

# THE EMPTY PEWS

**I**N THIS ISSUE of *Compass* we survey the empty pews and ask questions. Where has everyone gone? Why have they gone? And, above all, what ought we be doing about it?

In the pages that follow our contributors point out that the experience of being a Catholic now is different from what it was even a generation or two ago. And that is not all good: the vitality of our tradition is in danger as we become more and more like everyone else. So we are reminded of what is essential for a local ecclesial community, or parish, the challenges it meets and the opportunities it has. Faced with the widespread disengagement from participation in the sacramental life of the community we must be ever more attentive to fostering the life of the local church. We may also take some heart from the ‘untapped wells of spiritual vitality’ of nominal Catholics—in other words, from the power of the Spirit of God.

Our own experience of contemporary Catholicism in Australia fully supports all that we read in these articles—our contributors articulate our experience for us. It has never been easier than now to withdraw from the parish community because there is so little pressure put on one to stay. We are left to ourselves fairly much to decide for ourselves whether regular participation in the life of the faith community is important. Consequently, if life gets to be ‘too busy’, or church gets to be ‘boring’, or the effort to get there simply gets to be a bit much, then that is all it takes for many to wander off.

We who hang in there, on the other hand, are left to ask ourselves if somehow it is our fault that so many drift away. It is a question we need to ask because we need to test the pulse of our community from time to time. Is our community life deficient in some way—not a family spirit? Or, are our celebrations

boring and lifeless?

However, if after due consideration we can say that we believe we have a reasonably good community spirit, and that we normally do our best to avoid being boring, and that we are a welcoming community—even if we know that we need to do better in all these areas—then we need not blame ourselves if many no longer walk with us.

Most of all, we must resist the temptation to turn ourselves inside out, to make ourselves over in some way, in order to try to appeal to the absent ones. That way lies the danger of trivializing who we are and why we come together, and of letting ourselves be distracted from our main business by the absentees and their agendas.

## *Let us Remember Who We Are*

Faced with the empty pews we need to remind ourselves of who we are and why we come together as a community. We need to ponder the gift that is ours in the Church, the treasure God has entrusted to us.

The Church community is from God, a gift and a blessing from God that we need to appreciate and celebrate. Our Church has been instituted by and is fully sustained by Christ, the Son of God. ‘You are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church’: note the ‘I will build’ and ‘my Church’—the Church is not of human origin. And this Church has been built to last: ‘the gates of the netherworld will not prevail against it’. All the destructive forces that there are will not destroy this building. Further, this Church is equipped to interpret and teach God’s will authoritatively in the changing circumstances it finds itself in down the centuries: ‘I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven... what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; what you loose on

earth will be loosed in heaven’.

The Church community is God’s building. The weaknesses and failings of human beings in the community notwithstanding, it has the divine guarantee for its survival and for the reliability of its guidance.

Our response to this gift should be similar to the response commanded by the Father at Jesus’ baptism: ‘This is my beloved Son, listen to him’—except that now the command is ‘Listen to my Church’. And our response should be like that of the disciples when Jesus asked them if they, too, would go away: ‘Lord, to whom shall we go; you have the words of eternal life’—where else can we go to get what we receive through the Church? We can confidently look to the Church Christ established and sustains in order to receive all the goodness and love of God for our support, guidance, nourishment and safe journeying on our pilgrim way.

In the Church we hold a treasure. In the Church we enjoy and are entrusted with the blessings of God for humanity. It is foolish in the extreme, therefore, to go elsewhere, to construct some alternative for and by ourselves, or to just drop out, go nowhere and do without all that God is offering us.

Above all, in our parish communities we are not offering entertainment. We come to listen to God’s Word and respond with thanksgiving and worship. In Church we learn God’s will and are given the strength to do his will. It is serious business! Joyful, but serious.

Our task, then, and our challenge, faced with the empty pews, is to be more truly what we have been established to be, the Church that Christ instituted. By remaining focused in this way on our reason for being we will serve the rest of the population, and be there when, hopefully, some of the wanderers come home.

### *Has World Youth Day Helped?*

World Youth Day was a wonderful time of celebration and serious reflection and prayer. Our

parish hosted some three hundred francophone pilgrims who were a delight to have amongst us. The same spirit was manifested throughout the city. Young and old were caught up in the joyous atmosphere.

A survey conducted by the Australian Catholic University and Monash University has revealed some heartening facts. Entitled *Pilgrims Progress 2008* it studies the experiences of pilgrims before, during and after WYD08 (cf. [www.wyd2008.org](http://www.wyd2008.org) and click on ‘Latest News’). The aim of the survey is to gain a better understanding of the spirituality of the pilgrims ‘as a foundation on which improved ministry to them and to other Catholic young people can be constructed’.

Fr Michael Mason and the other researchers found that the pilgrims most wanted a spiritual experience and, in that context, to see and listen to the Holy Father. ‘They said they wanted a closer relationship with God and Jesus, they wanted to really live what they believe, and to have a stronger sense of what it means to be Catholic.’

The older pilgrims especially—those aged 20 to 35—were focussed on spiritual values, seeing WYD08 as a sacred time. And the researchers were somewhat surprised to find that nearly half of the teenagers were ‘regular churchgoers, have a strong faith and a firm sense of Catholic identity’.

So, perhaps the Catholic scene is not so dire as the empty pews might suggest. But, if there is so much Catholic religious spirit abroad, the parish communities must feel themselves challenged to put still more effort into their ministry to the younger members of the congregation. To quote from an email from Paul Monkerud, one of our contributors in this issue, ‘Pastoral Planning through a post WYD window would throw up many challenges as well as opportunities for the Church.’

Hopefully, more on that in a later issue. For the moment we have, in the next two pages, the testimonies of two young Australians who were deeply touched by WYD08.

—**Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.**

# WYD08 AN UNFORGETTABLE EVENT

## *Two Young People Share Their Experiences of WYD08*

I WAS LUCKY enough to go to World Youth Day in Cologne back in 2005. I travelled with some seventy students and teachers that came from Catholic schools all around Sydney. My highlight there was not in Germany but in the Czech Republic, during our pilgrimage towards the German city. After visiting a Cathedral on top of a tall hill, we ventured down into the town which was quiet during its siesta. As I'm just walking normally an Italian man heading towards me notices that I'm wearing a crucifix around my neck. He stopped in his tracks, looks at me stunned, and gasps, 'Ha! Are you Catholic?' To which my mortified self answered: 'Yes'. The man, so truly amazed to have stumbled across another Catholic, opened his arms out and gave me a hug. Now, being in a foreign country and being hugged by a complete stranger did raise my suspicions but, after checking my pockets, and everything being there, the man was *legit*. He honestly felt exalted that he came across another Catholic; I think I made his day too; he was quite stoked from the whole occasion. While I thought one bloke embracing another on the basis of their Catholicism wasn't something I'd ever expect to see in Australia, the act of someone simply being filled with joy from another person's common beliefs was one that was quite humbling, to say the least.

Now, in 2008, a wave of youth has sprawled through our city, and I saw this simple act being repeated hundreds of times a day, day after day for that whole week. And it was normal!



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We all prayed together, sang together, ate together, danced together, went to catechesis, Mass and received the Eucharist together—all in the name of our beliefs. Crowds of crowds were joined together and it was beautiful to see everyone that was young getting into the spirit of things, like nothing I or the Church in Australia has ever seen in Sydney.

We as youth, as a whole, don't need to be scared of what we believe; WYD has truly opened the eyes and the hearts of the youth. We can own up to being Catholic without feeling put down when asked about it. We don't need to keep it to ourselves and it is something we are all proud of. While there's still a lot more work to do, there's a lot of dust that the WYD broom has swept away. During that week I definitely saw the fruits of what the new Pope Benedict exclaimed to masses around the world from the final Mass in Cologne: 'You will receive the power!' And that we have.

—David George

ON SUNDAY the 19th of July, I stood, bleary-eyed alongside 150,000 other pilgrims at Randwick Racecourse, at the final Mass with Pope Benedict. It had been the longest, but by far the best week of my life. I had come into World Youth Week, not expecting to get back as much as I did. Actually, I was one of those pilgrims—the ones that registered five minutes before the deadline, much to the annoyance of my group leaders. I'd spent most of the previous week mulling over whether or not I should go... I was reluctant to because it was such a different experience—one beyond my spiritual comfort zone; I believed in God, but I wasn't one to proclaim my faith to the world. Until after WYD, many of my friends thought I was agnostic; I'd never volunteered my religious beliefs in fear of being criticized.

Such were the thoughts running through my head but, obviously, I ended up joining most of my youth group, Antioch, as we trekked around the city for five days, attending catechesis, going to youth festivals, listening to talks... There were the special events; like the Opening Mass, Stations of the Cross, and the Receive the Power Concert.. And who could forget mealtimes? Picnics at Darling Harbour and Hyde Park, dining on a lunch feast of canned tuna, baked beans, bread rolls, and Tim Tams; followed by a dinner of various stews and more bread rolls... And after a long, cold windy day, that dinner is more than welcome.

As the week went on, I became more and more enthused about the entire event—the Spirit was flowing through me. It was just such an unbelievable atmosphere to witness and be a part of. I remember walking back from the CBD into Darling Harbour, and hearing a lone voice singing a beautiful, yet unfamiliar melody. The voice seemed to be headed the same direction as I was, and as we got closer towards the harbour, I could hear more voices joining in, singing along to a song that they had recognized. And someone with bongos joined in, and before you knew it, an international choir seemed to have spontaneously materialized out of nowhere.



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But what I think truly spoke to me at World Youth Day, or Week (or whatever you choose to call it) was the sleep-out at Randwick Racecourse. I remember walking around, at some indiscernible time of night, with some New Zealander pilgrims I had just met and experiencing so many different ways of praising God. There was a large mob yelling 'Benedetto!' while all around the racecourse, candles had been arranged into small shrines. Everywhere you looked, the Holy Spirit seemed to be at work. There were groups dancing, while other teens meandered about with a pen and a smile, asking you to sign their shirt/bag/leg/wobble board. And there were stacks of us wearing 'Free Hugs' signs, sharing our own happiness without asking for anything in return. There was such a joyous feel to the entire weekend, joy which was based on our singular faith in God. I think it was then that I—and hopefully many others—fully understood the true meaning of what it is to be a witness to God's love.

World Youth Day added a dimension to my faith that it didn't used to have. No longer did I just believe, I was proud that I believed. WYD taught me that my faith and the faith of so many others was so wonderful that it deserved to be proclaimed and defended, and that I should not be afraid to be part of it.

I started wearing my WYD backpack to school. Every now and again, someone will come up to me and say: 'Oh, I didn't know you were Catholic.' And every time, I answer them with my chin held high: 'Yes, I am... And I'm damn proud of it.'

—Chakri Castillo

# A NEW CATHOLIC NARRATIVE

RICHARD RYMARZ

**A** DOMINANT discourse in contemporary Catholicism has told the story of a transition in Catholic identity. Such stories have a personal focus looking at the faith journey of individuals. Their basic premise is a variation on moving away from an intense, socially constructed religious belief to a more personal idiosyncratic view which places a high value on morality but has a far weaker transcendent edge, at least in the traditional Christian sense. Another key aspect of these stories is their unease with the official teachings of the denomination. These official teachings are often seen as backward and in need of serious updating. These narratives, then, have a certain power and interest as they chronicle often profound human experiences. They speak to a generation which still tends to monopolize the popular expression of religious belief and identity due to their seniority. What I intend to explore is the place of these narratives in some type of historical context, using Jewish experiences of emancipation as an analogy, and I shall argue that a new narrative needs to emerge, one which has not been shaped by the powerful impact of transition and one which is reflective of a greater engagement with the transcendent.

## *Leaving the Ghetto: A Transition Narrative*

Many Catholics, now well into their fifties and beyond, have experienced a profound change in the nature and expression of their religious beliefs. The catalyst has unquestionably been the Second Vatican Council. There is no need to emphasise the enormity of the changes that were initiated by the Council. It was a watershed in the modern history of the Church. No other event has created such a clear delineation between eras. We can speak of pre-con-

ciliar and post-conciliar generations but also of the many Catholics who were profoundly affected by the transition from one generation to the other. The change in worldviews was a seminal and intensely personal experience. It was also extremely common and was often likened to the walls of a ghetto coming down. This is described by Edmund Campion:

Catholics in Australia created their own sub-culture...so they created for themselves a sort of ghetto...the Catholic Bushwalking Club, the Catholic Business College, the Catholic Club, the Catholic Family Planning Service ... Our generation was unhappy about this. Not only were we moving out of the ghetto, we were absorbing the liberal propositions of our society and finding them good.

There are numerous instances in contemporary Catholicism of a discourse which draws heavily on the contrast between the pre- and post-conciliar eras. To select one example, consider the pedagogical approach taken with parents whose children are to be taken through the sacramental programs in primary schools. I am unaware of any published study which has systematically examined these presentations and will rely only on personal experience. Held in the evening, information sessions give parents a general introduction to the sacrament. In the case of the sacrament of penance a common strategy is to contrast confession before the Council and now. There are at least two problems here. Parents who in 2008 have children in grades three or four can in most part be assumed to have had little or no experience of the pre-conciliar Church. In the future this lack of experience will only become more acute. It should be realized that all references to the Church before the Council may make an impression on older Catholics but for those typically sitting in the school or parish

hall in 2008 and beyond, this is an era of receding historical interest only. The tail end of the pre-conciliar period is, after all, now close to fifty years past. Secondly, the religious socialization of these parents and their children has, on the whole, been weak and this is unlikely to change in the future. Most parents will have had only a limited experience of the sacrament of penance. To contrast confession before and after the Council is to miss on both scores.

Whilst not discounting the importance of the tensions and changes that emerged after the Second Vatican Council, for indeed these issues have great resonance for older population cohorts, younger generations are not part of this conversation as their formative experiences were quite different and much more diffuse, exposed as they were to a heterogeneous religious culture. Instead of assuming much 'baggage' on the part of parents with children in Catholic schools, for example, it may be sounder to try to recognize a new narrative that arises from a community that does not have, amongst other things, a strong sacramental sense in either a cognitive or affective dimension. A less backward looking tone may be in order, one which highlights what the tradition is offering.

In developing a new narrative a number of parallels can be drawn here with Jewish reactions to the Enlightenment. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, and escalating in the post Napoleonic era, there emerged Jews who harboured strongly ambivalent feelings about their religious heritage. They rejected, in particular, a strong communal identity and were more content with a personal and private religious expression, one which sat well with the cultural milieu they now either inhabited or aspired to. The emergence of this group can be directly related to the sudden and dramatic change in the circumstances of Jews living in Western Europe. Ghettos, which had for centuries insulated Jews from wider culture, began to breakdown, initially and most importantly in the city states of what is now Ger-



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many. Although the barriers of prejudice were far from being removed, the new era allowed Jews to live, work and perhaps most significantly, engage with wider culture. This led to a reconceptualization of what it meant to be a Jew.

A seminal figure at this time was Moses Mendelssohn. He sought to develop an expression of Jewish belief and culture that was faithful to the historic sense of Judaism but which was also reconcilable with modern rationalist European philosophy, especially the Kantian conception of the Enlightenment as a time when people freed themselves from immaturity and superstition. Whilst most Jews remained contained to ghettos, Mendelssohn's thinking was largely speculative. When the walls literally came down, however, the first reactions, as anticipated, were to achieve a greater harmony between the newly emancipated Jewish world and the wider culture.

Some of the strategies that were adopted include making worship more in keeping with current cultural mores. The educated Jew was seen as being able to engage with the wider culture rather than being merely fixated on an encyclopedic knowledge of the Talmud. Some Jews became so assimilated that they were uncomfortable even acknowledging their association with a group which they saw as rooted in a primitive form of Judaism, with its overtones of suspicion and magic, one that may have sustained a people in less enlightened times but was now acutely embarrassing. To return to the ways

of the ghetto was, of course, unthinkable and needed to be fought against with vigor and persistence.

A heuristic principle for many Catholics is to distance themselves from the totems of preconciliar times which tend to grate with many who seek to be integrated into the wider community. For instance, devotions such as that to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the like often do not sit well with those who see themselves as having moved beyond this type of popular practice. I am suggesting here an echo of those assimilated Jews of the nineteenth century who were disturbed by the piety of their brethren who remained unreconstructed. Some thorny issues remained, though, for those Catholics who, to some degree, saw themselves as being newly emancipated. Chief among them was what can be described as a type of sociological dissonance. Whilst becoming involved in the wider culture they were also expected, more obliquely, to retain dedication and affiliation to Church teaching and practice. Many of them resolved this tension by situating themselves firmly in the new emancipated world, and their stories tell of their journeys to this position.

### *The Shape of a New Narrative*

The metaphorical ghetto of preconciliar Catholicism with its strong religious socialization has, however, had little impact on younger Catholics and the stories of those who were shaped by it will have less and less traction as it recedes even further into historical memory. Post-conciliar Catholics were never shaped by a ghetto-like religious formation, much less by the experience of being challenged by the collapse of this conditioned worldview. Rather, they can be described as a tough market in that they like to keep their options open and are unlikely to commit to something if they cannot see some tangible benefits arising. They are also aware of the range of choices that are available to them, including the option to se-

lect to have some low-level allegiance to a number of positions. D'Antonio and his colleagues have suggested that one way of conceptualising youth and young adults today is to regard them as shoppers or consumers. The idea of the contemporary young person as a consumer is one that is gaining increasing currency. Mason and his colleagues, for example, express this as a movement from obligation to consumption, and present data on the religious affiliation of Gen Y supports this notion.

Generations of Catholics born after the Council have not embraced in any significant way Catholic belief and practice. Amongst Protestant denominations the disassociation of young adults is even stronger. Callum Brown has chronicled the decline of what he calls Christian Britain by noting the dramatic decrease in religious affiliation of those born in recent decades. One way of looking at the disengagement of young adults is to examine the analogical power of what is being offered to them. Andrew Greeley has called the present configuration of Catholicism in the United States, beige Catholicism: 'beige Catholicism – Catholicism stripped of much of its beauty, its rainforest of metaphors denuded, in a manic and thoughtless effort to be just like everyone else'. It is for many a staid and uninspiring faith that does not engage or excite either the intellect or the imagination. Part of the reason for this is that it has lost some of the supernatural edge which gave the tradition an identity and distinctiveness against what could be found in wider culture.

This parallels the Jewish experience in Western Europe in the nineteenth century. The result of the post enlightenment emancipation of Jews in France and Germany was not a renaissance of high-minded Judaism, negotiating successfully a path between the fervent and all-embracing belief of the ghetto and the new rational thought of the salons, but a sudden haemorrhaging of the vitality of Jewish life. The new generations, those who were born outside the ghetto but did not embrace

Mendelssohn's, and his heirs, albeit brilliant but somewhat sterile conception of faith and practice, found themselves increasingly attracted to positions which extended rationalist principles to their natural conclusion. To many a completely secular standpoint seemed a more attractive option than a Judaism which borrowed heavily from its principles but could not stand on its own. In the emancipated world one did not need to remain Jewish only as a protective measure against a hostile world. A pertinent question then became: What did Judaism have to offer?

In a similar vein some contemporary Christian discourse has placed great stress on naturalistic interpretations of religious belief, seeing this as a way of engaging with contemporary culture. Just as many Reform Jews were sceptical of the claims surrounding Moses and Mt Sinai, so also a Christian reformist sentiment, encouraged by what was seen as a mandate for greater integration and coupled with much theological scholarship, took an ambivalent stand towards some of the central Christian dogmas. In effect these strategies replicated the Reform Movements' premium on updating religious practice in order to better appeal to what they saw as the spirit of the age. In practice this often results in the removal or relegation of the supernatural elements of religion both in terms of belief and expression and their replacement with ethical systems or with some type of philosophically derived values. The price to pay, however, is a blurring of the boundaries between Christians and other groups, many of which subscribe to similar values. If a group has no or very low boundaries or distinguishing features then it loses sociological validity.

I am unaware of critically reviewed studies which show that Catholics, taken as an undifferentiated whole, display different values from other groups once factors such as socio-economic background have been controlled for. On a conceptual level it is hard to see why they should. The search for a set of values that distinguishes Catholics from

others is also based on an assumption that these values define all Catholics. As Greeley has remarked though, 'every generalization about values that begins with the word Catholic is likely to be misleading, if not erroneous, precisely because the generalization will mask substantial differences in values that exist among Catholic subpopulations'.

As the nineteenth-century Jewish story cautions us, once religious groups lose their characteristic beliefs and practices the vitality of the tradition is imperilled. The Reform Movement in France and Germany by the middle of the nineteenth century was faced with the prospect of overseeing the large-scale assimilation of Jews. Outside the ghetto Jews had far more options available to them. In the light of this greater competition a correction was needed. Many of the leaders of the Reform began to rethink the interaction between the religious and the wider culture, with a greater emphasis on measures to promote Jewish identity as something which transcended the experience of living in and then coming out of the ghetto.

The Orthodox Movement as embodied by Raphael Hirsch took an even stronger stand and insisted that without a substantive link with key religious beliefs and a ready expression of these then Judaism had no future. Jews needed to provide a cogent case for religious commitment in an era when nominal affiliation was an acceptable option. Along with this they needed to provide a strong sense of community which provided formative experiences. The exchange with the wider culture also needed to be carefully monitored lest the dialogue become too one-sided.

This was a reflection of a more sombre assessment of the ability of a religious community to integrate with a post-enlightenment secular culture that is not overly inimical to religious views, but which is largely indifferent. A culture which opposes and overtly criticizes a re-

religious view is in some ways a more obvious opponent than one which is indifferent to religious groups.

### *Conclusion*

I think there is something in all of this for contemporary Catholicism. The desire to dilute a strong metaphysical reading of belief and practice and, to use Greeley's term 'to be like everyone else', does in the short-term lead to certain confidence and busy-ness. In the long run it may simply relegate religion to being just one social player among many. That many young people find this unappealing should not be a surprise. Why should a young person, especially a young Catholic, persist in any type of tangible religious commitment when they have a range of options available to them? If the faith community is indistinguishable from other groups which often make far lower demands on the individuals, why be a part of it?

The narrative which looks back to the past

and moves on the premise that we are no longer like that has little appeal to those who have no connection with that era. A narrative which may be more compelling will chronicle what is a changed religious landscape. These stories are more likely to centre on themes such as Christians establishing and maintaining a religious identity in a culture which is saturated with choice. The core message here is to recognize secularising influences and to negotiate a place which synthesizes heritage and the demands of living in contemporary culture. Bouma expresses both the challenge and potential of this new type of religious narrative when he writes about:

A cohort of religiously articulate young people who will have a much more developed sense of their spirituality than previous generations. They will be more demanding and sophisticated consumers in the religious marketplace. The religious organizations that rise to this challenge will grow; those that keep insulting their market—as is the case for much of what passes for mainstream Christianity—will not.

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# THE MODERN URBAN PARISH

## *Challenges and Opportunities*

PAUL MONKERUD

ON ANY SUNDAY morning in winter, children and their parents converge on parks close to our parish church to savour the delights of the world game. This Sunday ritual unites and delights on a grand scale. Dads are able to spend rare time with their sons, while mums delight in the advances of gender equality as they adjust their daughters' shin pads. Meanwhile, at the parish church, organisers struggle to find enough families to fill roles for the 10am children's Mass. Welcome to life in a modern Sydney parish.

Sunday sport is one of many challenges that confront urban parishes. This article identifies some of these challenges and ways by which a parish might respond. It is divided into three sections. The parish is the Church in specific time and place. It must appreciate the core elements of its ecclesial identity if it is to encounter challenges and grasp opportunities creatively. The first section identifies six principles of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) that constitute a parish as a local ecclesial community. The second section identifies some of the opportunities and challenges that the local world presents to the parish. The final section argues that the most constructive response of the parish to these challenges is to develop the Sunday Eucharist as an engaging and enlightening celebration of faith, which forms and motivates the parish as a strong, vibrant community of faith in the world.

### *The Parish as Local Church*

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* (1988), Pope John Paul II describes the parish as an 'ecclesial community' and a 'Eucharistic community'.<sup>1</sup> The shift

in the self-understanding of the Church from institution to *communitas*, that is, a human and divine community, was the first defining feature of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>2</sup> The Church as *communitas* was called to be the 'sacrament' of the mystical community which God, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, yearned to establish with every human being and between all human beings, and which Jesus identified as the reign of God.<sup>3</sup> The mission of the parish is to highlight and promote the presence of the reign of God in its local world by encouraging the growth of every parishioner in this communion, and through it, making the universal offer of God's reign apparent to the world. The Church and parish are not the ultimate end of mission but the means for promoting the reign of God as that end. The capacity of the parish to be a sacrament of communion depends on the quality of its *communitas*.

A second defining feature of the Council's ecclesiology was the shift in the Church's attitude to the world. The climate of suspicion prior to the Council<sup>4</sup> was replaced by a more positive view of the world as the 'whole human family in its total environment'.<sup>4a</sup> The Church no longer saw itself apart from or against the world but as a partner in dialogue with the world about the fundamental questions of human origin, purpose and destiny. The Church's contribution to this dialogue was to present Christ's universal offer of salvation as the ultimate solution to these questions. The focus of the modern parish, therefore, must be outward and not inward if it is to engage its local world in dialogue. In other words, it must be about mission rather than maintenance.

A third characteristic of the ecclesiology of

Vatican II was the description of the Church as a charismatic community. Charisms, whether sacraments, ministries or persons, were a diverse range of gifts of the Holy Spirit for building up the Church as the sacrament of the reign of God. The hierarchical ministry was identified as the unique charism of leadership, called to encourage, test and order all other charisms for the benefit of the Church's mission.<sup>5</sup> This charismatic interpretation of ecclesial office recognised that the hierarchical ministry was not the only manifestation of grace in the Church. Consequently, the flow of grace must be understood not as one-directional, from the hierarchy as if a monologue, but two directional, from the hierarchy to the people, and from the people to the hierarchy, as in a dialogue or conversation. As a charismatic community, therefore, the parish is called to assist its members to identify, develop and offer their gifts in service of the Church in a process of open and ongoing conversation.

The documents of Vatican II acknowledged for the first time that grace was active not only within the Church but also in other Christian and religious traditions, and in people of goodwill.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the mission of the Church to the world also needed to be a dialogue, in which the Church not only enlightened the world but was also enlightened by the world.<sup>7</sup> The task of the Church was to adapt the universal and timeless principles of the gospel to the unique circumstances and diverse methods of interpretation of different peoples and cultures.<sup>8</sup> By dialoguing with, rather than seeking to dominate, peoples and cultures, the Council chose to adopt a new approach to mission.<sup>9</sup> The task of the parish is to engage local peoples and cultures through its willingness to converse with other Christian traditions, other faith traditions and people of goodwill within the local civic community.

A fourth feature of the ecclesiology of Vatican II was to abandon the image of the Church as a 'perfect society.' Rather, the Council acknowledged the holiness and sinfulness of the Church as a pilgrim people who shared the ex-



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istential restlessness and struggle between good and evil with all humankind. The mission of the Church was to reveal to the world that life with Christ through faith was the only definitive response to this restlessness.<sup>10</sup> The parish should assist its members to acknowledge the tension between their call to holiness and their experiences of limitation and sinfulness, to live this tension with hope and courage in the world, and hence, to witness to the presence and power of Christ to the world.

The description of the Church as a hierarchically structured community was a fifth defining feature of the ecclesiology of Vatican II.<sup>11</sup> Bishops formed an apostolic 'college' with the pope in the same way as, and as the ordained successors of, the apostles and Peter.<sup>12</sup> Their threefold apostolic ministry of word, sanctification and leadership was shared by priests and deacons to lesser degrees.<sup>13</sup> The hierarchical ministry was to be exercised as a service and not power, as a model for all ministry in the Church. Furthermore, the principle of collegiality was to operate at every level of Church governance.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, collegiality should characterise the *presbyterium* of each diocese, through collaboration and consultation between the bishop and clergy, and between the diocese and its parishes. Collaboration and consultation should also define the relationship between the pastor and his parishioners, particularly in decision-making processes.

A sixth feature of the ecclesiology of Vatican II was its description of the Eucharist as the 'source and the culmination of all christian life',<sup>15</sup> and the most complete expression of 'the

sort of entity the Church really is.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, any study of the challenges and opportunities that confront a typical Australian urban parish should begin with, and focus on, the Sunday Eucharist.

### *The 'World' of the Australian Urban Parish*

Results of the National Church Life Survey in 2001 indicated that Catholics represented about half the number of Christians who worship every week in Australia.<sup>17</sup> However, while regular church attendance across all denominations fell by about 7% between 1996 and 2001, attendance in Catholic parishes fell by 13%.<sup>18</sup> Most of those who stopped attending did not appear to transfer to other denominations.<sup>19</sup> Comparisons between the 1996 and 2001 censuses suggest that of those who identified themselves as Catholics, the number who claimed to worship regularly fell from 18% in 1996 to 15% in 2001.<sup>20</sup> Of those Catholics who attended Mass weekly in 2001, 76% were aged 40 or older. Young people between 15 and 29 years of age accounted for only 12% of regular worshippers (or less than 2% of all Australian Catholics in this age range).<sup>21</sup>

The results indicate that while the local Catholic parish remains the most popular expression, and hence, the most influential forum of worship in Australian Christianity, it faces some major challenges. The remainder of this article identifies some of these challenges, both in the local world of the parish, and within its own worship and life. It also proposes some ways by which the parish might respond to these challenges.

Before identifying some of the challenges that the modern world presents to the parish, it is important to recognise several positive features of the world that can support the parish in its mission. The freedom that Australians enjoy to practice their faith and to choose a faith-based education for their children enables the parish to participate in the affairs of the local community without fear of persecution, and with significant political influence. While most Austral-

ians avoid traditional religions, social commentators recognise a widespread spiritual hunger in the population, especially among young people, for meaning and belonging.<sup>22</sup> The success of some Pentecostal churches suggests that a significant number of Australians are open to the message of Christ, provided it is presented in ways that are relevant to their lives. The Judeo-Christian ethic that permeates legislature and government means that Australian society in general is still reasonably sympathetic to the core message of the gospel. The support that Catholic education receives from government enables the Church to retain a high profile in the business of the nation at all levels. The decline in Christian sectarianism makes ecumenical dialogue possible in ways that were unimaginable in the past. This not only facilitates the dialogue between the parish and its world but also enables the broader Christian family to present a more united face to the world.

The main challenges that confront the parish stem from the three related worldviews of materialism, individualism and consumerism.<sup>23</sup> In its broadest sense, materialism is synonymous with atheism. It rejects all notions of spiritual reality. A narrower interpretation would describe it as 'an interest in sensuous pleasures and bodily comforts.'<sup>24</sup> This kind of materialism places little value on sacrifice, charity or even justice, where the needs of another might conflict with the wants of the self. Individualism promotes the rights of the individual over those of the community. Consumerism measures happiness and self-worth in terms of material possessions and personal wealth.

The impingement of these worldviews on Catholic life is evident, for example, where Catholics view the parish only as a supplier of their needs, particularly in relation to the sacraments and Catholic schooling; where they are prepared to make formal and solemn commitments in relation to faith that they have no intention of honouring; or where they refuse to see that every member of the Church is responsible for building up the parish as a vital community of faith, by participating in its worship

and life and supporting its financial and capital aspirations. The tendency for Catholics to ‘shop around’ for a parish, simply for the convenience of experiencing a particular kind of priest, style of liturgy, form of church architecture or method of sacramental preparation, can be another manifestation of an individualistic or consumerist mentality. The combination of a consumerist view of faith and the mobility of modern society makes the task of building stable, local faith communities difficult.

The sheer busyness of people is another challenge confronting the parish. For many Australians, Sunday is their only full day away from work, when they must find time for their spouse and children, their extended family, home maintenance, rest and perhaps even to prepare work for Monday. In this context, Mass becomes a ‘good’ that must compete for time with many other ‘goods’, even for practising Catholics. Unless Sunday Mass is perceived to add value to individual and family life, it will be set aside in favour of other choices.

The pluralism of modern society licenses Catholics, especially young people, to satisfy their spiritual needs in forums other than the parish. Research suggests that for Generation Y young adults, their peer group is the primary influence in their decision making, and the main focus for their need to belong.<sup>25</sup> Pluralism diminishes the profile of the Church in the world, because the Church is just one voice among many. It legitimises a kind of secular humanism, which appropriates the title ‘Christian’ to arbitrary sets of values that require neither faith in Christ nor active membership of the Church. To the uninformed, this can undermine the claim of the parish to be a legitimate representative of the person and message of Christ in the marketplace.

There are other issues that alienate individuals from the Church. Divorce and remarriage exclude many Catholics from full membership of the parish community. Teachings on contraception and homosexuality attract widespread criticism that the Church is out of touch, against pleasure, and insensitive to major tragedies like the AIDS epidemic. Its high profile in world

affairs and extensive assets cause some to view the Church as just another rich and powerful multi-national. Sexual abuse by clergy has precipitated a decline in respect for Church authority. Finally, the increasing numbers of ‘chronically unchurched’ Catholics mean that there are generations who are completely alienated from parish worship and life.

### *The Australian Urban Parish as a Faith Community*

The most constructive response that a parish can offer to these challenges is to develop the Sunday Eucharist as an engaging, formative and consistent celebration that builds up the parish as a mature community of faith, with confidence to dialogue intelligently, honestly and compassionately with its local world. The following section identifies key elements of the Sunday Eucharist, and how it, and aspects of parish life that flow from it and support it, can enhance the development of the parish as a faith community.

#### **1. Worship**

The configuration of the gathering space, the skill and disposition of the celebrant as presider and preacher, and the standard of liturgical ministries all contribute to the quality of worship in the Sunday Eucharist. At the outset, a parish liturgy committee that is well informed and meets regularly to coordinate the Sunday Masses and other liturgies is essential if consistent, high quality celebrations are to be maintained.

The liturgical ministries of preaching and music are particularly important. The documents of Vatican II identified preaching as part of the *primum officium* of priests—their first office.<sup>26</sup> The task of the preacher is to assist the congregation to relate the Word of God in scripture and doctrine to the circumstances of their lives. This is a demanding task, particularly when the pastor must address many of the same people each week. It requires up-to-date knowledge of scripture, doctrine, theology and cultural issues, public speaking skills, deep faith

and a close identity with parishioners. The homily may be the only opportunity for faith formation for many parishioners. The task is even more challenging where parishioners are exposed daily to highly skilled communicators and sophisticated methods of communication, especially through the media. Yet despite the importance and demanding nature of preaching, there is little systemic expectation or provision for clergy to engage in regular professional development and assessment. In my view, this needs to be addressed.

Providing 'live' liturgical music of sufficient quality and variety at all Sunday Masses every week is a major challenge. There are far fewer parishioners suitably skilled and willing to serve as musicians and singers than parishioners who can minister in other ways. Yet good music and singing are crucial for engaging and uplifting worship. Conversely, substandard music and singing destroy liturgy. The challenge to find suitable musicians can discourage the search. Yet, accepting that a few musicians will provide most of the music limits the possible styles and vibrancy of the liturgies that a parish can offer. Because it is ministry, 'live' music is preferable to recorded music. However, the latter is always a better option than any substandard alternative. Hymns need to be readily accessible and invite congregational participation. The music ministry should have a representative on the liturgy committee to ensure that music always serves the liturgy, but musicians also must have some say in the music they play so they can express their ministry joyfully.

The parish is more inclusive if it encourages a variety of liturgical styles across its Sunday Masses. Liturgies designed particularly for children, families, young adults or more traditional tastes encourage a broad-based music ministry and provide more scope for individuals to find a style of celebration that suits their spirituality. Encouraging children and young adults to participate in the music ministry, whether at special focus liturgies or as part of the general roster, develops the musical culture of the parish. Coordination between the parish

and local Catholic schools is a key component of this strategy. In some cases, it may be possible for local parishes to share music ministers. Because of the significance of music to the liturgy, it may be time for more parishes or groups of parishes to employ paid music coordinators.

## 2. Sense of Belonging

While sound preaching and good music are essential for life-giving liturgy, there is one element of Catholic spirituality that can hinder the formation of the parish as a community. In *Enriching Church Life*,<sup>27</sup> John Bellamy and his co-authors reflect that:

In Australia, Protestants are more likely than Catholics to have a strong sense of belonging to their local church. But for Catholics their sense of loyalty to their denomination is much higher than for Protestants.<sup>28</sup>

The sense of belonging to the universal Church is one of the strengths of Catholicism. Catholics feel that they are part of a faith family and religious tradition that extends beyond their immediate circumstances, across the globe and back in time. They can enjoy a deep spiritual connection with the pope, bishops, clergy and lay people throughout the world, though they may not share the same language or culture. They can maintain spiritual relationships with deceased loved ones and past heroes of the Church by virtue of the community of saints. The Eucharistic rites enhance this connection with the universal Church.

However, if the celebration of the Eucharist does not encourage a commensurate appreciation of the local Church, it can reinforce a privatised form of faith, whereby individuals pray for other members of the congregation without feeling obliged to engage them in ordinary human ways. They can fail to appreciate their call to build up their parish as the universal Church in particular time and place: as a faith community rather than a spiritual service centre. The tendency to privatised faith is exacerbated by interpretations of the Eucharist that focus exclusively on the presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine, while ignor-

ing the Body of Christ in the gathered assembly.<sup>29</sup> It can be reinforced where weekday Mass is viewed solely as an opportunity for private prayer. If a parish is to be an authentic Eucharistic community, parishioners must be formed in a sound theology of the Eucharist.

The sacred character and formal structure of the liturgy provide few opportunities for worshippers to connect personally. Facing the backs of other worshippers is not conducive to personal exchanges. Worshippers are invited to speak only in response to the celebrant. Week after week, they listen to one man's interpretation of the scriptures without a chance to ask questions, seek clarifications or offer suggestions. When invited to offer a sign of peace to others, they may not even have the opportunity to introduce themselves. Inviting parishioners, from time to time, to introduce themselves and converse together, perhaps as part of the greeting, the homily or sign of peace helps to establish real rather than anonymous connections between worshippers. Simple blessing rites that mark arrivals and departures of parishioners, and significant milestones like wedding or death anniversaries also encourage belonging and connectedness within the congregation. People want to make connections in church, but they need permission. When such opportunities are offered in our parish, the people embrace them enthusiastically, the volume of singing and responding rises and more people linger after Mass.

Some may see these initiatives as diminishing reverence for the liturgy and the church as a sacred space. Such views raise questions about whether the primary purpose of the modern parish church is for building up the community of faith or for private prayer. Churches without a Eucharistic chapel must fulfil both purposes at different times. It is unrealistic to expect modern worshippers, particularly young people, to refrain from respectful conversation in the church, particularly after Mass. Indeed, such conversations may well indicate that worship has achieved its purpose.

Initiatives that encourage parishioners to connect before and after Mass can complement

the lack of opportunities for connection during the liturgy. Ministers of welcome, who greet parishioners and visitors with a smile facilitate connection between worshippers and augment the welcoming spirit of the liturgy. In our parish, the ministers of communion assist the ministers of welcome with a view to making the exchange at communion more personal. An informative parish bulletin, accessible hymns and information about special features of the liturgy prior to Mass add to the spirit of hospitality. Morning tea and other social gatherings after Mass not only enhance the sense of belonging but challenge parishioners to put into action after Mass, what they are called to be, and receive, during Mass—the Body of Christ.<sup>30</sup> They allow new members and visitors to connect with established parishioners. When linked to special moments like the celebrations of a sacrament within Mass, they affirm the significance to the parish community of the sacrament and those who have received it. The experience in our parish is that after-Mass opportunities only work if they are offered close to the church, if a special team is assigned to coordinate them and if particular parishioners, such as ministers of welcome, are designated to reach out to new parishioners, visitors and others who may otherwise find connecting difficult.

The sense of belonging at the Sunday Eucharist can be enhanced by initiatives in the parish that draw people together who might not meet otherwise. For individuals who may be unfamiliar with, or alienated from, the Eucharist, such as some engaged and recently married couples, parents of newly baptised children or non-Catholic family members, social gatherings can be a less confronting way of initiating themselves into the faith community. In this way, the social agenda of the parish becomes an important strategy for parish outreach.

### 3. Parish Ministry

The National Church Life Survey in 2001 found that only 'about 38% of Catholics said that they had a role in their church compared with 63% of Anglicans and Protestants.'<sup>31</sup> Encourag-

ing parishioners to serve in a well organised, well resourced network of ministries deepens the sense of community and mission in a parish. Such networks animate the parish as a charismatic community. Ministry should be interpreted personally and relationally rather than functionally; as a means of expressing personal and communal faith rather than merely fulfilling tasks. Initial and ongoing formation should be an essential requirement for ministry. In this way, ministry becomes a major vehicle of faith formation in the parish. Because most parishes lack the means to run ministerial programs, the diocese can assist by developing such programs, in consultation with parishes and designed specifically for their needs. These programs could also be offered as deanery initiatives, to make them more accessible to parishioners and to affirm the deanery as a forum of collaboration between parishes in the diocese.

The role descriptions of all parish ministries should be readily available for the information of parishioners and as an invitation for others to join. Ministers should be appointed for fixed terms with the option to renew. The parish needs to resource its ministries appropriately, develop a workable rostering system and a structure of ministry coordination that provides ministers with up-to-date information and pastoral care.

#### 4. Faith Formation

The National Church Life Survey in 2001 noted that ‘... only one in 10 Catholic attenders are regularly involved in study, discussion and prayer groups compared to 31% of Uniting Church attenders, 39% of Anglicans and over 50% of attenders in some denominations.’<sup>32</sup>

Evidence suggests that while most Catholics receive a comprehensive religious education in a Catholic school, they undertake little faith formation after they finish school. Consequently, even highly educated individuals can possess only a rudimentary knowledge of their faith.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, many never grasp its relevance and so cease to practise it. Some view faith as a kind of tribal mark that entitles them

to certain benefits from the Church. Others practise their faith simply as a moral duty, but fail to relate it to the complex issues and circumstances of their lives. As a result, they lack confidence to witness to their faith in the marketplace.<sup>34</sup> In his work on faith development, James W. Fowler found that many practising Christians manifest low levels of faith development that support only a privatised faith and prevent them from embracing a more mature, communal faith.<sup>35</sup> Raising the ‘faith literacy’ of parishioners, therefore, is another key strategy in developing the parish as a faith community, focused on mission.

The most important aspects of faith formation in a parish are preaching, liturgy, religious education in Catholic schools, catechetics in state schools and sacramental preparation. Apart from the liturgy, support of the catechists and members of the sacramental teams should be a primary concern for the parish. No other aspects of its mission offer so much potential for evangelisation and conversion. Scripture study groups, Advent and Lenten programs and diocesan based initiatives are other ways by which parishioners can develop their faith.

#### 5. Leadership

Another strength of Catholicism has been the close pastoral relationships that parishioners have long enjoyed with their pastors. Celibacy and living close to the parish church have enabled the pastor to be highly visible and accessible to his people. This relationship is now threatened by the declining number and increasing average age of priests.<sup>36</sup> One priest cannot be as visible or accessible as two or three. The extra load reduces his capacity to establish strong pastoral relationships. Clergy from overseas offer a broad range of priestly backgrounds and styles that can enrich the *presbyterium* and improve the pastoral care of ethnic groups in parishes. At the same time, limitations in English and a lack of understanding of Australian secular and ecclesial culture can hinder their capacity to communicate and relate, and hence, to build the parish as a com-

munity.

While the numbers of active clergy decrease constantly, few parishes close. Dioceses face the dilemma for the foreseeable future of too many parish demands being placed on too few clergy. Unless there are fundamental changes to the number and mode of operation of parishes, pastors will be unable to satisfy the demand for services or develop pastoral relationships that are so necessary for establishing parishes as ecclesial communities.

The apparent reticence among Church leaders to establish mandatory programs of ongoing personal and professional formation and appraisal for diocesan clergy is further cause for concern, given the increasing demands and complexities of priestly ministry and life. Clergy conferences, which provide an important forum for fellowship, are more likely to offer information than formation. A lack of regular formation and appraisal reduces the capacity of a pastor to exercise pastoral leadership effectively and devalues his professional standing and authority, particularly when he works alongside professionals for whom regular in-service and assessment is mandatory.

The National Church Life Survey in 2001 found that leaders who inspire their congregations to share a common vision are more effective than either directive or non-directive leaders in developing local ecclesial communities.<sup>37</sup> A clear, shared pastoral vision is one of the most powerful catalysts for community growth.<sup>38</sup> The Survey also revealed that without a vision, most Christian communities tend to remain inward-focused on maintenance, rather than outward-focused towards mission.<sup>39</sup> A pastoral vision and associated pastoral plan encourage parishioners to offer their gifts for service to the parish in ways that are most constructive for themselves and their community.

Magisterial documents since the Second Vatican Council have recognised the value of pastoral planning.<sup>40</sup> When establishing a pastoral plan, the parish needs to reinterpret the diocesan pastoral plan according to its local circumstances and priorities. In this way, the parish planning

process can form parishioners in the close relationship that the parish is called to maintain with the diocese and the bishop. Their sense of belonging to the diocese is enhanced when the pastor, who represents the bishop in the parish, is committed to constructive relationships with the bishop and clergy of the diocese. The relationship between the diocese and parishes, and between the bishop and pastors, must be grounded in genuine collaboration and consultation, so that parishes are not treated merely as branches of the diocese or the diocese regarded as superfluous by parishes. As far as possible, consultation should cast parishes and pastors as participants in the decision-making processes that affect them rather than merely the recipients of the outcomes of those decisions.

The experience of formulating the inaugural pastoral plan in our parish revealed that the process of producing a vision and plan is as important as the final result. In a spirit of building community, every effort should be made to ensure that parishioners understand not only how to participate in the planning process but also its purpose. This is not a simple task. The concept of pastoral planning is a new feature of Catholic life. The time and energy required for parishioners and pastors to understand its purpose and method should not be underestimated. When completed, the parish vision and plan should be ratified by the community, displayed prominently, referred to constantly and reviewed regularly.

In the spirit of collegiality, the pastor should promote the establishment of a leadership group, such as a Parish Pastoral Council, to assist him oversee the implementation and revision of the parish pastoral plan. The selection of this group should also be broadly consultative. Its constitution needs to ensure that its primary task is not to run the parish as an executive but to keep the parish vision before the community and help it achieve the objectives of the plan. The pastor and leadership group should seek to establish a community whereby they become a 'sacrament' of what the whole parish is called to be.

## 6. Outreach

The National Church Life Survey in 2001 indicated that Australian Catholics exhibit less motivation to mission than other Christian denominations.<sup>41</sup> The need for a renewed sense of mission was recognised by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), in which he called the Church to a ‘new evangelisation’, focusing particularly on Catholics who do not participate actively in the worship and life of the Church.<sup>42</sup>

The parish primary school is the most fertile setting in the parish for this new evangelisation.<sup>43</sup> Through school liturgies, parish liturgies with a school focus, sacramental programs and a positive, regular presence of the pastor in school life, the parish can present an inviting profile to many who are sympathetic to its mission but separated from its worship. Programs that reach out to alienated or lapsed Catholics are another expression of the new evangelisation. Parish prior-to-school care centres offer new possibilities for the new evangelisation while responding to a growing need in the community.

The outreach of the parish to non-Catholics has two foci. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides a forum for those who may be interested in joining the faith community. The identification of the parish with other Christian churches, other religious congregations, local civic communities and those whom it serves

through its works of practical charity are all key aspects of its mission to the world.

The effectiveness of parish outreach depends greatly on the quality of its communication with its world. A friendly, efficient and well resourced parish office, informative parish bulletin, visible signposting and particularly in the modern context, an informative, inviting website, all contribute to the effectiveness of the parish’s mission.

## Conclusion

The challenges that confront the modern urban parish are substantial. Most are beyond its power to control. The most authentic and constructive response that it can make to these challenges is to develop as a strong community of faith, defined by quality celebrations of the Sunday Eucharist. Such celebrations require a great deal of investment by the pastor and parishioners. They demand thorough planning. They call for the pastor to be present to his people. This will not be possible if he is overwhelmed by other demands.

If parishes are to develop the kind of Sunday Eucharistic celebrations that build vibrant, missionary communities, confident in, and motivated for, the new evangelisation, then the traditional structure of parishes and their modes of operating must change significantly. It is a daunting prospect.

## NOTES

1. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (30.12.1988) (hereafter referred to as *CL*), ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html)) art. 26.

2. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (21.11.1964) (hereafter referred to as *LG*), 8.

3. *LG* 1.

4. The depiction of the world in the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566) was typical. It described the Church as ‘... that society of all the faithful who still dwell on earth, [which] is called militant, because it wages eternal war with those most implacable enemies, the world, the flesh and

the devil.’ (emphasis added). *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. by T.A. Buckley (London: 1852), q. v., quoted in Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image through Twenty Centuries*, Vol. 1 (London: SPCK, 1977), 198.

4a. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* (07.12.1965) (hereafter referred to as *GS*), 2.

5. *LG* 7, 12; Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18.11.1965), 3.

6. *LG* 8, 14, 15, 16.

7. *GS* 44.

8. *GS* 4, 44, 53.

9. *GS* 59.

10. *LG* 6, 48.

11. LG 20.
12. LG 20, 22.
13. LG 28.
14. LG 24; The increased implementation of synods and bishops' conferences after the Council was one manifestation of collegiality.
15. LG 11.
16. Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (04.12.1963) (hereafter referred to as SC), 2.
17. John Bellamy and Keith Castle, 2001 *Church Attendance Estimates*, NCLS Occasional Paper 3, <http://www.ncls.org>, (Sydney South: NCLS Research, February 2004), 5.
18. Bellamy and Castle, 7.
19. Sam Sterland, Ruth Powell and Keith Castle, *Inflow and Outflow Between Denominations*, NCLS Occasional Paper 8, <http://www.ncls.org>, (Sydney South: NCLS Research, March 2006), 18.
20. Bellamy and Castle, 10.
21. 'Age profile of church attenders', [www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=136](http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=136). Accessed 22 May, 2008.
22. Hugh Mackay, *Advance Australia ... Where* (Sydney: Hatchette, 2007), 14, 282.
23. Secularism is not included here because its meaning is ambivalent. It has been defined as 'a movement in which the attention and energies are directed towards the world and away from any other world or form of existence.' Secularism would reject religious sentiments that distract or divert human endeavour away from present realities. On the other hand, it would support religious perspectives that encourage individuals to respect and respond creatively to the real circumstances of people in the world. Michael Downey, ed. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (The Liturgical Press: Minnesota, 1993), s.v. 'Secularism', by Michael Dodd.
24. Michael Downey, ed. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (The Liturgical Press: Minnesota, 1993), s.v. 'Materialism', by Michael Dodd.
25. Mark McCrindle, 'Understanding Generation Y', <http://www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/Colleagues/files/links/UnderstandingGenY.pdf>. Accessed 7 November, 2007.
26. Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (07.12.1965), 4.
27. John Bellamy, Bryan Cussen, Sam Sterland, Keith Castle, Ruth Powell and Peter Kaldor, *Enriching Church Life* (Sydney South: National Church Life Survey, 2006).
28. *Ibid*, 16.
29. SC 7.
30. 'You, however, are the Body of Christ and His members. If, therefore, you are the Body of Christ and His members, your mystery is presented at the table of the Lord, you receive your mystery. To that which you are, you answer: 'Amen'; and by answering, you subscribe to it. For you hear: 'The Body of Christ!' and you answer: 'Amen!' Be a member of Christ's Body, so that your 'Amen' may be the truth.' St Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 272", <http://heritage.villanova.edu/vu/mission/Eucharist/augustine.htm>. Accessed. 29 May, 2008.
31. National Church Life Survey, 'A Summary of Attender Level of Involvement', [http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=33#Inv\\_Summary](http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=33#Inv_Summary). Accessed 22 May, 2008.
32. *Ibid*.
33. The NCLS 2001 found, for example, in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, 'there are some areas of difference between the denominations with Catholics indicating the lowest acceptance of a Trinitarian understanding of God at 72%, ranging through the Uniting Church attenders at 84%, Anglicans at 88%, and Pentecostal attenders at the highest level 98%.' 65% of Catholic attenders gave assent to the doctrine of the virginity of Mary, compared with 62%, 67%, 90% and 95% respectively of Uniting, Anglican, Baptist and Pentecostal Church attenders. National Church Life Survey, 'Attender Beliefs and Practices', [www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=31](http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=31). Accessed 22 May, 2008.
34. C.f. 1 Pt 3:15.
35. James W. Fowler, 'Religious congregations: varieties of presence in stages of faith', in Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis, *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1992), 370-383.
36. The NCLS 1996 indicates that only 4% of Catholic clergy were under 40. 52% were aged 50-59; and 44% were 60 or more. National Church Life Survey, 'A Demographic profile of church leaders', [www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2338](http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2338). Site accessed 22 May 2008.
37. Bellamy, Cussen, Sterland, Castle, Powell and Kaldor, 20.
38. *Ibid*, 19.
39. *Ibid*, 18.
40. CL 57; Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (31.01.1994), 65; John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Inuente* (06.01.2001) (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2001), 29; John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania* (22.11.2001) (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2001),

11, 22, 48.

41. '...Anglican and Protestant attenders are more likely to emphasise roles associated with drawing people closer to God while Catholics tend to place greater emphasis on roles associated with school education and charity for the poor. ... Pentecostals, who selected converting non-believers to the faith as the most important role for the churches, are much more likely to value reaching the unchurched than Catholics, who regard converting non-believers

as a low priority.' [www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2224](http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=2224).

42. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (07.12.1990) (Boston: Daughters of St Paul, 1990), 33.

43. The connection of the parish, mainly through its pastor, with the local Catholic high schools, is another key arm of the new evangelisation. However, this connection will likely be less potent than with the primary school because the presence of the pastor is less frequent and less visible.

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# DIMINISHING MASS ATTENDANCE

## *A Pressing Ecclesial Concern*

DANIEL ANG

EACH WEEKEND, hundreds of thousands of Catholics gather in parishes and communities around Australia to celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy in which Jesus Christ is confessed and encountered as risen and dwelling among us. By participating in this event, believers live out their faith in relationship with one another and are invited to reflect on the implications of God's gift of self for their daily lives and the needs of the world. This sacramental experience promotes the transformation of a community of disciples, nourishing an ongoing commitment to understand God's will, as well as a desire to receive and follow his Word.

The centrality and importance of this sacramental encounter renders the contemporary state of religious practice in the Australian Church an alarming statistic. For each weekend, while over 700,000 Catholics gather for thanksgiving, memorial and presence, more than 4 million Catholics opt to stay at home or, at the very least, choose to be elsewhere (ACBC Pastoral Projects Office 2008). If we hold the Eucharist to be fundamental to our Catholic faith, the cornerstone of the Church's identity and mission, then we must address the stark reality that almost four out of five Australian Catholics do not participate in the primary sacramental event of the Church to which they profess to be members.

As Neil Brown has commented, the absence of an estranged majority from sacramental worship is not without consequence for it impairs the ability of the Church to be that community of faith and praxis that God calls it to be:

... it is only through participation at Sunday mass that the local Church community as a whole exists and establishes its identity as a community of faith, hope and love. To miss Sunday mass without sufficient reason is then to diminish the life of the community, while participation creates it as the Body of Christ. If the obligation is presented

then as simply passive attendance to satisfy an obligation or as a private devotional practice, its full moral force is obscured. (*Brown 2000, 35*).

Thus, there lies an enduring challenge for pastoral workers, and parishes as a whole, to not only affirm participation as a matter of importance but to enable believers to experience and understand their participation as deeply significant, rather than as the mere perfunctory execution of an obligation. As will be suggested, the pressing challenge of diminishing participation awakens us to the need for better pastoral practice in our appeal to the marginalised, alienated and disengaged.

### *Reasons for Non-Attendance*

The reasons for low levels of attendance at Mass are various and many of them are familiar: the perceived irrelevance of the Church to contemporary life, the felt misuse of power and authority in the Church, problems with the parish priest, and the feeling that being a committed Catholic no longer requires attending Mass as frequently, or even at all. Family or household-related issues also figure in this dearth of attendance, including overriding priorities on weekends and the reluctance of other family members to attend weekly liturgy (Dixon et al. 2007, vi).

Apart from these explicit reasons for nonattendance, the challenge of postmodernity has also greatly altered the situation of faith today and further complicated the religious, sociological and psychological barriers that mark our time. A feature of this postmodern milieu is the reactionary abandonment of grand narratives. No common matrix or overarching story is seen to encompass all human experience or is accepted as the measure of life's meaning or meaninglessness. In this cultural mindset, no single truth separates virtue from vice, distinguishes possibility

from diminishment, and no way of life can claim to offer ultimate freedom over enslavement or isolation. The loss of religious imagination also figures with 'presence' confined to the physical or psychological. In this demise, much of the disruptive and restorative power of the symbol has been lost. Openness to the company of the transcendent has been diminished; fragmentation, rationalism and acquisitiveness dominate instead. Ultimately, these phenomena have underpinned an aggressive individualism which is mistrustful of history and tradition, dismissive of abiding norms, and resistant to any demand that comes from outside the privatised self. Of course, contemporary Catholics—ambivalent or otherwise—are not immune from these surrounding shifts in perception and perspective. The postmodern age bears upon their openness to spiritual experience and informs their ongoing reflection on the authority of such an experience in their lives.

It is also worth considering whether the popular Catholic imagination has, in fact, lost its sense of the eschatological in faith and practice, its sensitivity to the future consummation which the sacraments anticipate. One suspects that the sacraments are more commonly thought of in episodic, instantaneous terms rather than in terms of lifelong development and growth, let alone with a view to an ultimate eschatological horizon. Compare this to the experience of the early Christian communities in their memorial of Jesus' Last Supper. The sacred meal was understood not only as creating the identity of the group over time but as the locus of belief in the Resurrection. In communities such as that at Corinth, believers gathered to share the Eucharistic meal 'until he comes', the breaking of the bread and sharing of the wine allowing the community to see the new covenant afresh and to live out of this hope as a sanctified people (1 Cor. 17-34). Additionally, it was precisely at the Eucharistic table that the community's sense of social equality and justice was tested. It was here that believers of disparate walks of life gathered in common remembrance of the One in whom they had encountered God. It is doubtful whether many



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confessed Catholics conceive of, or encounter, the Eucharistic liturgy with such bold openness to a new creation, a new form of sociality, and a future consummation. The sacraments have lost their disruptive and evocative potential for many contemporary believers, becoming instead *one* experience among many, rather than the source and summit of the life of faith most deeply lived.

Others have suggested that the Second Vatican Council, in its one-sided acclaim of the human condition, its failure to present unbelief as a serious obstacle to salvation, and its failure to acknowledge the reality of evil, contributed something to this general laxity in Catholic practice (Lamont 2007, 87-99). Is it possible that the brief mention of sin in the documents of the Council, an evasion which continued under the bishops that sanctioned it, the less than explicit relation between belief, practice, and salvation, and the comforting prospect of universal salvation have led to the marginalisation of the distinctive features of Catholic faith, including participation in weekly Mass? Has the Catholic experience of faith been reduced to a sentimental and vague theism with little distinctive moral content or impetus to change through action? It is certainly a prospect worth our consideration. One wonders, however, whether a more intense focus on human sinfulness would yield greater rates of participation in the sacramental life of the Church, particularly among many Catholics who already feel marginal, alienated, and who do not, as it is, find the invitation of the Church to be credible, attractive, or deeply connected to life.

### *The Search for a Response*

While the reasons for nonparticipation are becoming more apparent with the aid of research, the ecclesial responses we might offer to this situation are less clear. Certainly, ‘megaphone diplomacy’ from the pulpit would seem a doubtful approach. It would be fair to say that many Catholics who choose not to participate in the sacramental life of the Church would be only too aware of their ecclesial obligation to do so. The invitation to attend Mass weekly is well-known and made often. In actual fact, it may well be the case that the Church’s explicit exhortation to its members to observe this practice is a very ground on which many justify their nonparticipation. After all, individuals who perceive the Church to lack credibility, relevance and moral authority are likely to ignore or dismiss the urgings of that same Church to participate in its life, above all by command on high.

Adding to this reluctance is the reality that many Catholics continue to locate themselves as ‘outsiders’ looking in on the Church rather than as forming the Church from within by their faith and spirituality. It is also apparent by the often-heard criticism of the ‘institutional Church’ that many have collapsed the reality of Church negatively to the realm of office-holders alone. As a result, calls to attend Mass and to participate in community can seem unreal and inauthentic. Such expressions of alienation suggest a larger ecclesial task for communities of faith—a repositioning of the Church in the minds and hearts of the disappointed and disillusioned. However, this shift in perception cannot be achieved simply by intellectual appeal but must involve the ability of communities to witness to the deepest reality of the Church as a people ultimately concerned with justice and prayer, with activity and contemplation, with living in faith, hope and love. It is apparent that we need recognise, articulate and witness to motivations for fuller participation in the sacramental life of the Church that go far beyond ecclesial obligation or authoritative command, for without a vocabulary of spirituality and concrete example the alienation and nonidentification with the ecclesial dimensions

of faith will only continue to increase.

The current decline in Mass attendance affirms as well that religious practice outside the context of living relationship soon becomes emptied of its meaning, its intentional character, and loses its very purpose. Without encouraging reflection on the life of faith outside the context of liturgy, involvement can remain only at the level of ‘attendance’ but never begin to take on the quality of ‘participation’. The sacramental life, therefore, calls for a life of faith which develops deep roots, a genuine spirituality, for the essence of Christian life is not a particular method or practice but a living encounter with a person and a community of believers. If decline is not to remain the overriding story of the Church then ongoing catechesis will be essential in nurturing these relationships. It must provide opportunities for Catholics to enter into an apprenticeship in the spiritual life, an apprenticeship by which believers learn, over time and by their attentiveness, to ‘see’, ‘taste’ and respond to the goodness of God. More than ever, our communities need to centre themselves on these projects of catechesis and spiritual formation, becoming what John Paul II described as ‘genuine schools of prayer’ (*Novo Millennio Inuente* 34). This promotes a variety of Catholic spiritualities and multiple opportunities for believers to participate in, and contribute to, the spiritual momentum of their faith communities and the wider contexts in which they live.

Clearly, a declining level of participation challenges the Church to make adaptations in its approach to the re-evangelisation of its members. As David Tacey suggests, we must move from a preaching stance to one which embraces the demands and promise of listening to the alienated, lapsed, and even the seemingly impassive. In a time of darkness, religion must shift its emphases,

[T]o survive these new conditions, religion must become prophetic and use its prophetic resources and imagination. It must play down its authority, its desire to impose, preach, or import and instead it must listen to people’s stories, to their pain, their hopes and dreams, their failures and despair. A destitute time is a time for listening and being at-

tentive—but this is no ordinary listening. It means intuiting a sense of the beyond, even if the words themselves do not convey this sense. It means listening to what has not been said. (Tacey 2007, 54).

This approach places trust in the untapped wells of spiritual vitality that lie within each individual, a seed of genuine desire and possibility that awaits to be nurtured and brought to the surface. It sets a task for the Church to engage in dialogue and reciprocity, a style of commitment that the Second Vatican Council, in its documents and enduring spirit, models and promotes itself (O'Malley 2005, 79). Indeed, without listening there can be no genuine communion; nor can there be longevity or vitality in the life of the Church for lasting participation and involvement cannot be imposed from without but must spring from within. It must be asked if the Church has the courage to undertake and commit itself to this course, a pathway of deep listening and patient availability that stands at the centre of our Gospel spirituality. In light of the current decline in participation within the Church, the words of the evangelist resound with a striking significance for our communities today, 'take care how well you listen; for anyone who has will be given more; from anyone who has not, even what they think they have will be taken away' (Luke 8:18).

### Conclusion

The most recent statistics with regards to Mass attendance within the Australian Church cannot be ignored. They paint a picture of growing dis-

engagement with the sacramental life of the Church and confirm that the context of faith has shifted significantly. Apart from Church-centred and family or household factors, we have recognised the challenges of postmodernity which resists the very notion that any one account, or encounter, can hold life together and draw it to its depths. Yet, for Catholic faith, a sacramental life is precisely the recognition and experience of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the definitive and abiding event of the world. What is more, the sacraments affirm and concretise the intimate availability of this gift throughout life's journey while participation expresses and realises personal relationships and mutuality, with God and with one another as fellow travellers on the way.

The contemporary decline in participation challenges us as Church to reassess our response to those who feel themselves on the margins of the Church's life or who are no longer engaged with the life of faith. The reality of diminishing Mass attendance advances us with urgency to the activity of prophetic listening, of 'tuning in' to the deepest desires, fears, ambivalences, and aspirations of flesh-and-blood people with sincerity, charity and goodwill. By this project, we might begin to close the chasm which exists between the often unarticulated yearning and hope of ordinary people and their perceptions of what is 'going on' in churches. Unless we find the courage to undertake such a project, declining participation in the Church's life will remain the story of our community for the foreseeable future.

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# THE CHURCHES AND ECUMENISM, 2008

MICHAEL PUTNEY

AS IS CUSTOMARY, Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, gave an address to its Plenary Assembly on November 14, 2006 which was, as it were, a ‘state of the nation’ address concerning the ecumenical scene worldwide from a Catholic perspective.

## *A New Situation*

Among other things, he drew attention at the beginning of his address to the obvious truth that we are in a very different situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century than we were at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> It is too easy for us to forget this and not to appreciate the enormous fruitfulness of the ecumenical movement.

A second general point he made was that he rejected the interpretation of the present situation very current in discussions about ecumenism, that we are in a time of wind-down or of stalling, or that we have passed into a period of ‘winter’, or as some have said, ‘an ice age’.<sup>2</sup> He rightly rejected such a reading of what has happened these past twenty or thirty years.

One of the problems confronting many striving to interpret the present situation is that they are not aware of all that has been achieved in international dialogues, and in relationships at the highest level between Christian world communions. Because ecumenical practice at the local level is very often little different to the practice of twenty years ago, and some in fact can point to a diminution of ecumenical activity in their area in the past ten years, this

is seen as an indicator that the whole ecumenical movement has ground to a halt.

It would be more accurate to interpret the present situation on the local level in terms of the ecumenical journey having reached a plateau. The churches have achieved a very significant level of mutual understanding and have established structures for collaboration that required an enormous amount of effort. As these were being achieved, they were seen as wonderful ecumenical gains or even ‘break-throughs’. While those agreements and structures are capable of providing a continuing growth in ecumenical collaboration and understanding, they are not of themselves capable of generating new major ‘break-throughs’ or of taking us to new levels of ecumenical relationship, and hence people speak of a stalling in the ecumenical movement. More dramatic development than this can really only happen for the Catholic Church through the dialogues and negotiations that take place on the highest level of ecumenical interconnectedness.

## *A New Methodology*

But even on the local level, something more and something more exciting can happen through a more intentional harvesting of the fruit of the ecumenical relationships of the past century. We need to review what has been achieved in that time which is the basis for the new level of relationship or the deeper communion that has been achieved. Then we can ask of each other whether we are actually living in accord with this new degree of communion, this new relationship, and finally we

can explore together what we can do to deepen it even further.

This was the methodology used and then recommended by the Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Commission for Unity and Mission that grew out of a meeting of Anglican and Catholic bishops in Canada ten years ago. It recognised that Anglicans and Catholics no longer had the same degree of communion, or more accurately lack of communion, that they had forty years before, and also that they hadn't really taken seriously this new level of communion, or used it as the basis for new initiatives that could take them to a deeper level of communion.

In a similar way it is possible to move from what people on the local level see as an ecumenical impasse by this methodology of harvesting, of recognising, and of planning new initiatives. The covenanting proposal of the National Council of Churches of Australia, which follows from the Covenant signed by the Heads of most major Churches in Adelaide in July 2004, is a method whereby local parishes, congregations, dioceses, presbyteries and so on can covenant to do certain things together, to carry forward the ecumenical relationship they already have, so that a new relationship can be achieved.

### *Spiritual Ecumenism*

Moreover the other commitment that can be made on a local level to further the ecumenical cause is to take more seriously the contribution of prayer and of sharing one's spiritual gifts and resources with each other. This spiritual ecumenism has always been one stream of the ecumenical movement, but has seldom been the main stream. Some movements of prayer and monastic life have focussed on prayer and everyone has done something by their prayer together in the Week of Christian Unity, but even this has ceased to be a major spiritual event in many places.

In 2008 Christians celebrate the centenary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, at



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least since it began its earliest form as an Octave of Prayer for the Reunion of Christians started by the then Episcopalian priest, Lewis Thomas Watson, the founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement who have committed themselves to the ecumenical movement. Many are seeing this year as an appropriate time to renew their commitment to praying together.

The ecumenical movement has not stalled. Extraordinary things are happening on an international level by way of dialogue and the deepening of relationships between Christian communions; and even on the local level Christians do not need to stay where they are if they take seriously the new level of communion achieved by past ecumenical efforts and above all, enter more deeply into the spiritual way forward.

In his overview of the present situation of the ecumenical movement, Cardinal Kasper named five changes that have occurred in the ecumenical landscape that need to be taken account of if we are to move forward ecumenically on any level. The first he called 'Climate Change: the new question of individual identity.' He suggested that a hermeneutic of suspicion was replacing the hermeneutic of trust that had reigned supreme in the ecumenical movement up until now. Christian communities, churches, communions are drawing the boundaries more clearly and are affirming their identity more definitively over against the others.<sup>3</sup>

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### *The Question of Identity*

Neither he nor anyone else would or should question the importance of identity in the ecumenical movement. It has always been obvious that one cannot dialogue with others unless one knows who one is oneself, and that there is no real ecumenism if the parties involved do not identify with any community or represent any tradition. There can be no exchange of gifts if no-one can distinguish the gifts they have to offer. There can be no agreement reached if people do not know what they believe. Identity is very important in the ecumenical movement, but a hardening of identity, a self-defensive identity, an accusatory identity, is not helpful to the movement.

Cardinal Kasper was speaking from his very rich experience of ecumenical relationships with other Christian communities in Germany. For example, he was disturbed by the reaction of some Germans to the Joint Declaration on Justification which is arguably one of the greatest achievements of the ecumenical movement. Scholars such as Eberhard Jüngel described such achievements as 'cheating'.<sup>4</sup>

The ecumenical movement flourished because of the discovery of what were often described as the hidden agreements in our disagreements. In a public lecture in 1972, Günther Gassmann, a German Lutheran, who had been a guest at a meeting in Windsor of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission discussing the Eucharist, described an evangelical Anglican and a more conservative Catholic discussing some aspect of eucharistic theology about which all other participants had found agreement. According to Gassman, everybody stood around and watched them. They could hear the two arguing with gentle accusations that if one were to hold the position being put forward by the other, then one would be contradicting the Scriptures or the great Tradition of the Church, and so on. Eventually they heard one of them say to the other: 'Is that what you mean?' and the other said:

'Yes, that's what I mean.' The first speaker then apparently said: 'Well, if that's what you mean then that's what I have been trying to say as well.' They had discovered a hidden agreement in their apparent disagreement. Four hundred years of determination to speak in a way that reinforced differences had finally crumbled as they listened attentively to the faith the other was trying to describe theologically, and heard the same Gospel in which they believed.

What has been suggested by others, not least of all Cardinal Avery Dulles in a talk in 1990 at St John's Seminary, Boston, is that we are now discovering hidden disagreements in our ecumenical agreements.<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps understandable. For people who haven't experienced the intense meeting of minds and hearts that occurs in an ecumenical dialogue and only have the text of the statement before them it is easy to ask a thousand questions of the text and even perhaps in one's heart to accuse the participants of not having dealt with all the problems. The participants may well have, but may not have canvassed them all as one would in an article or an academic paper, in the briefer and more focussed ecumenical agreed statement.

It probably is also true that sometimes the enthusiasm of the early decades of the ecumenical movement led some participants to agree too easily, and in that sense to fail without intending to, to be truly representative of their own communion. Sometimes indeed, participants representing one or other communion have been of one particular school of thought in that communion. This was seen by some to be the problem in the early days of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. There was not thought to be sufficient evangelical representation among the Anglicans.

So there are grounds on which one can question whether there are now hidden disagreements in the agreements, and then to bring any so discovered into the continuing dialogue. This is a normal understandable development

in ecumenical dialogues that have often been going for forty years. But people who find these hidden disagreements can also sometimes be taking an ideological stance. They may well be unsympathetic to the ecumenical movement. They may not see it as a movement of the Spirit as those involved certainly do. They may see it as jeopardising an identity, whether it be Catholic or Protestant, or Orthodox, or all the variations in between and beyond, that they consider to be true and to be placed at risk by these agreements.

Properly conducted ecumenical dialogue ought not place any identity at risk. Ecumenical dialogue normally involves people who robustly adhere to their own identity, entering into profound relationships with others in such a way that they are thereby able to see reflected in the other something of themselves, and to discover themselves anew in the meeting with the other which confronts and challenges their own clearly held identity. What grows from this encounter is not a compromised identity for either party, but rather a re-appreciation of their own and the other's identity and recognition by each party that the other is to a greater or lesser degree, depending on who they are, likewise representing the faith and the Church that they see their own identity as embracing and protecting.

Cardinal Kasper rightly suggests that this stress on identity serves us well when it enables us to define who we are and our differences, but only as long as this is done within the framework of a larger shared faith, and when it is done with the aim of overcoming differences through dialogue rather than establishing barriers to progress or simply of asserting one's own identity come what may.<sup>6</sup> He obviously fears that the latter is beginning to happen in Germany and at times among some Orthodox.

### *The Basis and Goal of Ecumenism*

The second major theme of Cardinal Kasper's address he entitled: 'Disputed Questions on

the Basis and Goal of Ecumenism'. For him: 'the foundations of ecumenism are not a sentimental irenicism in which the question of truth has become irrelevant, not a vague feeling of belonging together, a diffuse humanism or an amorphous global religiosity'.<sup>7</sup> According to his Catholic understanding, 'the foundation of ecumenism consists in the common confession of Jesus Christ and the Triune God as it is expressed also in the basic formula of the World Council of Churches',<sup>8</sup> and is expressly cited by the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council.

A new problem is that the Trinitarian and Christological basis of ecumenical relationships is not as secure as it used to be. The ancient creeds which have served the church so well and which were forged through such incredible debate and conflict are now not always appreciated. They are sometimes being unravelled because of new questions confronting the churches, such as those raised by Christian feminism.

A study by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches on the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed which resulted in a report entitled *Confessing the One Faith*<sup>9</sup> in 1991, has not been taken up very fully. It never captured the imagination as the earlier statement from the Faith and Order Commission *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* had done. This may well have been a lost opportunity to stave off the loss of a shared language about God which is disturbing many at the moment.

This is only one aspect of the changed theological context in which ecumenists are doing their work. There is also a difficulty in that many theologians are just not as concerned about the theological and especially the ecclesiological issues of ecumenical dialogues. Those of a less classically Protestant or Catholic theology whose concerns are those raised by the issues and challenges of contemporary culture will be far less interested in the traditional goal of achieving organic unity or uniting Christian churches according to some other

model, because it is simply far less important to them.

But even those who are concerned about church unity do not necessarily describe the goal in the same way. The World Council of Churches through its own Faith and Order Commission has at each Assembly attempted to describe more fully the goal of the ecumenical movement. While not a member of the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Church has played a part in that formulation for many decades and would support the statements from the Canberra Assembly (1991) of the World Council of Churches and the Porto Alegre (2006) Assembly. However, it would not be true that Christians generally actually share that description of the goal. Kasper concluded very tellingly that 'the lack of a common goal is, in addition to the lack of clarity on fundamentals, the most profound problem of the contemporary ecumenical situation. For if one has no common goal there is a danger that one unintentionally moves in different directions and finds oneself in the end further apart than before.'<sup>10</sup>

There are very significant consequences of this lack of a shared description of a goal for the ecumenical movement. Catholics, Orthodox and many other Christian ecumenists strive for unity in faith, sacraments and ministry while rejoicing in diverse expressions of the faith and the liturgy and the canonical forms that the same ministerial order take in different churches. The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* is a beautiful example of this unity of faith but diversity in expression and emphasis. On the other hand Christian churches in Europe have entered into various agreements which do not demand this same level of agreement in faith, sacraments and order, and believe this is sufficient, perhaps justified by the Augsburg Confession's requirement only of agreement in the teaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments according to the gospel.

Some of these Christians can become very impatient with the Catholic Church for not

permitting a sharing of eucharist and ministry given, for example, the agreement on justification by faith in the *Joint Declaration*. Their impatience is understandable given their perception of what is required for Church unity but it arises because two vastly different understandings come into conflict on this question.

That the Orthodox would share Cardinal Kasper's concern was well illustrated by the address at the third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu in Romania on September 5, 2007 by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. According to him the Orthodox were committed to doing everything in their power to 'promote the sacred work of restoration of full ecclesiastical and sacramental communion among churches on the basis on the same faith in love and respect for the particular expressions with which the apostolic faith is experienced.'<sup>11</sup> He hoped that the Assembly would result in real positive steps toward that goal. But the churches would need, he said, to 'agree upon the character and form of the Christian unity that we seek, especially since we know that one of the existing and preliminary impediments is precisely the different opinion among Christian churches as to the purpose and goal of the ecumenical movement'.<sup>12</sup>

One of the most heartening recent events for Catholic ecumenists was the Consistory for new cardinals in Rome at the end of November last year. Pope Benedict chose to invite Cardinal Walter Kasper to give the address to the College of Cardinals which had gathered for that Consistory and their major discussion was on ecumenism. When speaking to the other cardinals, Kasper gave an update on the present state of all the relationships of the Roman Catholic Church to other Christian World Communions. He then made many of the same points that he had made a year before in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council. He phrased this particular point rather colourfully: 'What we hold to be our common patrimony has begun to dissolve here and there

like glaciers in the Alps.’<sup>13</sup>

### *Evangelicals and Pentecostals*

The third major theme of his address to the Pontifical Council was entitled: ‘New Challenges: Evangelicals and Pentecostals’. He acknowledged that these churches and communities are sometimes referred to as a third wave in the history of Christianity. Speaking first of Evangelicals he made the point that on matters of the Church and the sacraments, they are often very far apart from other Christians such as Catholics, whereas on Christological doctrine and on ethical questions, they are often very close to Roman Catholics, and often closer to them than some other Protestant Churches. This is a new configuration within the larger ecumenical world.<sup>14</sup>

Kasper sees the Evangelical movement as a counter-current or a reaction against the more liberal protestant theology which he perceives to be fairly prevalent again today; and he can see their concerns and the concerns of the Catholic Church often coinciding. However there are major theological differences on ecclesiology, sacraments, biblical exegesis, and the understanding of the tradition which can hinder even this coming together.<sup>15</sup>

In October 2006 a statement entitled ‘That they may have Life’ was published by Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) which is an American group of Evangelicals and Catholics who have achieved a significant level of mutual respect and co-operation and try to speak together on moral matters about which they are equally concerned. Some of the Catholic representatives and signatories of that statement were George Weigel, Fr Richard John Neuhaus and Cardinal Avery Dulles. A similar coming together has occurred to a lesser extent in Australia.

The report acknowledges that it is not always easy for Catholics and Evangelicals to find a common voice on moral matters because of their different understanding of the capacity of human reason. It claims that

Evangelicals, and the Protestant tradition generally, view human reason as deeply corrupted by sin whereas Catholics see it as still having a capacity to discern truth including moral truth, despite its being wounded by sin.<sup>16</sup>

So while a new partnership may be arising between Catholics with some other Christians and Evangelicals on ethical issues, the differences between them on ecclesial, anthropological and biblical issues make that not always an easy partnership. At the same time, it is a partnership which could become increasingly important if those involved in it recognise that they are coming out of two very different world views. While they may share particular commitments and theological positions, they are truly very different and need to deal with that difference, if the relationship is to grow. This means that dialogue about who they are and not just about ethical issues, is essential if the partnership is to work.

Concerning Pentecostalism, Cardinal Kasper distinguished three different waves: ‘Classic Pentecostalism, within which good dialogue has been possible with some groups; the Charismatic Movement within the traditional churches including the Catholic Church; and Neo-Pentecostalism, which often turns into a religion of purely worldly promise of prosperity’.<sup>17</sup> He said rather critically of this third wave: ‘Its relationship with the traditional Churches is mostly quite aggressive and proselytising; a practical dialogue is of course possible, but dialogue in the real and accepted sense has until now scarcely been possible.’<sup>18</sup>

One has to remember as one reads these words that he is looking at the Catholic scene around the entire world. In parts of Latin America his concern about aggressive proselytising would echo those of many bishops. There is a fair level of hostility among Catholics to Pentecostals in parts of Central and Latin America. At the same time he acknowledged and has done so on many occasions, that part of the problem lies with the Catholic Church itself. If they are losing tens of thousands of Catholics to Pentecostal groups, they

need to look at their own house to put it in order so that people will not go elsewhere looking for 'life' as they understand it.

Many Pentecostals are committed to unity. Though because they do not have a very highly developed theology of the Church or appreciation of the larger Christian Tradition through the centuries, that unity is described as something Christian communities can achieve by working together. It would not necessarily involve doctrinal or institutional unity. Whereas for Catholics and Orthodox and many other Christians, the unity they are seeking is a restoration of the unity they had before the divisions which have torn them apart, and it will be a unity within the great Christian Tradition of the Gospel. It will encompass faith and sacraments and ecclesial order or ministry as has been stated so often by the World Council of Churches. Consequently, while Catholics may meet an enthusiasm for unity among Pentecostals, the unity sought does not involve many of those elements Catholics believe are essential for unity. This can lead to disappointments and misunderstandings unless people deal with their differing understanding of 'unity'.

The third category of Pentecostals described by Kasper is an interesting dialogue partner for Catholics in Australia at present. Not all Pentecostal churches still use the charismatic gifts of tongues and healing in a normal Sunday service, whereas the dominant image of Classic Pentecostals is of Christians distinguished by their use of such gifts. The relationship of Catholics with this new wave of Pentecostals is similar to their relationship with independent Evangelical Churches and mega-Churches that have grown up in Australia, often according to an American model.

There seems to be a mega-church model of worship sweeping through Australia. It often involves very strong music or 'praise worship', a strong sermon, a brief prayer and a collection. Many pastors in more traditional Western churches are inclined to adopt this model because as they perceive it, 'it works'.

However, there is a flow through of participants in such churches. Pastors sometimes have a major task to hold their members for more than a few years. So, in dealing with these bodies Catholics are not dealing with Churches in the traditional sense of the word.

In addition, there is a tendency among some Evangelicals and Pentecostals to believe that God is sending preachers or pastors or movements or strategies or events into our midst to bring about the radical and dramatic change they are hoping will occur to our secular culture. They give regular invitations to other Christians to join in one or other rally, listen to one or other speaker, or make some new commitment to prayer together. There is always a promise that this will bring something rather dramatic to one's city or the nation.

Once more Catholics are dealing here with a different ecclesial or spiritual phenomenon than certainly ecumenists are used to in their dealing with each other. Sometimes Catholics and representatives of other Christian Churches share some of the Evangelical / Pentecostal priorities. Because these are so different to classical ecumenical priorities, collaboration can be fairly awkward at times. This is particularly true when representatives of traditional ecumenically open churches, including Catholics, attempt to organise an event with Pentecostals and Evangelicals, only to discover that their goal and their methods are very different. A civic prayer service can become a rally unless all can agree about the nature of the event.

### *Ecumenical Fragmentation*

Cardinal Kasper added as the fourth element in the contemporary ecumenical terrain: 'Ecumenical Fragmentation and New Networks'. This may be a peculiarly Catholic concern. The Catholic Church sees itself as dealing with World Communions which themselves do not necessarily describe themselves in terms of being one church, except in the sense that all

Christians belong to denominations which are each part of the one Church. This denominationalism is alien to a Catholic or Orthodox understanding of the Church. That is why Catholics speak always in the plural of 'Churches and ecclesial communities', rather than of 'the Church' as a word inclusive of everyone, and why they avoid the word 'denominations'.

To take one example, the World Methodist Council is an association of extraordinarily diverse churches maintaining some allegiance to the theology and spirituality of John and Charles Wesley. Among these is the Uniting Church because the Methodist Church of Australia became a member of the Uniting Church and the Uniting Church retains the original membership it had of the World Methodist Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

There are also Waldensians, Church of the Nazarene and the Great United Methodist Church of the United States which has bishops and which retains as members of itself all Methodist Churches in Asia, Africa and Europe which were founded by missionaries of the United Methodist Church. Their bishops are members of the College of Bishops of the United Methodist Church, and their representatives attend the General Conference of the United Methodist Church of the USA. On the other hand, there are Methodist Churches in many parts of the world which were founded from Great Britain and which do not have bishops and which are independent and, other than historically, are not connected to the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

This is a very diverse body as often are other World Communions and as a consequence, there is what Cardinal Kasper calls an 'asymmetry'<sup>19</sup> in the relationships. This is true as well for other Christian communions in their relationships with each other in different ways. Nonetheless, such an asymmetry is something that the ecumenical movement has been dealing with since the beginning. However his concern was, and is, that greater frag-

mentation is occurring, or could occur in even those bodies. Kasper's concern was particularly focussed on the Anglican communion. The whole ecumenical world is praying for the Lambeth Conference this year which will be the centenary Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion and one in which it has never faced such tendencies to division and to splintering.

Kasper also pointed to all kinds of new High Church Movements within other Christian traditions, and monastic movements such as Taizé, Bose and Chevetogne etc., as well as the Focolare movement and to Chemin Neuf. In May 2004, about 10,000 young people from Christian movements of young people of many Christian Churches gathered in Stuttgart in Germany, and found a spiritual linkage between themselves that perhaps would have surprised their more official and older Church members.<sup>20</sup> The up-shot of all of this is simply to say that the ecumenical world is becoming more diverse and more complex.

### *Secular Ecumenism*

The fourth contribution of Cardinal Kasper to the Assembly of the Pontifical Council was to speak of 'Secular Ecumenism and Fundamental Ecumenism'. He attributed the notion of 'secular ecumenism' to the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Konrad Raiser.<sup>21</sup> It would consider that in the future the churches will come together not through theological dialogue but through collaboration for achieving justice, peace and freedom throughout the world. This is a new paradigm of ecumenism. Kasper maintained that ultimately this would not be enough because questions of theology would still arise.

Secular ecumenism may be a continuation of the earlier ecumenical stream of the 'Life and Work' movement which paralleled the 'Faith and Order' movement in the early days of the modern ecumenical movement prior to the formation of the World Council of Churches. The mantra of some in that move-

ment was that 'doctrine divides while work unites'. Cardinal Kasper described the crucial significance of this issue as follows:

The fact that many people are by now no longer interested in the old controversies or in overcoming them cannot be simply solved by putting these issues aside, but rather by opening them up anew. This ignorance and often also indifference relate not only to the old controversies but also to the common foundations on which the churches are based.

Many people, especially young people, simply cannot understand the traditional doctrinal distinctions even with the best will in the world. They need a new elementary vocabulary; the fundamental Christian message must be made accessible to them in a language that they understand. Where such a fundamental form of communication exists, a new type of ecumenism comes into being on the foundation of the Christian faith, and thus we are able to speak of a fundamental ecumenism that must move towards the ultimate aim of full visible unity.<sup>22</sup>

In speaking further about this 'fundamental ecumenism' he argued that it must not be simply academic even though serious academic work would always continue to be indispensable. But it needed to be spiritual as well:

Ultimately fundamental ecumenism is a spiritual task. It places the focus once more on the fact that ecumenism is most profoundly and in its heart of hearts spiritual ecumenism, that is, an ecumenism that after all the simple divisions, the sins against love and truth, the prejudice and the malice towards one another makes room for the spirit of Christ, which is a spirit of reconciliation and love.<sup>23</sup>

In Oberlin in the United States a conference was held in 2007 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Faith and Order Conference in that same city. Fr John T Ford, a great Catholic ecumenist, reported that he was struck by the fact that young people were not able to understand and were not concerned about the issues to which the participants who had been

at the first Oberlin Conference in 1957 were referring, and about which they were apparently still concerned. He saw young people as much more interested in what again would have been called the Life and Work movement rather than the Faith and Order movement, with its emphasis upon common witness and collaboration for the sake of the world, and the great sense of unity this generated. In fact, they were inclined to see doctrinal discussions as reinforcing division rather than overcoming what separates the churches.<sup>24</sup>

Ford used a distinction taken from John Henry Newman between notional and real assent to describe these two approaches. Notional assent tends to be abstract and while intellectually defensible, can be somewhat divorced from concrete situations. Real assent on the other hand is concerned about the concrete realities of daily life and so is usually far stronger than notional assent. Notional assent speaks to the head and is integral to the way human beings work. They need to be intellectually persuaded before they make real decisions. But real assent is what motivates people and drives them on. He saw the need for a coming together of both streams of the ecumenical movement and both ways of thinking and working.<sup>25</sup>

As he said: 'In life, the notional and the real go together: the notional without the real tends to be speculation, while the real without the notional tends to be superficial. If so, as an ecumenical corollary, Faith and Order and Life and Work need to be more engaged as ecumenical partners.'<sup>26</sup> Both he and Cardinal Kasper highlighted one of the most fundamental problems that the ecumenical movement faces internationally and here in Australia.

Many, and especially younger people, are often not at all concerned about those things in which committed ecumenists of the past invested all their life and energy for the sake of the unity of the Church. The doctrinal issues do not capture their imagination. On the other hand, issues of justice, peace, the integrity of creation do capture their imagination

and they are happy enough for Christians and secular people, and representatives of other World Religions, to work together for these causes. The doctrinal difference between Christians and other World Religions are seen to be minor in comparison with this positive common engagement.

However, the situation may be even more barren than either of these authors have suggested. In fact, they are actually only talking about a small number of people, and particularly a small number of young people who would be interested at all. We live in a secular age and an age in which Pope Benedict has said we suffer from 'a dictatorship of relativism'.<sup>27</sup>

In our secular age, so powerfully analysed by Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor,<sup>28</sup> a major problem for Christian ecumenists is that their work has become irrelevant to many of their contemporaries. The issues that divide Christians and which concern ecumenists are of no concern at all to those who either do not look beyond the human for their meaning or even for their self-transcendence, or who only have a vague appreciation of what it is we believe, but who nonetheless may be on a spiritual quest, and who can hold contradictory religious or philosophical positions together without being disturbed.

Some commentators are suggesting that secularism and atheism are 'on the run', so to speak, at present, but this is not obvious in Australia. Rather the Churches give the impression to secular commentators that they are 'on the run'. Their ecumenical endeavours may appear in the eyes of secular observers to be reorganising the deck chairs on the Titanic. This places an enormous challenge before Christian Churches and religious communities to find the way to speak to their secular culture that will enable the Christian voice to be heard so that the Christian gospel can be embraced and the Christian community can be seen as a life-giving body to which to belong.

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### *Ecumenism in the Future*

Ecumenism in that context is not rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, but reorganising the body to make it stronger to carry out that task. Australian Christians need a commitment to the new fundamental ecumenism that is based upon the profound spiritual ecumenism, of which Cardinal Kasper spoke. The prayer of Jesus recorded for us in the seventeenth chapter of St John's Gospel: 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their work, that they may all be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:20-21) is still the basis of the ecumenical movement.

Christians strive to fulfil Christ's prayer by working to restore the unity that was there from the beginning and to do so for the sake of the world. However, they can sometimes forget that the prayer is truly Christ's prayer and that Christ dwells in all of us. Therefore there is an urgency in Christians that comes from him because it is his longing for Christian unity that finds expression in all of their ecumenical efforts. Indeed their hearts are one with his heart through baptism and faith and any efforts they contribute to the restoration of Christian unity are simply their carrying forward his longing, his desires, his inspirations, his actions through them.

If Christians return to him together in prayer, and there can be no better year for doing so in this centenary year of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, he will inspire them, and move them to take the steps that they need to find that unity which will serve the cause of sharing his life anew with secular Australia. This is the new 'world' that needs to believe that it is the Father who sent him, as he so prayed.

Our ecumenical task is a new responsibility in a secular age. It is the essential coming together of Christians so that they will have the strength, the wisdom, the knowledge, the

power, the courage, the strategies, the structures to convey anew to a secular culture the joy of knowing Christ Jesus. He longs for that far more than they do. Their task is simply to surrender to the longing of his heart that they

will find within themselves and together to pray anew and to dialogue anew and collaborate anew with greater commitment that we may be one so that Australia will believe that it is the Father who sent him.

## NOTES

- 1 Cardinal Kasper, 'The Current Ecumenical Transition', *Origins* 36:26 (Dec 7, 2006) 402.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid. 409.
- 4 Ibid. 408.
- 5 Avery Dulles, 'Ecumenism Without Illusions: A Catholic Perspective', *First Things* 4 (June/July, 1990) 20-25.
- 6 Ibid. 410.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 *Confessing the One Faith. An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*. Geneva:WCC,1991.
- 10 'The Current Ecumenical Transition', p.410.
- 11 Patriarch Bartholomew, 'Hope for Christian Unity in Europe', *Origins* 37:15 (Sept 20, 2007) 238.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Cardinal Kasper, 'The Current State of Ecumenical Dialogue', *Origins* 37:28 (Dec 20, 2007) 452.
- 14 'The Current Ecumenical Transition', p.411.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 'That They May Have Life. A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together', *First Things* 166 (October 2006) 2.
- 17 'The Current Ecumenical Transition', p 412.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid. 413.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 John T Ford, CSC, 'Oberlin 2007: The Need for an Expanded Methodology?', *Ecumenical Trends* 36:8 (Sept 2007) 5.
- 25 Ibid. 6.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 'Future Pope's Homily for Conclave Opening', *Origins* 34:45 (April 25, 2005) 720.
- 28 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. London: Harvard University Press, 2007.

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*Just as in God the subsistence of the Trinitarian persons is grounded in relation, in an analogous manner (i.e., in a similarity which is at the same time more dissimilar) relations are the fundamental reality also in the created realm. The human being must from this perspective be understood as a relational and dialogic being. He does not find his fulfilment in forcible self-assertion but in respectful and loving recognition of the otherness of the other. This is the fundamental paradox and the dialectic of Christian existence: only he who loses his life will find it (cf. Mt 10,38–39; John 12,25). Neither force, money, power and influence, not the self-assertion 'of the fittest', but instead tolerance, respect, solidarity, forgiveness, goodness and practical love shall then determine the course of the world.*

—Cardinal Walter Kasper, 'The Timeliness of Speaking of God', John Henry Newman Lecture, 8 May 2008. (<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/kasperlecture>)

# THE PRAYER FOR THE JEWS ON GOOD FRIDAY

## *A Reflection*

JOSEPH SOBB SJ

THE LITURGY of Good Friday included and still includes a series of intercessory prayers. These have two parts: first, an extended call to prayer, inviting the congregation to pray for a particular group, and usually indicating the ‘intention’ or ‘focus’ for prayer; and secondly, an *oratio* style of prayer, similar to the ‘collect’ or ‘opening prayer’ at Mass, as the conclusion. An example of the call to prayer, from the 1960 or 1962 *Missale Romanum*, reads, ‘Let us pray for the Pope...that God keep him healthy and safe to rule God’s holy people.’

When Benedict XVI allowed the rites of the 1962 *Missale Romanum* to be more widely used<sup>1</sup>, attention turned almost instinctively to the wording of the ‘Prayer for the Jews.’ Interestingly, hardly any attention has been given to the other prayers, such as the ‘Prayer for Heretics and Schismatics.’

In February 2008, by a note from the Secretary of State, Pope Benedict XVI disposed that a revised formula<sup>2</sup> for the *Oremus pro Judaeis* in the liturgy of Good Friday be substituted for that to be found in the 1962 *Missale Romanum*. However, Benedict XVI finds himself having to confront more than a change of wording, but a new situation in Jewish-Christian relations. This had already been signalled in a change introduced by John XXIII in 1960, deleting the term *perfidis* (perfidious?) to describe the Jews in the ‘Prayer for the Jews.’ In 1964, Paul VI visited Israel (for only half a day!)—the first time a Pope had done so. In 1965, Paul VI promulgated *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions. In 1974 and 1985 further guidelines were issued. In 1986, John Paul II

visited the Synagogue in Rome, and in 2000 he went to Israel, and prayed at Yad Vashem and the Temple Wall in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1962 *Missale Romanum*<sup>4</sup>, the ‘prayer for the Jews’ is preceded by the ‘prayer for heretics and schismatics,’ and followed by the ‘prayer for the Pagans.’ The revised (1970) *Missale Romanum*<sup>5</sup> of Paul VI changed the former to a prayer ‘for the unity of Christians,’ and the latter became two separate prayers ‘for those who do not believe in Christ,’ and ‘for those who do not believe in God.’ The *oratio* for heretics and schismatics in the 1962 version referring to their being ‘deceived by diabolical fraud,’<sup>6</sup> and the *oratio* for the Pagans asking that they ‘be freed from the worship of idols,’<sup>7</sup> remain unaltered in Benedict XVI’s ‘disposition’.

In general, the texts of the intercessory prayers of the 1970 version seem more objective, more ready to recognize the action and presence of God in the hearts of all, more humble. The 1962 texts read as somewhat divisive or alienating, and failing to recognise anything of good in non-Catholic Christians, or Jews, or non-believers. This is an entirely different climate from that which followed Vatican II. Hence, it is important to consider Benedict XVI’s Good Friday prayer not only in the context reflected in the three editions of the *Missale Romanum*, pre-1960, 1962, 1970, but also in the light of the developments in the more than forty years since *Nostra Aetate*. The ‘revised’ Good Friday Prayer is not an isolated text, but is part of a much wider area of concern.

A further perspective may be noted at this point. Much of the positive response that we read to Benedict XVI’s encouragement of the 1962 *Missale Romanum* speaks highly of the

so-called Tridentine rite, especially implying that it is, somehow, uniquely 'traditional' worship—a fairly limited historical perspective in itself. Its admirers tend to speak in high praise of the rite's numinous, reverential, inspiring character. In other words, they tend to focus on rituals and other external features, but rarely seem to address the more substantial issues such as the reality of Catholic life and practice in its various manifestations, in major cities and rural townships, from lovers of classical music to frequenters of contemporary pop-music concerts. The even more substantial issue of theological content, too, is often barely treated or even ignored. In liturgical discussion, this is always an impoverishment, sometimes quite misleading, sometimes even grievous. It is obviously very grievous when the actual wording of liturgical prayers and their theology is the focus of significant concern.

### *Comparisons*

The call to prayer, 'for the Jews,' in the 1962 version, invites the congregation to ask that God will 'take away the veil from their hearts,'<sup>8</sup> alluding to a passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians,<sup>9</sup> which, in turn, alludes to Exodus 34:29-35.<sup>10</sup> The argumentation in this part of Paul's letter is quite complex, moving from a veil over Moses' head to a veil over the hearts of the Jews. Whatever Paul's situation and purposes at the time this letter was written, when it is used as a call to prayer in a Christian community and designates the Jews in this fashion, it has always appeared quite demeaning, both of Jews and for Christians. The intention is expressed quite bluntly in the 1962 version that they may 'acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>11</sup> The 1970 version, it would seem, recognized this insensitivity, and affirms the Jews as the first to whom God spoke. The intention proposed is that they may 'grow in love of God and in faithfulness to the covenant.' The contrast could not be more marked.

The call to prayer in the 2008 version subtly changed the 1962 version, yet it is still unattractively negative. The 'blindness' theme is



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muted slightly by asking that God will 'illuminate their hearts,'<sup>12</sup> though clearly the thought is still basically the same as in the 1962 version. The intention in the 1962 version was that 'they may acknowledge Jesus Christ our Lord.' In the 2008 version it becomes that 'they may acknowledge Jesus Christ as saviour of all.'<sup>13</sup> This has obviously been influenced by the Vatican document, *Dominus Jesus*, which appeared above the signature of Josef Ratzinger.<sup>14</sup>

The *oratio* of the 1962 version designates the Jews as 'blind'<sup>15</sup> and asks that they may be 'brought out of their darkness' by perceiving the light of God's truth which is Christ.<sup>16</sup> Thus it closely follows the theme of the call to prayer. The *oratio* of the 1970 version, on the other hand, asks that the 'people first chosen may come to the fullness of redemption,'<sup>17</sup> thus taking up the theme of the call to prayer in a positive way. Its tone is eirenic, rather than aggressive, and, much more a prayer for the Jews, rather than against them. It may also be an indirect (perhaps unconscious?) allusion to Paul's words in the letter to the Romans<sup>18</sup> which is a much more hopeful and positive assessment than that of the 1962 *oratio*.

The *oratio* of the 2008 version, however, departs somewhat more radically from its predecessor, the 1962 version. It alludes explicitly to the text of the letter to the Romans,<sup>19</sup> and removes the description of the Jews as 'blind'.<sup>20</sup> At this point, then, the *oratio* of the 2008 version is far less aggressive than that of the 1962 version, and, indeed, because it quotes Romans 11:26, actually more conciliatory than the intention proposed in the call to prayer which precedes it. However, one is led to wonder

whether the statement, ‘you wish all to be saved’,<sup>21</sup> is not intended to foreshadow the concluding phrase, ‘all Israel may be saved’;<sup>22</sup> otherwise, it is difficult to see the particular relevance of that statement in a prayer for the Jews.

### Conclusion

A number of questions remain. Clearly, the 2008 version of the prayer for the Jews is slightly, if unevenly, more positive than the 1962 version it replaces. It is likewise biblically based and makes use of less contentious biblical texts. In comparison with the 1970 version, however, it is far less ungrudging, its tone less humble, its vision less generous. It fails to acknowledge the theological development and inter-faith dialogue that has been taking place over the past forty years. Perhaps, of course, this is deliber-

ate—the prayer is meant to reflect the theology of the period and the changes introduced into the prayer are simply to make it less obviously offensive.<sup>23</sup> This might also be why the other prayers, for heretics and schismatics, and for pagans, remain unrevised.

Finally, it may be helpful to ponder why the 1970 version did not simply replace the 1962 version. In my opinion, this would have been an important recognition that Christianity and Judaism have a unique relationship, since it is the Jew, Jesus, whom the Christian Community acclaim as Lord. The ‘parting of the ways’ after the catastrophe of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE was a sadness. However, the words of Paul in the letter to the Romans surely should influence all our liturgical prayers, both their spirit and their content: ‘Irrevocable are the gifts and the call of God’.<sup>24</sup>

### NOTES

1 *Summorum Pontificum*, July 2007.

2 Henceforth, 2008 version.

3 There is an interesting and typical comment on these activities of John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I, John Paul II, and, indeed, Benedict XVI in a website from the Most Holy Family Monastery in New York. All these Popes are deemed ‘manifest heretics’!

4 Henceforth, 1962 version.

5 Henceforth, 1970 version.

6 ‘animas diabolica fraude deceptas’.

7 ‘libera eos ab idolorum cultura’.

8 ‘auferat velamen de cordibus eorum’.

9 2 Corinthians 3:13-15.

10 The latin text of the call to prayer is taken from the Vulgate, ‘velamen positum est super cor eorum’.

11 ‘agnoscant Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum’.

12 ‘illuminet corda eorum’.

13 ‘agnoscant Jesum Christum salvatorem omnium hominum’.

14 Published 6 August 2000.

15 ‘illius populi obcaecatione’.

16 ‘a suis tenebris eruantur’.

17 ‘populus acquisitionis prioris ad redemptionis mereatur plenitudinem pervenire’.

18 Romans 11:24-32. For a very helpful discussion of this passage, see Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina Series, 6, 1996, pages 348-358.

19 ‘plentitudo Gentium intraret’ in the Vulgate be-

comes ‘plentitudine gentium in Ecclesiam Tuam intrante’ in the *oratio*, however, which is far more specific than Paul’s words, and would seem to imply that salvation means “entering the Church”.

20 In Romans 11:25, the term is ‘porosis’ (translated as ‘hardening’ in the NRSV, and other contemporary versions, but ‘blindness’ in the King James Version). This word does not appear in the LXX. In the rest of the New Testament it appears only in Mark 3:5 (referring to the Jewish congregation in a synagogue), and in Ephesians 4:18 (referring to the Gentiles). It is translated as ‘caecitas’ in the Vulgate. We might speculate whether Jerome, in choosing ‘caecitas’ was unconsciously influenced by 2 Corinthians 11:14, where the verbal form is ‘eporothe’, or Job 17:7, ‘peporontai’, and where the context, though not the term, is blindness. The most frequent verbal form of ‘harden’ in the First Testament is ‘hzaq’, though ‘qsh’ is also used, both being translated ‘skleruno’ in the LXX. In Hebrew, the fairly rare noun does not necessarily carry negative overtones.

21 ‘vis ut omnes homines salvi fiant’

22 ‘omnis Israel salvus fiat’. The Vulgate reads ‘sic omnis Israel salvus fieret’, Romans 11:26.

23 Whether it succeeds in this is unclear; it has been received both positively and negatively, by Jews and by Christians.

24 Romans 11:29.

# REVIEW

TP Boland, *Bernard Joseph Wallace 1974-1990, Diocesan Catholic Education Office, Rockhampton, Qld., 2008. ISBN 978-1-86420-292-2.*

*From the Book Launch, Wednesday, 25 June 2008.*

ONCE I began reading this text I found it hard to lay the book aside. It is a tender account of our former bishop's life and ministry amongst us. So delightful and refreshing is the fruit of Dr Tom Boland's research that it instantly generated a type of resurrection experience within me. In this book, Bishop Wallace springs back to life in the precise way we knew him, regarded him and appreciated him as if he had never left us these past nigh eighteen years. It rekindled for me my respect and my reverential fear.

Today heralds a unique occasion in the Diocese of Rockhampton. This book is the first exclusive record of a Bishop of the Diocese crafted for this purpose. The same writer earlier provided a much fuller and more detailed account of Archbishop James Duhig. James was Archbishop of Brisbane for forty-eight years, with five years at the side of his predecessor as Co-adjutor, following eight years as the third Bishop of Rockhampton. His tenure here, merely one-sixth of his Brisbane pastorate, though only one half of Bishop Wallace's, occupies a chapter of that large biography.

I consider this more slender volume as a blend of amazing grace and remarkable intelligence. Those two attributes belong to both the subject of the book, Bishop Wallace, and to its writer, Dr Boland. This launch merits brief reflection on the grace and intelligence of both the bishop and the historian.

Bernard Wallace served as the eighth Bishop of Rockhampton from 1974 until 1990, dying towards the end of the year having successfully tendered his resignation, regretfully, in the wake of diagnosed and advanced can-

cer. Earlier attempts at stepping aside as his years advanced failed. Rome was obviously reluctant to lose the service of an eminently competent and trustworthy bishop. His own wish to resign was far from self-centred but rather to align himself with his expectations of priests and an acute awareness of dwindling energy.

The exceptional grace, however, is that Bernard Wallace had responded to a vocation to the priesthood. His initial inclination was to missionary life. He recounts that surprising twist in these words:

I was drawn to the priesthood through the Missions. In fact, my original desire was to be a missionary rather than a priest. As a boy, I rejected the notion of being a Christian Brother—having no taste for teaching. Similarly, I had left aside the diocesan priesthood, because I felt no attraction to parish work. Yet, in God's good time I finished up as a diocesan priest and taught in a seminary for twenty-five years—and liked it. Surely the Almighty must have his own sense of humour.

He came from Melbourne—far afield. Over the years his affections for home waned, even slightly embittered, in political and ecclesiastical terms. When Bernie's mind was formed it became a force as irresistible as an immovable object. Hence, the author is no less scant relaying Bernie's cutting criticism, including the hierarchy, in critical even cynical, phrases. He wasn't always fond of bishops. Some consider his appointment as a bishop a just desert. A more intimate knowledge of the workings of episcopal life, however, softened his outreach and quite colourful descriptions of his confreres. The view from the inside tem-

pered the view from the outside.

Providence obviously collapsed each of his personal life preferences. He embraced the ways of providence and allowed them to shape his life for excellent service as a humble, retiring man, endowed with extraordinarily simple tastes, unassuming of position, reticent whilst diligent in the exercise of high office, inevitably borne with impeccable dignity, zealous in every aspect of priestly function whether in the city or the vast rounds of country, in conditions harsh or kind.

As a young priest his pastoral zeal took root in Bundaberg and Mt Morgan. His theology was sharpened by the long years of academic lecturing at Banyo Seminary. For fourteen years, Father Wallace and Doctor Boland lectured at each other's side. Dr Boland manages to portray a concealed, complex character in a complimentary and charitable manner worthy of them both.

Bishop Bernard was a brave man. He expressed his convictions forcefully. He stood his ground resolutely. He followed his ideals passionately. He urged a restructuring of the diocese built on the solid base of lay cooperation and shared responsibility determined that priests would enable its happening. His recorded addresses to the clergy and to the Diocesan Pastoral Council are legendary. His confident trust in people was indelibly impressive. He espoused the laity into becoming a living and visible Church. The Church's strength lay in its broad and solid base; a well formed and well intentioned laity.

The Australian Church, the National Bishop's Conference and the International Ecumenical Commission claimed from him scholarly contributions. A warm photograph on page 82, himself with Pope John Paul II, wears the label 'Two thoughtful leaders'. It could not be better described. Seminary students knew his clarity of thinking and accuracy of exposition. We had already caught from him what later became his Episcopal motto: 'The Truth will set you free'. (John 8: 31)

In the Seminary, staff and students relished

his competence mixed with rare compassion. The completion of St Joseph's Cathedral, his foresight for an isolated aerial western ministry, the provision of Aged Care Facilities in Bundaberg and Mt Morgan, along with direct engagement in the Aboriginal apostolate all generated intense interest. They signal his expansive and far reaching vision and commitment to unfolding mission.

In essence, Bishop Wallace was a man of rich, complex and varied presence. It ranged from acid tongue comments to docile behaviour. His wading through a pond, shoeless and sockless, trousers rolled up, to pick water-lilies for nuns could scarcely be heralded as spectacular; but for a man like Bernie, it appears heroic. His liturgical style tended to be mild or bland, even retiring. But it consciously deflected any attempt to exhibit himself in deference to the sacred mysterious presence of the risen Christ which he judged more paramount. The balance came in lively lecturing on Liturgy, Scripture or Theology and vigorous preaching of the Word of God.

I am disappointed that his academic record does not list Canon Law, especially as he directed my interests surprisingly in that direction. There lies a flaw in everyone! His local education legacy rests with the still flourishing annual Bishop's Inservice Days for Teachers where his brilliance sparkled.

Bernie was a fiercely self restrained and quiet man. Often conversation, comment, contribution or observation needed squeezing from him. He never intruded or pushed himself forward. This quiet demeanour suited his more absorbing and reflective manner. The book testifies to these aspects of character and personality. Still waters flow deep. His ways reflected neither shallow nor facile traits. He was fertile to the core. The opening paragraph of Chapter One sets the book's appetising tone. 'Of course, the man's a fool' the bishop said. Bernard Joseph Wallace, Bishop of Rockhampton, set many a hall ringing with that denunciation. It was characteristic, almost defining, of his life and endeavours. It was the

energetic explosion of a perfectionist, aware of the sharpness of his own mind, impatient at the incapacity or mental lethargy of someone who should know better. It was the anguished outcry of one who suffered acute migraine all his long life, yet still devoted his intellect and will to the unending pursuit of truth and clarity.'

The writer, therefore, Dr Boland fits as a most suitable 'potter' for this splendid work. Like the Bishop he too wears Australian recognition for his historical expertise and linguistic flare. His academic background includes a Doctorate in Church History, a long record of public lecturing and the author of several highly acclaimed historical researches.

In this instance, he writes with a grace that matches that of the bishop. Father Tom has produced an interestingly thorough journey into a good and gracious man's life. Like the Bishop, himself a well seasoned priest, he is also acutely conscious of his vocation, lived sincerely through its share of testing circumstances, but nurtured by faith and prayer and safeguarded in the skilful love of a disciplined life. He so understood his subject as to do him true justice.

Se we hold this record. I cannot comprehend any more suitable and lasting tribute to Bishop Wallace than a book in his honour that weaves the threads of his life. Bishop Wallace loved books. He loved people in book form. They were the company he most enjoyed. Often he gathered the masters of the world around him on his desk or lying on the floor beside him. He read prolifically. His library was his

earthly treasure and lasting legacy. He remains a source of energy and enthusiasm to the seminary for ongoing generations of its students who inherited the library.

With a book, of course, you can shut someone off without a word. Simply close the book. One or two words was all he ever needed, otherwise, in your presence to achieve the same result. He was a master at creating silence. Words were his world. He liked silence, even solitude, sometimes, edged with loneliness. He spoke educationally and spiritually enthusiastically as if imbued and inspired by the Spirit. His words were the entrée to his refined and cultured being.

I sincerely thank Bishop Brian Heenan for inviting me to launch the biography in Rockhampton and congratulate him for the encouragement he has been to Doctor Boland. I salute Doctor Boland for the tedious hours of research which underpins what we now cherish; and once again bow my head in profound admiration for Bishop Bernard Wallace.

You may notice that, generally, photographs are sparse in this work. Bernie's shy nature inclined him to avoid the camera. In so doing, he has squashed any temptation to review his life in comic form. He certainly warrants better treatment than the casual. He has received the best from the hand and the heart of Doctor Tom Boland.

I am enormously proud to praise them both, to raise up this splendid text and to declare *Bernard Joseph Wallace 1974-1990* by TP Boland now launched.

—Fr John Grace VG.

*With thanks to The Review, the Journal of the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton.*

The book can be purchased for \$20.00, including postage, from the Cathedral Gift and Bookshop, PO Box 8446 Allenstown, Qld. 4700. [cathedralbooks@bigpond.com](mailto:cathedralbooks@bigpond.com) or phone 0749 212170.

## NEW RELIGIOUS BOOKS BY AUSTRALASIAN AUTHORS

### KEVIN MARK

**Dear Young People: Homilies and addresses of Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to Sydney, Australia, on the occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day, 12 to 21 July 2008; Pope Benedict XVI; St Pauls; PB \$12.95 781921472145]; 96pp; 185x125mm; 2008**

Collection of eleven addresses and homilies given by Pope Benedict XVI during his July 2008 visit to Sydney for World Youth Day (WYD) 2008. In addition to texts specifically related to WYD, there are also papal addresses given to a meeting with leaders of other Christian churches, and to a meeting with representatives of other religions. Included as an appendix is Cardinal George Pell's Homily for the WYD Opening Mass, 15 July. Eight pages of colour photos; recommended reading list.

**Gathering with Mary under the Southern Cross; Marie T. Farrell RSM; St Pauls; HB \$6.95 [9781921032332]; 32pp; 185x120mm; 2008**

Concise historical and theological account of devotion to Mary by Australian Catholics, with specific reference to the title 'Mary, Help of Christians', under which she was declared Patroness of Australia in 1844. Colour photos; bibliography and recommended reading list. Author is a member of the Singleton

congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, a Senior Lecturer of the Sydney College of Divinity, and teaches Christian spirituality and Marian theology at the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

**Good Night and God Bless: A guide to convent and monastery accommodation in Europe: Volume One: Austria, Czech Republic, Italy; Trish Clark; Paratus Press, www.goodnightandgodbless.com, dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB \$29.95 [9780646485201]; 264pp; 210x135mm; 2008**

Guide for tourists, travellers and pilgrims wishing to make use of accommodation options in convents, monasteries and abbeys in Europe. This first volume of a planned series focuses on Austria, the Czech Republic, and Italy. Provides details both of places available simply for accommodation and those that offer spiritual retreats. Detailed information is provided on the principal recommended sites, including places of interest and food and drink suggestions. Also includes pilgrimage suggestions. Basic details are also provided on other religious accommodation options. Some colour photos; maps; index. A second volume, covering religious accommodation in France, Ireland and England, due for publication

in 2009. Author is the owner of a travel marketing business. Part of the proceeds of the sale of the book go to the Mary MacKillop Foundation.

**Jesus of Nazareth; Pope Benedict XVI; read by Nicholas Bell; Bolinda Publishing; Audio CD set \$39.95 [9781742013497]; MP3 CD \$29.95 [9781742017396]; 2008**

Australian-produced audio book version of the first book written by Joseph Ratzinger since his election as Pope. Subtitled 'From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration', it is the first of two volumes in which Benedict XVI will present a deeply personal account of the life and significance of Jesus. This unabridged recording is available as a ten-CD set, or in MP3 format on a single CD (the MP3 version can be easily uploaded to MP3 players, including iPods). Duration is 12 hours, 10 minutes. The reader attended the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, and has performed in many theater productions in London and Australia (where he is now resident), as well as numerous movies and television programs.

**Prayers I Pray: An Australian prayer book for primary school age children; Margaret Commins RSM;**

**St Pauls; HB \$12.95 [9781921032660]; PB \$8.95 [9781921032677]; 64pp; 180x115mm; 2007**

Pocket-sized collection of 57 prayers for primary school-age children. First published in 2004 in a perfect-bound paperback edition, it has been re-issued in sewn hardcover and paperback editions. At the start and end of the volume are common traditional prayers, such as the Our Father, Rosary, and Prayer of St Francis, but the majority of the prayers are the original work of Commins. The prayers are grouped into categories, for instance, those for 'daily use' include prayers on waking, going to sleep, and meal times. Also includes prayers for 'special people', 'special interests', the major liturgical seasons, the sacraments, and prayers specifically about Australia, such as the natural environment, Aborigines, bush fires, and ANZAC Day. Illustrated throughout the colour drawings, many with an Australian character. Commins is a Religious Sister of Mercy who served as an editor at St Pauls Publications for 14 years, and also has experience as a primary-school teacher.

**Question Time: 150 questions and answers on the Catholic faith; Fr John Flader; Connor Court; PB**

**\$19.95 [9781921421051]; 327pp; 210x150mm; 2008**

Collection of answers to 150 questions related to Catholic faith. The questions and answers were originally published in the *Question Time* column in Sydney's *The Catholic Weekly* between 2005 and 2007, and since mid-2007 have also appeared in *The Record* in Perth. The texts are arranged systematically by topic, following the general structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and hence grouped into four major sections—Catholic Doctrine, The Sacraments and Sacramentals, Christian Moral Issues, and Christian Prayer and Devotions—as well as more specific subsections. Foreword by Cardinal George Pell. Author is an Opus Dei priest who served as a university chaplain for 30 years and since 2002 has been Director of the Sydney Archdiocese's Catholic Adult Education Centre.

**Stages on the Way II: Documents from the bilateral conversations between churches in Australia 1994-2007; Raymond K. Williamson (editor); St Pauls; PB \$29.95 [9781921032684]; 320pp; 215x140mm; 2007.**

Sequel to *Stages on the Way: Documents from the bilateral*

*conversations between churches in Australia* (Joint Board of Christian Education, 1994), also edited by Williamson. Volume is a collection of agreed statements and reports arising from bilateral conversations between the major churches in Australia between 1994 and 2007. Represented are the Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches. Texts are gathered under three headings: Dialogues Seeking Mutual Recognition, Dialogues Seeking Theological Convergence, and Dialogues Seeking Understanding. Topics include Christology, the saints and Christian prayer, Gospel authority, communion and mission, justification, inter-church marriages, and mutual recognition. Includes an introduction to the volume, introductions to each document, and a glossary. Preface by Christiaan Mostert, Chairperson, Faith and Uniting Commission, National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA). Editor is an Anglican priest who served as General Secretary of the NSW Ecumenical Council for 21 years, as well as Secretary of the Faith and Unity Commission of the NCCA. Collection was produced on behalf of that Commission.

*Kevin Mark manages the Australasian information in the Global Books in Print database and is former religious publisher for HarperCollins Publishers.*

# PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

*OCTOBER 2008 to JANUARY 2009*

*From the Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A to the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year B*

Prepared by Michael Trainor

## PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the 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 October 2008 to January 2009, from the Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A to the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year B. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The readings over this time are diverse for several reasons: We move towards the conclusion of readings for Year A, into the season of Advent and the beginning of Year B; we celebrate Christmas, with its associated feasts and the usual celebrations that occur over January, before we pick up the readings of Ordinary Time; we move from proclamation of Matthew's gospel to the reading from Mark's gospel which will generally be the principal gospel for the remainder of the liturgical year in 2009, until Advent 2010; curiously in the year of Mark, John's gospel makes an occasional appearance; we also read from various First (Old) Testament readings chosen with the theme of the particular gospel in mind.

All these make for a challenging liturgical time as we seek to highlight helpful themes that link to each over the course of several cel-

ebrations, honour each of the readings with their unique historical and cultural contexts, and suggest how the readings might be celebrated.

It is important to remember that while the first readings are chosen with an eye to the gospel, these readings need to be respected in their own right. They are readings of the Jewish people expressing their faith conviction about God's involvement in their lives. Rather than seeing the First Testament readings, especially during Advent, as offering prophetic statements 'fulfilled' in Jesus or as divine predictions about Jesus, they are better treated as declarations of faith about God's ongoing fidelity to Jesus' ancestors. This should be the spirit in which these readings are proclaimed and interpreted in the Christian Assembly. Advent is a particularly important moment of the liturgical year when this needs to be respected. The prophetic readings, especially from Isaiah, are not predictions about Jesus fulfilled at his birth. They are profound proclamations of faith about Israel's God and are, from this perspective, valid in themselves.

•**The Final Sundays of Year A** (especially from November 2 to 23) look toward God's ultimate coming, however this may manifest

itself. This will usually be in the death of those we love, our own ageing, and the struggle we have with health and concerns about our well-being. The need to contemplate God's coming is no less important for us in a post-modern world, as it was for the first generation of Christians who had a particularly sharpened sense of the second coming of Jesus (sometimes called the 'Parousia' or 'eschaton'). The themes of the readings allow us to reflect on the necessity of wisdom and alertness to the realities of life that surround us.

The **Feast of All Souls** (November 2) offers an opportunity for the Sunday Assembly to remember all those who have died, and especially the generations of faithful disciples who have helped to give life the local faith community. As one theologian has written, authentic Tradition is 'the living faith of the dead.'

The final and climactic Sunday of the liturgical year A (**Christ the King**) allows us to seriously contemplate how Jesus' leadership is revealed in contemporary discipleship and ministry. These are evident in the ways communities respond to the socially disenfranchised. From the perspective of a critical economic and social analysis of our current Australia society, this final gospel reading from Mt could be particularly pertinent and powerful.

- **Advent** ushers in the new liturgical year B, with its focus on Mk's gospel. It also allows us to become steeped in the prophetic wisdom of the Jewish people with readings taken from Isaiah (**Advent 1-3**). These readings come from what scholars call Second ('Deutero') Isaiah and Third ('Trito') Isaiah, rather than from the historical character of the prophet himself. The historical focus of these readings is on the experience of Israel's exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. God promises liberation and happiness to a disconsolate people. The themes of our selections from Isaiah are most relevant to today's Christian community.

The gospel selections from Mk continue

(in **Advent 1**) where the previous liturgical year left off, with a consideration of God's coming or 'advent' at the end of time and the necessity of Christian disciples to be ever sensitive and alert to this. The focus in the remaining weeks of Advent turns to the coming of Jesus and his birth.

It is this birth which determines the gospel for **Advent 4** from Luke and its explicit story of the annunciation of Jesus' birth to Mary. Those of us from a Catholic tradition have always found this Lukan selection a wonderful affirmation of Mary's role in the story of salvation. The focus of the passage is, however, principally on Jesus. We celebrate this in Lk's story of birth heard at Christmas.

- **Christmas** liturgy encourages the proclamation from Luke's story of Jesus' birth. Here, different from Mt's birth story of Jesus, the continual emphasis on joy, redemption, liberation and celebration offer a rich tapestry of theological motifs to explore. They are eternally relevant.

- **Sundays in January** after New Year and Epiphany pick up the systematic reading of Mk's gospel. The themes of each gospel selection shape the choice of the first reading. In OT 3, for example, Mk's Jesus proclaims the necessity of repentance. It is this theme which attracted the compilers of the lectionary to the story of Jonah and his repentant invitation to the people of Nineveh.

- **Gospel of Year B: Mark:** Finally, a word about the Gospel of Year B. Mk's gospel is written for a struggling urban Roman community. The Christian house churches are divided. They seem to experience loneliness in their discipleship of Jesus around the year 70 CE. Political ill will and internal betrayal by some Christians of others to the Roman authorities does not make this an easy time of discipleship. Mark's gospel is intended to address these serious, deep rooted and traumatic experiences: Jesus is portrayed as struggling,

abandoned and misunderstood; the disciples as uncomprehending factionalists. The stories throughout the gospel become a snapshot of Mark's own community in its effort to be faith-

ful to Jesus. For 2009, this same gospel will be able to speak powerfully, encourage and challenge Australian Christians in their discipleship.

## PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

**October 5—Ordinary Time 27.** Is 5:1-7. God's people are like a cared-for vineyard, sometimes fruitless. Phil 4:6-9. Paul offers encouragement not to worry, but live faithfully and confidently in peace. Mt 21:33-43. The parable of what happens to the servants and son of the vineyard owner is an allegory of Mt's community: its struggles and suffering. *Theme—Suffering.* Mt's Jewish Christian community sees its own story in today's Gospel. To live with integrity and authenticity comes at a cost. Are there local and pertinent examples of this?

**October 12—Ordinary Time 28:** Is 25:6-10a. Paradise is presented here as a mountain feast with choice foods and wines. Phil 4:10-14, 19-20. In all that happens to him, no matter his physical or financial resources, Paul's ultimate focus is always God. Mt 22:1-14. God lavishes a banquet is for all, 'good and bad.' *Theme—Eucharistic Inclusiveness.* The local Eucharistic celebration is a reflection of the Universal Church: How does it celebrate inclusiveness in a world of cultural diversity?

**October 19—Ordinary Time 29.** Is 45:1, 4-6. An unexpected non-Jewish military emperor becomes God's agent of salvation. 1 Thes 1:1-5. Paul addresses a community with faith and openness in God. Mt 22:15-21. Jesus avoids a trap set by the religious leaders. God is the true source of all life, even political. *Theme—God and Politics.* An opportunity to reflect on the way God and religion have been co-opted into contemporary politics and military affairs, and offer an alternative focus: The heart of life and human community is God (1<sup>st</sup> Reading and Gospel), not the human whim for power or the seduction of privilege.

**October 26—Ordinary Time 30.** Ex 22:21-27. God's concern for the Israelites is to attend to the poor and not oppress the resident alien. 1 Thes 1:5-10. Paul praises the Thessalonians for their hospitality and openness to God's preached word. Mt 22:34-40. Jesus summarises the heart of ethical life: love of God and neighbour. *Theme—Hospitality to the Stranger.* The treatment of the socially for-

gotten, excluded and the poor in our communities is the touchstone of authentic religious life. A number of positive examples from the local scene can illustrate the living out of such faith.

**November 2—All Souls** Lam 3:17-26. The writer feels deep restless, but realises God's abiding love. 1 Cor 15:51-57. Paul celebrates Jesus' victory over death: 'Oh Death where is your sting?' Mt 11:25-30. Jesus invites wearied disciples to come to him and rest in him. *Theme—Grief and Consolation:* Everyone is touched by death and grief. Our readings honour this experience, allow God to accompany us in this and know the consoling presence of Jesus.

**November 9—Dedication of the Lateran Basilica:** Ez 41:1-2, 8-8, 12. Symbolic water of life flows from the temple, the symbol of God's presence amongst humanity. 1 Cor 3:9-11, 16-17. We are God's living and holy building founded on Jesus. Jn 2:13-22. Jesus is zealous to preserve the sanctity of the temple, as the abode of God's presence. *Theme—God's Abiding Presence.* The Lateran is the key church of the Bishop of Rome, and the main church of Rome. It symbolises the unity of the Catholic Community throughout the world. This feast offers a local opportunity to honour the generations of past and present members who enriched our faith lives.

**November 16—Ordinary Time 33:** Prov 31:10f. An ancient summary of the ideal wife, industrious and wise. This reading requires careful explanation in today's setting without reinforcing a conventional female stereotype. 1 Thes 5:1-6. Paul encourages ongoing commitment to alertness by those who are 'children of the light.' Mt 24:36; 25:14-30. A well known parable that begs careful study, lest economics rather than the struggle to do what is honourable and right (in the character of the third slave) is unwittingly promoted. *Theme—Alertness.* As the end of the liturgical year nears, the readings offer an opportunity to encourage spiritual and critical alertness to what is going on socially and ecclesially. The temptation to re-

flect on the 'good wife' (first reading) or encourage the use of one's 'talents' (gospel) misses the point. The focus of the liturgy is about God and openness to God's life in our world.

**November 23—Christ the King:** Ez 34:11-12, 15-17. God promises to personally look after the people, like a shepherd for sheep. 1 Cor 15:20-26, 28. Paul celebrates the authority of the Risen Jesus who has power over all. Mt 25:31-46. The climactic parable in Mt's gospel, of the need to care and tend those who are marginalised. *Theme—Care:* The final readings of this liturgical Year A encourage a spirit of tenderness and care, especially for those who are marginalised or feel shepherd-less. These attitudes reveal the qualities true leadership for today. Examples abound that show how ordinary people live out these qualities in our local communities.

**November 30—Advent 1 (Liturgical Year B begins):** Is 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8. The prophet implores God to intervene in human affairs. We are like clay in the hands of the divine potter. 1 Cor 1:3-9. Paul affirms God's active and strengthening presence in the Christian community revealed through Jesus. Mk 13:31-37. This is the first proclamation from Mark's gospel for this new liturgical Year B (See notes above about Mk). Jesus encourages discipleship openness and alertness to God's presence. *Theme—God's Presence:* Advent begins with a celebration of God's presence in human history and an encouragement for the disciple to keep watchful of this presence in its many manifestations. The liturgy offers a moment to celebrate God's tangible presence in the local community.

**December 7—Advent 2:** Is 40:1-5, 9-11. The powerful reading celebrates God's tender comforting presence to disconsolate people in Babylonian exile. 2 Pet 3:8-15. God is faithful and will come. This calls for real practical patience. Mk 1:1-8. John the Baptist prepares the people for the coming of Jesus. Repentance, humility and openness echo throughout. *Theme—A Comforting God.* Today's readings reinforce the Advent conviction of God's desire to be with and comfort every human being—a conviction in which many have lost confidence. We celebrate this comforting (not comfortable) God whom many would love to encounter. What local experiences and stories illustrate the presence of such a God?

**December 14—Advent 3:** Is 61:1-2, 10-11. God's servant, empowered by the Spirit, will bring solace and good news to the oppressed. 1 Thes 5:16-

24. Paul gives sage advice to struggling Christians: rejoice, pray, be grateful and open to God's spirit. John 1:6-8, 19-28. The first of a few readings from John's gospel in this year of Mk. Here, John the Baptist focuses our gaze on Jesus. He is life's centre. *Theme—Hope:* Our liturgy is hope-filled. It counteracts those pervading negative and cynical attitudes that find their way into faith and civic communities. Each of the readings provides ways in which this hope can be fostered in an Advent-graced and expectant people.

**December 21—Advent 4:** 2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16. The writer plays on the metaphor of 'house.' David seeks to provide God with a worship-house, but it is God who will build the real house for David—in his descendants. Rom 16:25-27. Paul's hymn of praise to God's wisdom and kindness revealed in Jesus. Lk 1:26-38. The annunciation of the birth of Jesus to Mary. The centre-piece is that the evangelist says about Jesus: he will be great, God's son, and rule forever. *Theme—God's Kindness.* The image of a God essentially kind, revealed to us through Jesus, can be celebrated in this final Advent Sunday. Despite alternate messages they receive, many need to experience the face of God's kindness turned towards them and creation.

**December 24-25—Christmas Midnight.** Is 9:2-4, 6-7. God brings light into the night of the world through the promised birth of the King's son. Titus 2:11-14. God's grace of liberation is revealed through Jesus. Lk 2:1-20. Jesus is born; people are attracted to him; the cosmos rejoices.

**Christmas Day:** Is 52:7-10. To a people experiencing Exile, the prophet offers hope in a God who will liberate them. Heb 1:1-6. Jesus is the revealer of God. Lk 2:1-20. Jesus is born; people are attracted to him; the cosmos rejoices. *Theme—Hope through Jesus' birth:* Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. The political parallels to today could not be stronger. This birth can offer real hope, that people in their struggles and tragedies are not forgotten. In fact, God, revealed in the birth of this child, is with them.

**December 28—Holy Family:** Gen 15:1-6; 17:3-5, 15-16; 21:1-7. God calls Abraham and Sarah to become the ancestors of God's family in the Israelites (and, of course, the Muslims). Heb 11:8, 11-12, 17-19. The writer celebrates Abrahams' fidelity to God. Lk 2:22-40. The prophet, Simeon, praises God's tangible salvation now revealed in Jesus. *Theme—The Human*

*Family:* Abraham and Sarah are the foundational ancestors of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. These traditions are God's 'Holy Family.' More unites than divides us. Today's liturgy offers a moment to celebrate our universal religious unity.

**January 1—New Year's Day: Solemnity of Mary, Mother of Jesus.** Nm 6:22-27. The writer describes God's blessing poured out upon a priestly people. Gal 4:4-7. Paul affirms Jesus' human birth through Mary, subject to life's limitations. Through Jesus we know that our relationship to God is the same as his. Lk 2:16-21. The shepherds come to see the child lying in a place of feeding. *Theme—God's Blessing.* The first reading invites us to consider the kinds of blessings we would like God to bestow upon us, our family, friends and world.

**January 4, 2009—Epiphany:** Is 60:1-6. The people of God will be blest with a divine light that will attract all the nations of the earth. Eph 3:2-3.5-6. God's gift of solidarity with humanity ('grace') is now affirmed and revealed, even to the most unexpected of peoples ('Gentiles'). Mt 2:1-12. The Magi, rather than magicians, astronomers or kings, are rather royal servants who find Jesus from their observance of the heavens and their consultation of the Jewish scriptures. *Theme—The Divine Quest.* Every person is on a search. The ultimate search is for God. Epiphany celebrates the Christian search as disciples of Jesus. The search is discovered and clarified through meditating on our history, creation and Scripture:

**January 11—Baptism of Jesus:** Is 55:1-11. The prophet's invitation is to—Come! Be quenched! Live!.and Seek! 1 Jn 5:1-9. Our faith in Jesus allows God to bring us to life. Mk 1:7-11. Jesus is baptised by John in the Jordan. The heavens are 'torn apart' and the heavenly permeates the earth. *Theme—Baptismal renewal:* The first reading

names the essential desires of our lives, realised in baptism and through communion with God in Jesus. As we renew our vows of baptism, we recommit our selves to care for the planet and each other.

**January 18—Ordinary Time 2:** 1 Sam 3:3-10.19. The young Samuel hears God calling but needs the help of another to know that it is God who calls. 1 Cor 6:13-15.17-20. Paul affirms the centrality of our physical bodies for our faith lives. Our bodies are important. We live as human beings not as angels. Jn 1:35-42. This second extract from Jn's Gospel in the year of Mk has John the Baptist direct his disciples to Jesus who invites them to come and stay with him. *Theme—Encountering God.* Friendship with God lies at the heart of everything. Samuel (first reading) hears God's call but needs help to recognise it; John the Baptist's disciples see Jesus but need help to follow him and time to become his followers. The readings invite our encounter with a companionable God revealed in Jesus. We, like the Baptist's disciples, are invited to 'come and stay' with him.

**January 25—Ordinary Time 3:** Jonah 3:1-5.10. Jonah calls on the people of Nineveh to repent, and, to his surprise, they do! 1 Cor 7:29-31. Paul ponders the larger context by which life is lived—God. Mk 1:14-20. Jesus' first words in Mk's gospel encourage a change of attitude ('repent') and an openness to God's call ('believe in the gospel') revealed in Jesus. These are the key qualities for discipleship in the rest of Mk's gospel. *Theme—Openness.* Both Jonah and Mark encourage a spirit of repentance. This is not the breast-beating attitude of one who should feel guilty or a permanent feeling of paranoid moral corruption. Rather 'repentance' (metanoia, in Mk's Greek) is an attitude of openness to change. This is an attitude of the heart that allows God's project (as expressed by Paul) to shape one's life.

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*While scholars may have warmed to Mark in recent years, the gospel has taken rather longer to reestablish itself in wider Christian usage. True, Mark now has his 'year' (Year B) in the revised Sunday Lectionary of the Roman Catholic Church, which has served as a model for the lectionaries used in other traditions. But there is still some way to go if Mark's voice is to be heard and recognised among the gospel quartet .*

—Brendan Byrne SJ, *A Costly Freedom. A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2008, pp.ix-x..