These three Churches bundle all of the pastoral, administrative and liturgical roles and functions of their ministers under the title priest. There may be good reasons in the future for untying the bundle a little and seeing if everything belongs to this one minister or if things could be distributed a little differently.

In Part II of the article we will consider our remaining terms and some criteria for evaluating the impact of Vatican II on renewal of the local Church.

The Christian vocation, a gift from God, is the heritage of all. Whether married or single, ordained as priests, or religious, ALL are chosen by God to proclaim the Gospel, and to communicate salvation, not alone, however, but in the Church and with the Church. (John Paul II, *World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 1996*)

The word 'vocation' is a very good definition of the relationship that God has with every human being in the freedom of love, because 'every life is a vocation.' (John Paul II, *World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 2001*)



SUSTAINABLE YOUTH MINISTRY

Exploring the Role of the Spirit

DANIEL ANG

IN CONVERSION with others regarding their past experiences of parish life, it is not uncommon to hear stories of rich and memorable youth programs, of the enduring friendships and deep spirituality that were born of these significant and formative experiences. For many, participation in youth programs and networks has been an important and life-giving aspect of their journey of faith.

It is, however, a reality of contemporary church and community life that ministries with youth can often fold or run out of steam as quickly as they emerge. While occasional events, such as World Youth Day, draw thousands of young people into active and conscious participation in the life of the Church, it is not the story of youth ministry writ large. Indeed, following the conclusion of these large-scale events, it seems pertinent to ask the question 'What now?'

Dioceses and parishes, the latter of which I propose are the coalface of youth ministry, have long struggled to establish effective and long-lasting youth ministry programs, grappling with the complexities of turning well-intentioned policy into practical and sustainable outcomes. While acknowledging the success of particular youth ministry models both here and abroad, a scan of the pews at your local church might suggest that there is considerable work still to be done. It is evident that in the life of the Church young people are not afraid to vote with their feet.

Despite this sobering reality, we move together in hope, searching out new ways in which youth ministry might not only be sus-

tained but, as a response to the Spirit of Christ, flourish as an active and integral part of the life of the Church. While seeking to avoid a detached analysis that speaks only of pedagogy without proper attention to the demanding and concrete practicalities of sustainable youth ministry, we cannot divorce the 'how' of youth ministry from the ever pressing question of 'why'. In seeking to create sustainable ministry with young people, we cannot get away from that which motivates and underpins our endeavour, that is, the source from which our ministry draws its very life.

Our understanding of youth ministry as a genuine and authentic work of the Spirit opens up powerful possibilities in the development of sustainable ministries with youth in our contemporary experience. Specifically, it is our ultimate trust in the living experience of the Spirit that sustains our mission with young people, an experience of God's Spirit that leads us to decision and creativity and to which our programs must ultimately be attuned. As will be discussed, both the discernment of the Spirit in the lives of young people and our own ongoing conversion are critical elements in the development of long-lasting and life-giving youth ministries.

The Diversity of Belief

To begin with, however, let us take a brief survey of the present situation in which youth ministry finds itself and to which our focus on the Spirit might bring new courage and



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possibility. While the vigour and impact of youth ministry throughout Australia varies according to diverse and ever changing social and pastoral contexts, recent studies by the Christian Research Association show there is more uncertainty about belief among younger Australians than any other age demographic (Hughes 2005, 1-6). This joint study of the Australian Catholic University and Monash University reveals Australian youth are more likely to believe in astrology and paranormal beliefs such as the power of psychics and fortune-tellers than their US counterparts. The percentage of young people attending religious services continues to remain low while the exploration of Eastern religions among the young appears on the rise, with fifty-one per cent of those surveyed believing definitely or possibly in reincarnation. In somewhat crude marketing terms, it appears that we are selling our message to an increasingly fragmented market, unsure and shifting in its needs and demands, unmoved by the Christian offering and composed of disparate groups of individuals and subcultures willing to explore a range of alternative possibilities.

Youth Ministry: A Work of the Spirit

Having framed our discussion within this situation of complexity and diversity in belief, how might we hope to venture towards a sustainable ministry with youth? Our reflection on and practice of youth ministry as a genuine and authentic work of the Spirit provides sustenance, vitality and direction to our mission with young people both 'in and out of season'. In speaking of the Spirit, I concur with Michael Welker's fine analysis which questions associations of this outpouring of God's Spirit with inaccessible, unusual or sensational experiences: 'the Spirit is not something numinous, but a power that changes real life relations' (Welker 1994, 108). Indeed the earliest reflections on Christian service, the letters of St Paul, recognise the pre-eminently public character



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of the Spirit, as the gift of God's self poured out for all humanity. This Spirit, an aspect of the mystery of God, calls forth a variety of charisms within the community of faith while empowering and bringing dignity to the marginalised and disempowered (Acts 2:16-18). With this in mind, we might begin to attend to the movement of the Spirit as the deepest reality of our mission, calling us to service with young people who are so often at the margins of the Church with few formal or structured opportunities through which to have their voices heard. The immersion of youth ministry in the Spirit provides both mandate and energy to our task, framing our mission within a relationship of enacted faithfulness to God and giving youth ministry its own particular and irrevocable assignment within the life of the Church.

Trust and Decision in the Spirit

One of the first implications of this vision of youth ministry as an ongoing journey with the Spirit is that it demands our ultimate and overriding trust in the presence of this Spirit in all that we do. By a constant return to this most fundamental reality, we find the courage to be renewed in the successes, failures and questions that emerge from our ministry. In this respect, we draw much encouragement and confidence from the Second Vatican Council, which, as the contemporary theologian Richard Lennan notes, 'not only endorsed such a pilgrimage, it incarnated it' (Lennan 2005, 7). Like the Council, our trusting surrender to the



Spirit is that which allows us to remain faithful to our missionary discipleship through conditions of change and uncertainty. So well proclaimed in Scripture, it is the same faithfulness to the Spirit that provides the remedy to our fears in the uncertainty of the here and now. Just as the newly-called Peter is reassured by Jesus, 'Do not be afraid' (Luke 5:10), so we too have nothing to fear in our faithfulness to the mission of Jesus. However, a correlative failure to centre our mission in the life of the Spirit will lead to a ministry that becomes inevitably fragile, that eventually seeks its own distorted ends or, perhaps, that limps on as if it had only not enough time to die out altogether.

Not only is the Spirit the source, sustenance and assurance of our ministry but it is also the Spirit that provides the creative momentum and the decisive vision needed to meet youth 'where they are at', both now and into the future. As Karl Rahner notes, the Spirit is one 'who constantly breaks through all frontiers' in order to make the gifts of confidence, unity and ingenuity available to us, provided we are disposed to receiving it (Rahner 1970, 40-41). It is not an offer of cheap optimism in which we believe we can do nothing but wait for the practical strategies to be delivered, pre-packaged and free of responsibility. To the contrary, this immersion of our ministry in the promise of God's enduring presence is to acknowledge and actualise our position as 'co-deciders with God's Spirit' (Rush 2004, 76). This Spirit does not provide instructions we merely need to carry out but necessarily invites our boldness, our experiment, creativity, and decision. As Denis Edwards concludes, 'The Spirit is not only a *presence* but also a mysterious personal *counterpart*' (Edwards 2004, 178).

Ultimately, the dynamism of this relationship asks whether we have the necessary courage and openness to venture into all that the Spirit invites us to in our ministry with young people. It is an invitation to give ourselves over to the ultimate risk, challenge and possibili-

ties of far-reaching and bold youth ministry. In seeking to create sustainable ministry with young people, we must seek to give ourselves over to the radical nature of all Christian mission, one which gives without expectation of receiving back, which gives freely what will 'be coolly taken for granted' (Rahner 1970, 200). While it would be erroneous to claim our participation in the life of the Spirit guarantees the outcomes we would desire, that we somehow control this wind 'which blows where it will' (John 3:8), it is true to say that without attentiveness to the Spirit we cannot hope to carry out a mission that is ultimately faithful to 'what God would want' (1 Cor. 2:11). In dreaming of sustainable ministry with young people, we cannot be saved from the challenge of life in the God who is always greater.

The Experience of the Spirit

Having located sustainable youth ministry within a trusting relationship to the Spirit, in all its complexity and creativity, what are some of the fundamentals of youth ministry that flow from this orientation?

To begin with, it leads us to the fact of both truth and experience that youth ministry is not primarily concerned with handing on facts, creedal statements and information about God but, irreducibly, about bringing young people into contact with the living Jesus. While sustainable youth ministry must be, in part, an educational project, one which imparts the deposit of faith found in both Scripture and the tradition of the Church, it is, first and foremost, a ministry in which we bring young people into an encounter with Christ himself, not just ideas, conventions or abstract formulae. Even the educational component of youth ministry must always and forever be grounded in not only pointing to Christ but, by its very exercise and witness, making God present in and through the ground of experience. This accords with our Catholic sense of sacramentality and insists on the spirituality of those who repre-



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sent the Church in their pastoral work with youth. As a consequence, the pedagogy of sustainable youth ministry is not propositional, nor concerned with manufacturing consent, but is indisputably *relational*.

In insisting on the experience of God as the first principle of Christian discipleship, Karl Rahner writes, 'The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all' (Rahner 1981, 149). Our experience of God through faith, through our 'Yes' to the unceasing invitation of God in the self-gift of Jesus Christ, is that which lies at the heart of all Christian life. So too must our youth ministry reflect and offer this deepest reality, bringing young people to this experience of the Spirit through which we have access to the living Jesus. Indeed, if we are able to do this one most difficult thing, everything else we seek to do will be easy. Sustainable ministries with youth must never lose touch with the transcendent yet pervasive reality of the God in our midst and endeavour to provide the environment in which young people can experience the Spirit and clarify this experience in the safe and supportive context of community.

Discernment and the Spirit

If we are to create a life-giving and intimate environment in which young people are able to bring their desires, wonder, struggles and questions into relationship with God, our ability to discern the movement of the Spirit in the lives of young people must also be at the centre of our activity. Listening and discernment allow the Church to respond to the deepest needs of young people. Avril Baigent, youth ministry coordinator in the diocese of Northampton, UK, draws attention to the fact that parishes have often presumed and expected faith in their teenagers, thus failing to recognise the different stages that mark their journeys (Baigent 2003, 10-11). It is critical that we engage with and listen to young people, particularly at the level of our parish commu-

nities which are the home of our worship and thanksgiving. It is in the spiritual reality of the parish that opportunities must be provided for youth to not only draw from the wisdom, knowledge and gifts of the Church but also actively participate and contribute to that same treasure, particularly in the liturgy which is its very life. While this makes immediate quantitative demands—namely, the need for adequate and appropriate resources within parishes and dioceses—it also presents a qualitative challenge. In order to 'pick up' and respond to the Spirit in the lives of the young people, in the context of growing uncertainty and change, we must be willing to journey towards our own transformation. We, ourselves, must become ever-deeper apprentices of the faith. As Gregory of Sinai writes in the 14th century 'For the understanding of truth is given to those who have become participants in the truth (who have tasted it through living)' (Kadlobovsky 1977, 42). In other words, our own conversion is a condition for discerning the Spirit in others.

The discernment involved in creating sustainable ministries with youth will often produce tension, disagreement and sometimes even conflict. However, once again, attentiveness to the Spirit allows such conflict to be negotiated. We can see this in the Acts of the Apostles where Peter, having returned from his stay in a Gentile household, is confronted by the other apostles who object to this apparent recklessness. Ultimately, however, it is the acknowledgement of the Spirit among all people, both Jews and Gentiles, that unifies the community as it strives to live out of a shared and authentic discipleship (Acts 11:1-18). Youth symposiums and conferences serve as valuable locations for our ongoing discernment, creating and sustaining the kind of 'habitual climate of exchange' that invites a deep sharing of our values, our ideas, and our faith (Wolff 1993, 90). Undoubtedly, the multiplicity of needs among youth and the variety of pastoral contexts in which we meet them will properly result in a multiplicity of means to



minister with youth. Nevertheless, the imperative character of all these creative endeavours is the deep and genuine gift of self in the Spirit that is at the heart of Christian mission. It is a gift first incarnated in Christ himself and so a radical attitude of self-offering that must animate and flow out in our relational ministry with young people.

Ongoing Reception of the Spirit

Finally, the need for sustainable youth ministry to actively discern the movement of the Spirit in the lives of young people presupposes a genuine openness to the world in which young people live. We must cast aside any presumptions of contemporary youth culture as being either static or without treasure. Instead, we must be ready to discern within this world of change and choice both those aspects of youth culture which represent authentic developments of the Gospel and those which are incompatible with Christian faith. In the prophetic words of Belgian theologian Edward Schillebeeckx:

The Church does not simply have something to communicate. In order to communicate, she must also receive from and listen to what comes to her from the world as 'foreign prophecy,' but in which she nonetheless recognises the well-known voice of the Lord (Schillebeeckx 1969, 126).

Perhaps even more challengingly, our engagement with the world of youth culture and our ongoing recognition of this 'foreign prophecy' invites the Church as a whole to receive and incorporate the sense of faith (*sensus fidei*) of young people into both its present and future. Only by 'taking up' or incorporating the faith of young people into its very own life, no matter how poorly named or articulated, can the church become more of itself: a communion in the one Spirit of Jesus Christ. When the Church is attentive to the living faith of *all* its members, young people included, it can reside in the world as an ever more powerful witness to the unity of the kingdom of God. In

expressing unity and love across difference, the Church may not only express the faith of young people but will also draw young people to the kingdom which it serves.

The experience of the Spirit in a changing world, in the unpredictable context of youth culture and indeed within the life of a changing Church, also opens up youth ministry to the eschatological dimension of Christian faith. As the documents of the Second Vatican Council remind us, we are a pilgrim Church and so the ongoing reception of the Spirit in the present and the necessity of openness to the unknown future resists singular or 'once-for-all' approaches to young people. In order that the Gospel might be proclaimed with ever-greater efficacy, we must exhibit a willingness to embrace forms of ministry with young people that are hitherto unknown and unforeseen.

Our ministry with youth, like the Church itself, must be an open system, forever searching for the new signs of life that the Spirit brings forth in the world and willing to take up new means of carrying out its mission. So, in returning to the contemporary experience of belief in Australia, we might ask ourselves, 'What does the current climate of spiritual uncertainty among youth really mean?' Does it signal the final indifference of young people to the Christian claim or does it in fact point to a much deeper hunger with which our youth ministries have yet to engage? Our reflections on the Spirit provide us with a powerful way forwards.

Conclusion

There is, perhaps, no greater encouragement for our mission with young people than the Second Vatican Council. Its proclamation in *Lumen Gentium* of the 'universal call to holiness' reveals youth ministry not as 'remainder concept' - an optional extra in the life of the Church to be carried out once all the 'serious work' is done—but as an indispensable and critical part of our identity as Church. Let our talk about the future of sustainable



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youth ministry not be the concealment of a lack of courage, for we only arrive at the future 'by walking into it, full of hope' (Rahner 1970, ix). Our trust and confidence in the Spirit of the Lord, our constant renewal in its life and our willingness to engage with risk,

discernment, and deep and sincere conversation will lead us to a life-giving youth ministry, sustained not by what we have done but by that which God has given to us so that all generations might come to know him in the Risen Christ.

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TERRA SPIRITUS

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Spirituality is a word that provokes a wide range of responses, from enthusiasm to confusion, from anticipation to suspicion. Some accuse the term of being too broad to hold any real meaning while others consider it far more attractive than the institutional religion they have experienced. Whatever the verdict, one thing is clear: spirituality is increasingly recognised as the search for the divine by ordinary Australians. Within the climate of increasing violence and fear, in the wake of natural

tragedies and in the ongoing Western experiment with New Age philosophies and alternative lifestyles, there is an observable desire to understand and connect with the sacred. A greater attention to issues of God and the spiritual is emerging within our Australian context.

Terra Spiritus is a new voice that has emerged from this conversation, offering a unique resource on Catholic Christian spirituality through the convenience of the Internet.



Published by Pauline Electronic Publishing, a ministry of the Daughters of St Paul in Australia, *Terra Spiritus* is 'an invitation to listen, connect and engage with the sacred, an invitation to embrace and nurture an ongoing relationship with God'. To be certain, Christian spirituality has not always been at the forefront of the spiritual conversation within Australian society and much talk on spirituality has tended to centre on New Age spiritualities or Eastern religions and philosophies. The broader Australian public has not seen spirituality as the primary ground of the Christian churches and many Catholics do not immediately experience their parish life as a doorway into mystery or the spiritual. However, this spiritual impulse has begun to find its voice, not only in the richness of Australian literature and the arts but also in the walkways and cafes of our cities and suburbs. Now, perhaps more than ever, there is a growing number of people in touch with the Christian tradition who are openly seeking ways to connect this inheritance with their everyday experience, their home life, work life and relationships.

It is these people, yearning for more in their Catholic faith and practice, which *Terra Spiritus* aims to engage. The site itself offers a range of articles on Christian spirituality, reflections on prayer and relationships, meditations on Scripture and multimedia features which are accessible by subscription from any computer with an Internet connection. One of the more innovative features of the web site is a beautifully presented online chapel which provides an accessible space for prayer in the home or office. Christians can now tap into the immediacy of the Internet as nourishment for their

experience of and conversation with God.

The name of the Internet magazine, *Terra Spiritus*, is a rejection of the myth of *terra nullius*, a long held misconception by early colonisers that Australia was 'uninhabited' and even a 'God-less' land. It affirms the ongoing experience of the sacred in this land and the Australian Catholic experience of God. It seeks to inspire its readers to a refreshed and renewed experience of the sacred, of the Holy Spirit at work in daily life.

Indeed it is this grounded, pragmatic approach to spirituality which has long characterised Australia's search for the divine. This earthy and practical view of spirituality has been understood as the product of our isolation and development as a nation, from early colonial roots to a later economy of the working class which brought a no-nonsense, level-headed approach to the hard realities of life. Australians, by and large, find their spirituality not through elaborate words or rhetoric but through lived experience, through the individual and communal events and spaces that frame everyday life, from sport and recreation to the familiar surroundings of the beach and the bush.

As the conversations around spirituality and meaning-making continue to grow within contemporary Australian society, the richness of Christian spirituality becomes more and more apparent. Through new voices such as *Terra Spiritus* and the fruitful dialogue of Christian communities themselves we will continue, as a people, to journey towards a deeper understanding and experience of God and of ourselves.

—Daniel Ang

***Terra Spiritus* can be found at www.terraspiritus.com.au.**



GOD AND PHENOMENOLOGY

Re-reading Jean-Luc Marion

JOHN O'CARROLL and CHRIS FLEMING

WHAT CAN MODERN metaphysics say of God? Not much—if we accept the argument of Jean-Luc Marion, the influential French philosopher and Roman Catholic theologian on one side of the channel, and even less if we accept the thesis of his Anglican philosopher interlocutor from the British side of the discussion, John Milbank. Both these writers have been part of a ‘theological turn’ in contemporary theory. Working at the cutting edge of philosophical theology, they offer surprising and important responses to a range of questions that are themselves anything but novel. Our primary focus in this essay is the work of Marion, but we also examine it in relation to that of his ‘cranky ally,’ John Milbank.

Orientation: Metaphysics, Phenomenology and Theology

Beginning with Aristotle—who usually referred to it as ‘first philosophy’—metaphysics is that branch of philosophy which is the study of existence at the most universal, abstract level. It is, Aristotle tells us, the study of *esse qua esse* [of being as being] (Aristotle 1003a24ff, 1026a13ff. cf. Heidegger 1975, p. 275). As such, it endeavours to investigate both the most general ‘principles of things’ as well as their ‘first causes’ (Aristotle 981b27; cf. Heidegger, p. 275). Both Marion and Milbank reject the modern secular versions of metaphysics, albeit for different reasons. For the latter, the attempt to posit a metaphysics independent of theology leaves it rationally groundless. In this respect, Milbank accepts the critiques of philosophers like Jacques

Derrida (1930-2004) because they show—unsurprisingly in his view—that modern metaphysics (and indeed secular modernity as a whole) precisely *has* no ground. For Marion, too, the claims of metaphysics are to be questioned. His route to this questioning is complex, and takes place via a reinvented version of phenomenology.

But here we must take a brief step backwards. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) distinguished famously between *phenomena* which we can know as they present themselves to us in time and space, and what he called *noumena*, objects or ideas which we find are conceivable, but are not knowable ‘in themselves’ (Kant A 42/B 59. Cf. A 277/B 333). With Kant’s distinction, we see both a critique of speculative rationalism (metaphysics) and the conceptual preconditions of phenomenology, that branch of philosophical inquiry upon which Marion’s worked is founded. The term ‘phenomenology’ names Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) rigorous attempt to describe the way phenomena are disclosed to us in consciousness. Phenomenology literally means the ‘science of phenomena,’ and its ongoing task has been to analyse ‘appearances,’ the *how* or *structure* of appearing—what Michel Henry (1922-) has called ‘the essence of manifestation’ (Henry 1973). One way in which Husserl’s philosophy marked itself off from former approaches was by emphasising *intentionality* as the basis of mental apprehension—we are, that is, always oriented *to* phenomena. Husserl recommended that we suspend judgement about the metaphysical reality of what manifests to consciousness



in order to take up an analysis of the conditions and forms of such appearances (Husserl 1931, pp. 237-45; 1960, pp. 12-13; 1965, p. 96).

Marion: Beyond Idolatry?

In his influential *God Without Being* [*Dieu sans l'être*] (1991. Fr. Orig. 1982), Marion works the phenomenological seam of two seemingly related but distinct phenomena: idols and icons. Both appear in consciousness as objects of veneration insofar as they are seen—whether mistakenly or no—as traces or portents of the divine (1991, pp. 7-8). But Marion wishes to make an important distinction: where the idol, he argues, 'presents itself' to our gaze and hence allows us to 'seize hold of it' (pp. 9-10), the icon cannot be so held, resisting, as it does, full apprehension (p. 17).

Marion's notion of the 'idol' is not hide-bound to physical artefacts—to stone statues and the like. (Unlike *phenomenalism*, phenomenology does not restrict the notion of 'appearances' to include only (narrowly) 'empirical' or sense-based phenomena.) It is possible to be in the thrall of *conceptual* idols (p. 16). For Marion, metaphysical idolatry is one temptation to which the philosopher is particularly prone. He contends that one such conceptual idol is the very idea of a *describable* God. Such idolatry is evinced, for instance, when God, philosophically figured as Being (Gk. *ousia*), takes precedence over the more biblically grounded notion of God as *person* (Gk. *Hupostasis*, Lt. *persona*).

Further, in criticising the 'God' posited by metaphysics, Marion is happy to accept even the assault by another philosopher in the Husserlian tradition. In his complex attack on 'ontotheological' deification, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) challenges the conventional wisdom that the God of the philosophers is equivalent to the God of the bible. The former gains respectability at the price of being topped and tailed to fit into a metaphysi-



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cal procrustean bed. God is allowed entry only to the extent that 'philosophy, of its own accord and by its own nature, requires and determines how the deity enters into it' (Heidegger 1969, p. 56; cf. pp. 54-72; 1977, pp. 99-105; Marion, 1991, p. 61).

(It bears noting that the term 'ontotheology' is usually employed to designate several related notions:

1. The unacknowledged metaphysico-theological basis of western philosophy;
2. The anthropomorphic internalisation of the *imago dei* or the posited equivalence—beginning with Aristotle—of all beings (or being-in-general) and (the) Divine Being;
3. The erroneously assumed equivalence between the God of the bible with the god of the philosophers.)

Extending Heidegger's critique (and, to an extent, aspects of Nietzsche's attacks on Christianity itself), Marion argues in *God Without Being* that even metaphysically fixated Christian apologetics—when it imposes names like 'causa sui' [the self-caused] on God—paradoxically obscures what it aspires to name. Marion's biblically grounded intuition is that an eternal God cannot, in any strict



sense, be the cause of ‘itself’—or indeed, *any* abstract ‘explanatory principle.’ Such efforts will always be in danger of misconstruing what they purport to defend, effacing the ‘mystery of God-as-such’ (Marion, 1991 p. *xxi*. Cf. p. 16, p. 35, p. 61). Here we are reminded of theologian Henri deLubac’s discussion of the modern ‘rationalistic evaporation’ of God. This God may have *indeed* evaporated, deLubac argues; ‘but,’ he says ‘it was the rationalist God. A single puff will disperse the vapor. We shall not be disturbed. We shall even breathe more comfortably. The true God...is elsewhere’ (Lubac, 1960, p. 179).

In opposition to the metaphysical tradition, Marion suggests alternate figurations: God-as-charity, as *agape*, as the good, as gift. Why not, above all, as John reminds us (1 John 4:8), think God as *love* (Marion, 1991 pp. *xx-xxiv*)? But we should advance cautiously here; Marion is not simply interested in freeing God of ‘metaphysical’ determinations, but of *all* determinations (*xx-xxi*). As such, if certain names take precedence in Marion’s works (like those mentioned above), it is *not* because they attain *perfect correspondence with the divine*. Rather, it is because, more than ‘Being,’ they seem to better respect this freedom-from-determination. But how to pull off such a feat? Moreover, is such a demand itself theologically (or philosophically) reasonable? Marion’s response to such questions is to think carefully about the icon—and it is to his conception of the relationship between the idol and the icon to which we now turn.

Icons and Idols

Marion would have our God-talk serve the purposes of ‘iconicity’ rather than ‘idolatry.’ Again, what determines ‘iconicity’ or ‘idolatry’ is not so much the object of the gaze, but the method of looking—it is dependent on the intentional act directed, not the ‘end-point’ of the look, the seeing not the seen: ‘The idol depends on the gaze that it satisfies, since if

the gaze did not desire to satisfy itself in the idol, the idol would have no dignity for it’ (*God* 10, 29-31). Something becomes an idol when the gaze that intends it is satisfied with what it sees, when it petrifies or grinds to a halt on the visible (object); the (idolatrous) gaze admits no beyond (*God* 10-16).

Idolatry is the result of allowing the human gaze to become the measure of divine being. That is, God is simply equated with what the human gaze has equated with the divine. Importantly, Marion calls this sort of gaze the ‘invisible mirror,’ invisible because its function *as* mirror is not noticed (*God* 11-16, esp. 11-13). What it *isn’t* is a mirror of the divine. This would only be so if the divine happened to fit exactly and without remainder into the confines of the humanly visible. Idolatry, then, is this pre-established harmony of perception—a perfectly symmetrical relation between the subject and the imagined God. As Marion puts it, the idol reveals nothing but ‘a certain low-water mark of the divine,’ the ‘point marked by the frozen gaze’ (14).

Marion contrasts the circularity of the idolatrous gaze with his conception of the icon. In his best-known work, *God Without Being*, following Derrida’s analysis of writing, Marion puts the name of God himself ‘under erasure’ by writing it as ‘Gød’ to suggest that while we *can* conceive of God we cannot fully *comprehend* him (22-23). For Marion, then, when directed at the icon, the gaze itself is not fulfilled, satiated. The gaze, in this modality, refuses to rest on the visible, except by working to ‘transpierce’ it (*God* 11).

What can this mean? To transpierce the visible is to *attempt* to look in a way that transcends its own reflection, or transpierce *itself* (17). This gaze, in other words, looks *beyond* all visible things to the invisible because it does not make its own capacity the measure of what it intends. Knowing itself to be inadequate to that at which it aims, it does not equate the intelligible with the *divine origin of intelligence*, the sensible with the *gift of sight*. At



one level, this is theologically basic. We are often reminded, but are prone to forget, that God's freedom is without condition. This being the case, even the most orthodox monotheism would affirm that God's absolute freedom surely also includes freedom from *determination* ('The Saturated'; cf. *God* 10-31). Those who make God in their own image only admire what they themselves have created. We do better to recall that the visible is valuable, but only as a trace. As the old Zen saying goes: 'When someone points to the moon, do not fix your attention on the finger.'

***A Cranky Ally: John Milbank
and Irascible Orthodoxy***

We now take up the work of John Milbank inasmuch as it relates to a couple of the key issues raised thus far. The relationship between Marion and Milbank is complex. At times, Milbank seems to extol the virtues of the kind of phenomenology Marion has developed; at other times, Milbank appears to reject entirely any kind of philosophical account of the divine as a lapse into metaphysics-as-an-autonomous-science. Yet if we can cut through some of the more detailed critiques, we find there is affinity between the two writers—and we will do our best to show why we see Milbank as Marion's erudite, yet at times apparently very irascible, ally.

The best way to handle the relationship between the two thinkers is to look, among his many references to Marion, at some of the signal ways in which Milbank engages Marion's work. Ultimately, for Milbank, Marion's phenomenology too readily accepts the notion of the autonomy of theoretical reason—of philosophy as a meta-science—a claim Milbank is at pains to challenge in general terms (Milbank, 'Knowledge' 21-2, 'Only Theology' 36-7, 48-9). Milbank argues that modernist Christian theology from Christian Metz to Jürgen Moltmann has wrongly endorsed a whole web of intellectual frameworks that are, despite appearances and theological

intentions, profoundly hostile to Christian revelation.

Milbank's thesis is based on his celebrated argument that Western secularity is not some bare remainder that could only be properly seen after Christian superstition was stripped away. On the contrary, Milbank contends, the *Church itself instituted secularity*; the secular (via the notion of the *saeculum*) is itself theologically constituted, both historically and conceptually. In broad terms, the most forceful and thickly argued version of this thesis is contained in his magisterial *Theology and Social Theory* (cf. Taylor 31-2). Here and elsewhere, Milbank contends that, far from being an autonomous domain, the 'secular' is constituted—and is still parasitic upon—an active relation to that which it supposedly negates: the Christian and the religious (*Theology* 9).

We want less to take sides between the two thinkers than to seek *common ground*. It certainly *seems* true enough that Marion does endorse the vision of an independent phenomenology, but we must immediately *also say* that in Marion's hands, this phenomenology is unique as it is one ultimately overwhelmed by revelation (See, for instance, Marion, 'Metaphysics and Phenomenology' and Marion and Derrida 'On the Gift' 70). Looking at things from a different angle, we may also notice that there are possible problems with Milbank's characterisation of Marion's phenomenology (and perhaps even phenomenology itself): we would suggest that it is *not necessarily* as 'Scotist' as Milbank contends—or that phenomenology *per se* is necessarily possessed of a universal conceit: to 'see' essences independent of theological reason ('Only Theology' 47-8). We *can* agree with Milbank that this is certainly *a* form of phenomenology, one which draws quite close to some works of Husserl's (see, for instance, Husserl 12). But we can equally point to the fact that other key players in Radical Orthodoxy are seemingly comfortable situating their own work *within* phenomenology (cf.



Ward 47-9).

We hope that the picture we've been sketching is now clear. Milbank's major contentions on the history of the institution of the secular, and its foundation and ongoing reliance on Christian precepts do provide one avenue for framing the way we would view any 'secular' modelling of consciousness and knowing. This affects phenomenology itself, including that of the Husserlian tradition both writers seek, in their respective ways, to address. But it is surely *also* true that Marion's own extensive analysis of saturated phenomena, of God as icon and idol, are serious and substantial addresses to the problem of the linkage of theology with metaphysics or philosophy. For Milbank to disregard these inroads and analyses is, at best, wilful.

Beyond the work of Marion itself, we find the best evidence for the above contentions in the writings of Milbank himself. Doesn't Milbank—somewhat like Karl Barth, whom he criticises—also figure the autonomy of reason *precisely by rejecting it* (Milbank 'Knowledge' 32)? Doesn't Milbank risk confusing a *mode* of philosophy for philosophy *per se*? Philosophy, Westphal reminds us, 'does not speak with a single voice,' 'even when seeking to overcome onto-theological metaphysics' (271). Indeed, Milbank's critique of the metaphysics of univocity is itself predicated on an alternate metaphysical vision (See, for instance, Milbank, 'Only Theology' 44-5; *Theology* 422-32; Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth*, 19-59; Pickstock, 3-46; Ward, *Cities*, Ch. 3). Seen in this way, there are parallels between Milbank's work and Marion's diagnosis of modernist ontology as ending in nihilism.

Coda

Marion is interesting as a contemporary philosopher for the way in which his work represents both continuity with the philosophi-

cal tradition and a probing questioning of it. Continuing the Kantian legacy of using reason to question its own limits, it appears—oddly enough—as at home with contemporary 'postmodernism' as with St Thomas. But the 'postmodern' tag here should not mislead us; above all, Marion urges us to flee not conceptuality, or conceptual intelligibility *per se*, but conceptual idolatry. As he reminds us, to question metaphysics or ontology is not equivalent to taking *leave* of reason or conceptual rigour (Marion, *God* xxiv, 22-3. cf. 45). Theological hubris is to be avoided not merely because it is inadequate to its object, but because this inadequacy entails a conceptual hubris which makes us the measure and master of divine reality, turning worship into self-praise. Discourse is not to be abandoned but renewed: 'as joy, celebration, praise' (*God* 105-7). For Marion, we must think God as the gift of *agape* who escapes and overwhelms our attempts to encapsulate Him.

At moments like these in Marion's work, we find ourselves in powerfully devotional idioms of thought which are also characteristically consistent with a broader argument. How can this be? We certainly don't find this dimension in Milbank, whose work is rigorously, perhaps excessively, cerebral at every turn. The apparent paradox is resolved by the phenomenological turn in Marion's work: it allows both orders of knowing to proceed, in a sense, *together*. *Fides et ratio*: faith and reason are, indeed, as the famous encyclical from the late Pope Jean-Paul II put it, 'like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth, and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth...' (Jean-Paul II, 'Blessing'). It fell to phenomenology to notice that there are different ways of knowing things, even though our consciousness is, in a certain sense, one. Marion's contribution has been to show how, once these insights are put together, the very architecture of knowledge—and its representation—is transformed.



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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

SEPTEMBER 2006 — JANUARY 2007

*From the Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B) to the Fourth Sunday
of Ordinary Time (Year C)*

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed while this issue of *Compass* is current. It focuses on the readings for Sundays between mid-September and late January 2007, from the Twenty Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B) to the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

Our readings over this period are uninterrupted by special feasts or other celebrations which displace the usual Sunday readings. We also begin a new liturgical, year C, with the focus on Luke's Gospel.

The Final Sundays of Year B

The *First readings* over the remainder of Year B are drawn from a diverse range of literary genres: prophetic, historical, wisdom, apocalyptic and from the first five books of the First ('Old') Testament, the Torah.

- *The prophets* sought to bring God's people back to the heart of covenantal loyalty. They continued to remind them that God was with them in difficulty, would offer them forgiveness and communion, and restore them to their land after exile. These readings also allow us to explore and celebrate the most important religious themes that at the heart of a life of faith. Key is communion with God and an open spirit to trust this God no matter

what seems to happen. The prophetic readings from Isaiah in OT 24 and 29 show how such communion is possible with God's suffering servant figure. The Jeremiah reading in OT 30 presents us with a wonderful celebratory vision of God's restoration to a struggling people. It is a vision that is needed today.

- *The apocalyptic writing* found in the book of Daniel is proclaimed towards the end of the liturgical year when our minds think of the new year and time beyond the present. It is natural to reflect on life's eternity as one year merges into another. Apocalyptic writing was particular to a world and time which saw God's hand at work everywhere and in every thing. The passages from Daniel (OT 33 and Feast of Christ the King) allow us to keep our focus on God, and God's intention for humanity. It is this big picture rather than the literalness of the images which helps us to move beyond ourselves and our present.
- *The wisdom readings* on OT 25 (Wis 2) and OT 28 (Wis 7) further lead us into a world where God's presence was revealed in practical wisdom and attitudes that made life possible. Wisdom was God's gift shared with human beings, but in existence before time itself. No wonder Christians saw Jesus as the tangible presence of God's wisdom.

Our second readings over the final part of Year



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B (OT 27-33) principally come from the Letter to the Hebrews, addressing Jewish Christians familiar with Jewish liturgical imagery and practice. In this context, the writer presents Jesus as the quintessential Jewish high priest, close to God, human, prone to weakness, without sin and able to intercede effectively for God's people. The power of these readings is lost to us if we are unable to connect to our Jewish roots.

The Gospel. Finally, in the remaining Sundays of the year before Advent we proclaim the last half of Mark's Gospel which portrays Jesus as God's suffering servant preparing for the struggle and passion that await him in Jerusalem. The disciples accompany him, uncertain of their future. The story of Bartimaeus (OT 29) is reflective of the disciples: wanting to follow Jesus, but in need of healing from a deep blindness that prevents them from really 'seeing' and thus comprehending Jesus' journey. The year concludes, as it always does, allowing us to focus on what is essential in life, what is called in classical theology 'the last things.' These last Sundays culminate in the Feast of Christ the King (or 'leader') and the invitation for journeying disciples to allow Jesus to guide and teach us.

The New Liturgical Year C

When we turn to the new liturgical year C on Advent 1, we begin to hear from Luke's Gospel and prepare for the God's coming ('advent') in Jesus, particularly celebrated in his birth.

Luke's gospel was written in the late first century CE for a Greco-Roman urban house-church. This community, though cosmopolitan, seemed composed of a wide social cross section, from wealthy elite to artisans and poor. Lk addresses the wealthy to invite them to a change of heart, openness to the socially reprobate and scandalous. Lk's portrait of Jesus mirrors the kind of attitudes which the evangelist encourages in the gospel's audience. As we trace the figure of Jesus and the disciples

throughout the liturgical year we shall notice how often meals feature. They are frequently the reason for criticisms levelled at Jesus and his followers by some religious officials. One scholar has suggested that Jesus' scandalous meal habits encouraged the religious purists to put him to death. In other words, *Jesus ate himself to death!* But more of this as the liturgical year unfolds.

About Advent

As we proclaim the Advent readings, it is important to recognise that the First Testament readings from the prophets (Jeremiah, Baruch and Zephaniah) are addressed to the Israelite people *in their own day*, and not texts specifically about Jesus. Jeremiah (Advent 1) is writing to Jewish people in exile, promising a vision of restoration; Baruch (Advent 2) writes after the exile about God's restorative intention for the people; Zephaniah (Advent 3) also celebrates God's vision for Israel. These readings are not prophecies specifically about Jesus, but about the people of which he was a member. Our readings celebrate God revealed historically in this particular people confronting specific historical and religious issues. Our First Testament Advent readings are importantly scriptures that Jesus himself would have heard and reflected upon.

In Advent the first two Sundays look back as well as look forward. They seek to offer a link with the Liturgical Year B just concluded and look forward to the year that is about to unfold. The theme of these readings is about God's Advent: at the end of time. Therefore a more cosmic, eschatological and universal perspective dominates the writer's thought world. This helps us to understand the apocalyptic literary style of the first Sunday. The recognition of this unique literary approach prevents us from being locked into a literal proclamation of this gospel.

- The Second Sunday continues this eschatological (end-time) perspective from 1st Sun of Advent. Here John the



Baptist's presence, inserted into the background of world history and politics, invites us to prepare for Jesus' coming.

- This consideration of the context of the 'big picture' is further reinforced in the Gospel of Advent 3, with John the Baptist's preaching spelling out the social, political and religious implications of conversion in following the one soon to be born.
- The gospel of Advent 4, which falls this year on Christmas Eve, presents a scene linked to the immediacy of the birth of Jesus. Here two female members from the same clan greet each other; one of them exults the future mother of Jesus. As the reader soon learns she is also the pre-eminent faithful disciple for Luke's community. Here she is called blessed; later she will be noted as one fruitfully contemplative of God's word.

At Christmas and the Sundays immediately after Christmas (up to the Baptism of Jesus), Luke's Gospel offers particular insight to celebrate the meaning of Jesus' birth in our midst. Luke emphasizes the birth of Jesus and the

presence of God's Word occurring within the context of political and world history. In other words, given our geo-political realities, the celebration of Jesus' presence with us offers fresh hope.

The Sundays of January begin with the feast of Jesus' baptism. This is an obvious moment to reflect on God's communion with us realised sacramentally in our own baptism. The theme of the readings of this feast encourages us, through our baptismal commitment, to be agents of justice and peace to the world in which we live. The remaining Sundays of January move us into Ordinary Time. After the gospel from John in OT 2, we begin a more consistent proclamation of Luke's gospel. In OT 3, we hear the commencement of Luke's gospel and Jesus' public ministry. The gospel of OT 4 reveals that Jesus' ministry through Lk will be tested. Eventually it will lead to his death. The second reading over this month is from the powerful 1 Corinthians. This is Paul's letter to a community deeply divided, jealous and stacked with members full of their own importance. Paul's letter seeks to offer an alternative way of living as a Christian community, aligned to God's spirit manifested among them.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

Sept 17—Ordinary Time 24: *Is 50:4-9.* A song of God's servant, faithful yet persecuted, who seeks God's justice despite persecution. *James 2:14-18.* Faith implies loving and caring actions towards others. *Mk 8:27-35.* Here is the literary and thematic centre of Mk's gospel: Who is Jesus for us? He is God's anointed one who will suffer, be persecuted and die. *Theme—Suffering.* Those close to God (the servant in *Is*; Jesus in *Mk*) suffer. Fidelity to God is not without its struggles. How are members of this community examples of faithful living in the midst of suffering?

Sept 24—Ordinary Time 25: *Wis 2:12,17-20.* A person steeped in God's wisdom will be tested and suffer. *Jas 3:16—4:3.* Community peace and unity is the fruit of God's wisdom. *Mk 9:30-37.* Jesus offers his struggling community of disciples a wisdom that subverts convention: being last and receptive to the social 'little ones.' *Theme—Wisdom:*

All the readings today challenge conventional wisdom concerned about power, importance, status and safety. Our communities are filled with examples of those who show true wisdom.

Oct 1—Ordinary Time 26: *Num 11:25-29.* Moses teaches about the unexpected nature of God's spirit, revealed in unpredictable people and circumstances. *Jas 5:1-6.* A challenging reading about wealth and its use that is still relevant today. *Mk 9:38-43,45,47-48.* Jesus' teaching continues to subvert: Optimism rather than pessimism, and a preferential treatment of the little ones rather than the great ones should characterise the lives of disciples. Living out this teaching requires firm commitment. *Theme—The Unexpected:* God's presence is revealed in the unexpected, in people and situations where convention expects otherwise. Examples of this unexpected presence of God abound today. Recognition of this presence invites con-



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templation, recognition and celebration, especially at a time when many think differently and are sceptical about this divine presence.

Oct 8—Ordinary Time 27: *Gen 2:18-24.* God fashions the earth creature into male and female, complementary beings who fulfil each other's need for human companionship. *Heb 2:9-11.* Jesus is our 'pioneer,' the one who goes before us in faith. *Mk 10:2-16.* Jesus' teaching ensures Mk's Roman community that those who are divorced are the victims of an oppressive social system never intended by God. *Theme—Companionship:* God's original vision for human beings concerns companionship and friendship. These are the foundations for community, the desire of every human being. Marriage becomes the sacramental expression of this community, reflecting the Trinitarian life of God. Sensitive thought needs to be given to those who are single, widowed and divorced in our Christian Assembly, that the Word addressed to them today is inclusive and encouraging.

Oct 15—Ordinary Time 28: *Wis 7:7-11.* True wisdom is God's most precious gift. It comes to those who are prayerful. *Heb 4:12-13.* God's Word penetrates into the core of our being and opens us to God's truth. *Mk 10:17-30.* Jesus' teaching on wealth is surprising to disciples who prefer to see wealth as a sign of divine blessing. Today's gospel is especially challenging in a world where most are poor. *Theme—True Wealth.* Mk's gospel and the Book of Wisdom offer an opportunity to reflect on our personal use of wealth and the economic situation of most on our planet. A wisdom is needed on how to respect our natural resources and respond creatively and in the spirit of the gospel to alleviate poverty and suffering; local initiatives can be noted and celebrated.

Oct 22—Ordinary Time 29: *Is 53:10-11.* One of the four servant songs which praises God's anointed servant who acts on behalf of others. *Heb 4:14-16.* Jesus knows us intimately, especially in our suffering. *Mk 10:35-45.* Service rather than status characterises Jesus' ministry and, surprisingly, also his disciples. *Theme—Servant Leadership.* The Christian community is filled with people who offer service and leadership to others, from members of parish care groups to others involved in many non-'church' activities, often not noticed or celebrated. The gospel is active in our midst and revealed in the worshipping assembly.

Oct 29—Ordinary Time 30: *Jer 31:7-9.* God's vision for restoration of a broken, dispersed and

disconsolate people. *Heb 5:1-6.* Using Jewish worship language, Jesus is presented as the authentic high priest. He is one with the people he represents because Jesus, too, is 'subject to weakness.' *Mk 10:46-52.* A powerful story of the rehabilitation of a failed disciple ('Bartimaeus') and the power which the community has to heal, free and bring others to Jesus. *Theme—Coming Home.* Jeremiah and Mk reveal God's vision for people who feel unhappy and alone on life's journey and are wanting to 'come home' to be with God. Bartimaeus is Mk's example of this and offers us an opportunity to celebrate how this is happening in our local community.

Nov 5—Ordinary Time 31: *Deut 6:2-6.* God's covenant is with *this* present community of Israel. The emphasis is on 'us' not on 'our ancestors'. The present community rather than Israel's ancestors is the focus of God's action. *Heb 7:23-28.* Continuing the Jewish worship imagery from previous Heb readings, Jesus offers the unrepeatably sacrifice of himself to God for all people. *Mk 12:28-34.* Jesus teaches Mk's community the heart of religious practice, a focus on God and love of others. Such love reveals the closeness of God's kingdom. *Theme—Faith Today.* Dt seeks to remind the present audience that they are at the heart of God's covenantal love; Jesus' teaching in Mk reminds the gospel audience that religious life is always potentially active. It is revealed in our love of God and evident in the way we love others. Today's readings capture the heart of faith. What examples of such relevant and lively faith practice are obvious today?

Nov 12—Ordinary Time 32: *1 Kings 17:10-16.* The widow's hospitality to the prophet Elijah in difficult times brings her great blessing. *Heb 9:24-28.* Jesus is in the heavenly sanctuary with God, in God's very presence. *Mk 12:38-44.* Jesus highlights how the unprotected ones, here the widow, can be victimised and oppressed by a religious system that fails to liberate. *Theme—Religious Freedom.* The two widows in today's readings (1 Kings and Mk) are contrasting figures: One is liberated and blessed by the prophet; the other is a victim to religion. Vatican II's document on religious freedom affirms adult Christians in their daily lives. It is a document in harmony with the intended aspirations of our readings; it could be dusted down and highlighted for our worship.

Nov 19—Ordinary Time 33: *Dan 12:1-3.* God (= 'Mich-a-el' = 'One-like-God' Hebrew) will pro-



tect and deliver the people from cosmic anguish and bring them to everlasting life. *Heb 10:11-14.18.* Jesus is at God's 'right hand,' an image emphasising Jesus as God's agent and sharing in God's power. *Mk 13:24-32.* An 'apocalyptic' passage that emphasises Jesus' continuing liberating presence with those who are faithful despite difficulties. *Theme—God's Apocalyptic presence.* Dan and Mk presume the contemporary audience's familiarity with apocalyptic thought. This unique form of writing does not offer a literal divine timetable for things to come, but a reassurance of God's presence in the present struggles of human beings open to this presence. Who are those struggling around us? Who are those we know are constantly faithful to God?

Nov 26—Christ the King: *Dan 7:13-14.* God's agent judges and comforts as he reveals God's glory. *Rev 1:5-8.* A beautiful song celebrating God's powerful, gentle and comforting presence. *Jn 18:33-37.* The central message in John's passion narrative, here revealed, is that Jesus is truly King. *Theme—Jesus, revealer of God's power:* The final liturgical celebration of the year traditionally spotlights Jesus as God's agent, revealing God's power and presence. In a world broken, uncertain and seduced by political voices focussed more on terrorists than the poor, this is an important celebration. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate how this community has lived out its conviction of God's presence and Jesus' leadership throughout the liturgical year concluding today.

NEW LITURGICAL YEAR C

Dec 3—Advent 1: *Jer 33:14-16.* God's prophet foresees a time of peace, harmony and communion when all will live safely. *1 Thes 3:12—4:2.* Paul's people are urged to live out their community life with love and holiness. *Lk 21:25-28.34-36.* Our first Lk reading for the new liturgical year invites an attitude of alertness to Jesus' coming. *Theme—Alertness:* Advent initially encourages us to be sensitive to the many ways God comes to us. This coming happens mostly unexpectedly, and especially in pain, suffering and death. This first celebration of our year invites us to ponder God's presence to us in all these kinds of ways.

Dec 10—Advent 2: *Bar 5:1-9.* This is a celebration of God's delight in creation and humanity. *Phil 1:4-6.8-11.* Paul delights in the Christians at Philippi. They witness to the gospel and he en-

courages their ongoing discernment. *Lk 3:1-6.* Baruch's vision finds its expression in the historical and social preparation for the birth of Jesus. *Theme—God's delight.* The advent of Jesus soon to be born among us reveals God's delight for creation and humanity. Jesus' birth involves the whole of creation that God has blessed. This powerful theme has profound ecological implications for our faith communities. It commits us to this planet and invites us to celebrate this world and our lives as good, holy and blessed.

Dec 17—Advent 3: *Zeph 3:14-18.* The prophet announces God's gladness with humanity renewed through God's love. This affirmation removes judgement and offers freedom. *Phil 4:4-7.* Paul encourages joy—a deep gift from God that alleviates 'all worry.' *Lk 3:10-18.* Jesus' coming invites conversion back to God. This has economic and social implications for daily living. *Theme—Joy and Conversion.* These two themes (joy from Zeph and Phil; conversion from Lk) are powerful and appropriate on the eve of our Christmas celebrations. Joy is God's gift in the midst of life's struggles; not simply the ever-smiling Christian untouched by what is happening. The kind of conversion suggested by John the Baptist is an openness to be touched and guided by God. It has practical, personal and social implications for how we live out these days in preparing for Jesus' birth.

Dec 24—Advent 4: *Micah 5:1-4.* The smallest and most insignificant tribe will be selected by God to rule Israel. *Heb 10:5-10.* Jesus comes to do God's 'will.' This 'will' is to reveal God's love and kindness towards all. *Lk 1:39-45.* Mary and Elizabeth meet. And the child whom Mary carries is recognised as Lord; joy surrounds this declaration. *Theme—Smallness.* Micah and Lk reveal that God's attention is focussed on the insignificant and unknown. Israel's smallest tribe is praised; Mary, a village woman, is blessed. Who are those in our communities that are God's 'little people' and reveal to us something of the presence of God?

Dec 25—Feast of the Nativity

Midnight

Is 9:2-4, 6-7. God's light shines on a people that walk in darkness. Their hope is in the birth of one who will usher in God's authority and justice. *Tit 2:11-14.* God's love for us is tangible in the birth of Jesus. Because of this we live lives that are holy. *Lk 2:1-20.* Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. *Theme—God's Welcome:* So many



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will crowd into our churches this night. All seek to hear a word of hope and encouragement. In the birth of a child God is imaged as helpless, child-like, and welcoming. Mistaken notions of God as vindictive or vengeful are completely overturned. This affects the way we see our world and God's embrace of us.

Morning

Is 52:7-10. The prophet reveals to an exiled people that a message of salvation will be heard and that God ultimately reigns over disaster. *Tit 3:4-7.* God's utter love and compassion enabled Jesus to reveal God's goodness and kindness to us. *Lk 2:1-20.* Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. *Theme—Hope.* So many will crowd into our churches this night. All seek to hear a word of hope and encouragement. The readings powerfully provide the opportunity to celebrate a God revealed in a child, seeking to console and tenderly walk with us throughout the rest of our year and lives.

Dec 31—Holy Family: *Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14.* Wisdom is found in respect and care for the older members of the family. *Col 3:12-21.* Mutual love and compassion should characterise members of the Christian household. Special attention should also be given to the last verses of this reading, written at a time when subordination represented order and stability. *Lk 2:41-52.* Jesus is found as the teacher in the temple, and surprises his parents. *Theme—Surprise.* Families can be communities of great love and growth; at times they are also places of difficulty and pain. No family is ever perfect. Today's readings encourage an attitude of openness, mutual respect and forgiveness in family or community living. Thought should be given to how to celebrate those who live on their own. In Australia, at least a third of households are single unit dwellings.

Jan 7—Baptism of Jesus: *Is 42:1-4, 6-7.* God's servant is committed to bring peace and justice on the earth. *Acts 10:34-38.* Peter declares to a Roman, non-Jewish household that God is inclusive of all people. Those who act rightly are acceptable to God. *Lk 3:15-16, 21-22.* Jesus' baptism is a scene of prayer and communion with God. He becomes an agent of God's spirit. *Theme—Agent of God's Spirit.* Baptism is more than God's recognition of someone and that person's communion with God. It is a commitment to communal service and social justice. These aspects are found in all the readings. We are baptised to reveal God's inclusive

community. This is challenging in a world where exclusivity and prestige or favouritism permeate all sectors.

Jan 14—Ordinary Time 2: *Is 62:1-5.* In a time of exile and apparent abandonment, God reveals to the people of Israel that they will be God's delight. *1 Cor 12:4-11.* God's spirit permeates the Christian community, releasing spiritual gifts within it. *Jn 2:1-12.* Jesus' first sign reveals God's joy with humanity symbolised in a wedding feast with extraordinary amounts of wonderful wine. *Theme—Be Delighted.* The first reading and the gospel invite us to celebrate how God delights in and cherishes us. Sometimes this theological conviction is hard to come by, especially when things seem pretty tough. Today's word will help to offer another perspective.

Jan 21—Ordinary Time 3: *Neh 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10.* After exile, the temple is rebuilt, the Torah is found, and the first liturgy of the word celebrated. This is a fine picture of how the Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in every generation. *1 Cor 12-30.* Everyone is an important person in the Christian community. Those who are to be most honoured are those considered the most socially disrespected. Now that's a challenging! *Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21.* The first verses of Lk and then (skipping over the story of Jesus' birth) Jesus proclamation of his ministry. This is essentially about liberating human beings. *Theme—Proclaiming Freedom.* Neh and Lk both present scenes of biblical preaching, one in the story of the renewed people of Israel, another at the commencement of Jesus' public ministry. The scriptures are intended to nurture and liberate and bring their hearers a sense of happiness. This offers an opportunity to celebrate ways the Christian community continues this ministry today.

Jan 28—Ordinary Time 4: *Jer 1:4-5, 17-19.* The prophet is called to his mission even before birth; it is a divine commission that will succeed. *1 Cor 12:31-13:13.* Paul celebrates the Spirit's charism of love in the Christian community. It is the foundation of its life. *Lk 4:21-30.* Jesus' preaching is not without its critics who seek to silence him. Their God is exclusive and not the one that Jesus seems to be exalting. *Theme—God's inclusivity.* The prophet and Jesus in today's reading reveal a God whose vision is to embrace all people. This spirit of inclusivity is difficult for religious people (like ourselves) who always think that God only responds favourably to those who think the right thing or act correctly.