THE CANONISATION of Mary MacKillop is a powerful and very public assertion of Christian faith and Catholic beliefs. It is a big event for Christianity in Australia. Predictably, it is provoking a deal of heated criticism. We Catholics seem to have a special knack for stirring the cultural pot. How good or bad is that, I wonder? Possibly a bit of both.

Mary MacKillop was a person who lived by very Australian values. She was a woman who supported the poor and underprivileged, one of the common people, a woman who displayed great fortitude in face of ill-treatment by authority. She is a person that all Australians can appreciate.

But it is a very Catholic thing to have her canonised and that does not go down well with many of our fellow-citizens. Catholics have been accused of exploiting her.

In declaring her to be a saint, it is objected, we Catholics are publicly declaring our ‘peculiar’ beliefs in holiness, in life after death, in heaven, in miracles, in the power of prayer. The very fact that people in our enlightened twenty-first century Australia should hang on to such beliefs is an embarrassment to many. ‘What century are we in?’ it is asked in disgust.

If we Catholics would only keep these beliefs to ourselves we would be tolerated and left alone. But we insist on flaunting them in public. Such public display raises the hackles of many of our fellow Australians and provokes a latent anti-Catholic feeling into the open.

Not that opposition troubles us much; we are fairly hardened to it, having been served up with plenty of it down the generations.

But there is a difference in this present-day anti-Catholic feeling. No longer is it, as it often was in earlier days, an expression of sectarianism—opposition to one Church from other Churches. The ecumenical movement has instilled mutual respect among the Churches in Australia.

Anti-Catholicism now finds its source deep within the general Australian culture. What we Catholics are so publicly banging on about contradicts much of what passes for commonsense and wisdom in Australia today.

Hence the canonisation of Mary MacKillop and all that the event encapsulates is a provocation, an in-your-face celebration of beliefs that do not fit comfortably in contemporary Australia, and which seriously annoy many people. One has only to keep an eye on the columns and comments in The Sydney Morning Herald to see ample evidence of the fact.

But there is more behind present-day anti-Catholicism in Australia, as I realized when I did my national duty and lined up to vote on election day in the grounds of the local public school.

A little ahead of me in the line was a fellow in his late 40s who was launched on a long statement of his views on the Catholic Church and Catholics generally. I don’t know what started him off because I only noticed what was going on when he was already in full flight. But I got the jist of his story and something of his grievances fairly quickly.

He had been baptised a Catholic, made his first Communion, beenConfirmed—the lot! He felt he had had a bad time in the Catholic boarding school to which his parents sent him. Now he is an atheist, he declared—specifically an anti-Catholic atheist, I gathered. He was listing all the things he did not like about Catholics and the way we operate.

From my place down the line I proffered him my quizzical half-smile that I use for such
we must recognize that the Catholic Church can
demand a lot of patience and acceptance from us
all especially in recent times, even if the hurts
being carried by these former Catholics cause
them to lash out inappropriately.

All-in-all, the Canonisation and all the at-
tention it is receiving is valuable for causing
the Catholic voice to be heard in Australia. It
is a voice that speaks of different things, tran-
scendent realities, human possibilities with
the grace of God, the communion of saints
where we belong. Mary MacKillop’s story
offers many lessons on life as it should be
lived. It is a rich time for Catholics in Aus-
tralia. It makes us stand out as different, like
us or loathe us. It is far better than being ig-
ored.

In his recent book Losing My Religion.
Unbelief in Australia, (UNSW Press, 2009)
Tom Frame claims that Australians are disin-
terested in religion, rather than indifferent to
it. He writes:

Religion is not ignored wilfully or otherwise; it
just doesn’t mean much to a great many peo-
ple. In my judgment, the culturally compliant
strain of Christianity promoted in Australia does
not compel people to grapple with ideas that
will expand their horizons, nor does it oblige
them to embrace lifestyle choices that might
involve discomfort. Much of what purports to
be Christianity in this country is a form of reli-
gious therapy whose aim is to make people feel
better about themselves or help them gain more
enjoyment out of life. (p.15)

Thanks to the canonisation of Mary
MacKillop, we Catholics cannot be accused
of being ‘culturally compliant’—at least, not
at the moment.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.

An old Sister who knew her well said: ‘From the first time I met Mother
Mary, she greatly impressed me, for her manner was most lovable and
courteous ... No matter how busy she was, she always found time to
comfort all who came to her with difficulties or in distress. Her love of
the poor, especially poor children, was wonderful ...’

THEOLOGY AS NURSING CARE
FOR CULTURES AND SOULS

BISHOP ANTHONY FISHER O.P.

WE’VE HEARD IT all before, we
know the ending, we’ve analysed it
to bits, we could almost recite it
from memory. The Story of the Good Samaritan
(Lk 10:25-37) is a warm, comfortable,
almost sentimental tale.

Yet scholars such as yourselves remind us
that when first it was heard, it was far from
comfortable: it was packed with shocking lit-
tle jibes for its first hearers. In the first place,
there is implicit criticism of the clergy—for
their unneighbourliness, self-protectiveness,
ritual pernicketiness. It’s not unlike the lamb-
basting, justified and unjustified, that bishops
and priests are receiving at present and for
some similar reasons. Then there’s the shock-
ing suggestion that lay people might be more
neighbourly than clergy.

Last of all, there’s the intimation that a tra-
ditional enemy like the Samaritans could be
good, indeed good to Jews, indeed better than
Jews at being good to Jews. It is like telling
Benjamin Netanyahu that his most reliable
neighbour in difficult times would be the Pal-
estinians!

This is typical, of course, of the reversals
of common expectations that we meet so of-
ten in Jesus’ preaching and action—the most
dramatic of all being the Resurrection.

In tonight’s story the hero not only helps,
he helps a great deal, extending his care be-
yond the immediate emergency, seeing to the
victim’s longer-term good as well. Once again,
Jesus is proposing something shocking: a far
less measured kind of justice or charity than
even his most open-minded and charitable
hearers, does it challenge us still, two millen-
nia later, in our very different world? Lawyers
don’t tend to ask questions about eternal life
these days, at least not in public. But they are
still very interested in the question ‘who is my
neighbour?’ because it is a central question for
the big damages cases in negligence. How that
pays out in their own lives is another matter...
Throughout the Gospel, Jesus invites his hear-
ers to expand their notions of neighbour and
friend, kith and kin, until we see all Christians,
indeed all humanity, from near and far, living
and dead, and still to come, as our people, as
‘us’ rather than ‘them’. Piece by piece Jesus
breaks down the tribalism, the ancient animosi-
ties, the in-groups and out-groups, enlarging
our moral imaginations and sensitivities, so we
can put ourselves in the shoes of others af-
fected by what we do or fail to do.

During this conference our attention was
drawn to the revival of the atheist book-and-
conference industry. The product strikes me
as of very uneven quality, commonly ill-in-
formed about religion and often rehearsing
rather tired nineteenth century arguments. The
sex abuse crisis has been something of a gift
for that industry, but apart from that and some
bits of new science, there’s not much that’s
new about the ‘new’ atheism.

One claim that several of its prophets make
is that religion in general, and Christianity in
particular, has made no real contribution to
human welfare. Though there are many things
one might criticize in Christian history, this
claim is surely bizarre. Inspired by the Story
of the Good Samaritan and the other teach-
ings and life of Christ its author, Christians
have, down through the ages, established or-
phanages, hospices, hospitals and soup kitch-
ens. Sainted individuals, religious congregations, lay associations such as Vinnies and mass operations such as Caritas, have established so many projects that contribute to human welfare that they and their imitators are now part of the ordinary fabric of any civil society. Following the Good Sam’s lead, these charitable works serve not only to ‘our own’, but anyone in need; indeed they make anyone in need ‘our own’. As in the story they focus not only on pressing present need but ongoing welfare. And each of these works, as lived, contemporary versions of Good Samaritanism, challenge us all to exercise more moral imagination, sensitivity and response towards those who suffer. They call us to *com-passio* or fellow-suffering, indeed to identification with every suffering person, and to immediate, active and continuing care.

It was precisely this gut-churning compassion that was the driving force of Jesus’ mission. He cared: not just in the abstract, like the reader of a novel sympathising with a fictional character; not like a bureaucrat devising a strategy from a distance; but as one who laughs with those who laugh and mourns with those who mourn, who shares in people’s lives, has passion for their passions, suffers in their suffering, and is thus impelled to respond. Jesus identifies himself with those he meets, invests himself in them, makes their good his own, their salvation his purpose.

This was not merely a peculiar feature of Jesus’ *psychology*, as if he were a bit of an old softie, a bleeding-heart sentimentalist: it is replete with *theological* significance. The God described so often in the Psalms as ‘full of compassion and steadfast love’ is the One Jesus knew in prayer, in Liturgy, in his personal life as his *Father*. It was this loving Father-God whose only love-child Jesus was and whom Jesus made known. The Good Samaritan is God in Christ, coming with healing balm and boundless generosity to a broken humanity, and to each example of broken humanity, every case of dire and desperate need. God in his Christ comes seeking no gratitude, no reciprocation, making no inquiry into how deserving the victim, how great their contribution, how many boat-loads of others there might be, whether they have queued properly and have their identity papers in order… And he comes not just to address present pain but to provide for us at the inn to the future, indeed into the life of Resurrection when he will return to settle up for us.

During this time with you I’ve been pondering how biblical and systematic theology are to be *spiritual works of mercy*, not just activities of the speculative intellect, the incessant delivery of classes, assessment tasks and grades, the never-ending production of books and articles as faith seeks understanding and institutions and individuals seek publications. How can theology be healing balm, oil for troubled waters, wine for bruised bodies and battered souls?

I turned, as is my Dominican instinct, to Uncle Tom’s cabin, the *Summa Theologiae*, where the very first question is about the mission of theology and so of the theologian. Is theology a genuine academic discipline and how does it compare with other scholarly disciplines and other human activities? What use is it really? What’s its proper subject matter and method and how does it relate to philosophy, Scriptural exegesis and practice? It was as if the Angelic Doctor was on one of those government accreditation panels reviewing our theologates and requiring justification for their programmes—though with a much more interesting questionnaire. His thought is that there are things to which the human spirit in-
eluctably reaches out but cannot attain without help, and so many are left over-stretched, disappointed, confused. Some things we might in principle grasp by our own efforts, but it will ‘only be by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.’ Humanity, though capable of the nobility and insight of the Good Samaritan, is as often the man beaten and left for dead, not just physically, but intellectually, psychologically, morally, spiritually.

Human beings need more than social justice and social service, corporal works of mercy such as feeding, visiting, burying: they are more than sarx (fleshiness), as we’ve reflected upon in this conference in the light of the Resurrection. We know there are other kinds of hunger, thirst, sickness, imprisonment and death, other kinds of need for pneuma (spirit) and soma (bodiliness). In his treatment of almsgivings (STh. Ia IIæ 32) St Thomas puts prayer (and sacrament) first—before teaching—and then doctrinal teaching before moral counsel, moral counsel before pastoral care, pastoral care before reproving, pardoning, forbearing. There is a logical chain here which breaks if there is no theological teaching. Put simply: without theology, our morals, charity, reconciliation and peace are all at risk.

Amongst the many evils with which Christ contended and his followers must still contend, theological ignorance was one, and such ignorance can play out in terrible damage to whole cultures, societies, families, individual lives. We might consider the actions and inactions of soulless bureaucracies, markets and military machines; the distorted religiosities that leave some struggling to survive while others cross to the safer side of the road; the godless ideologies that in the century past killed and maimed so many; the religion-free zones that leave so many young and not-so-young people disoriented and addicted, dissatisfied and wounded. Welcome or unwelcome, sacred wisdom comes as divine light, to places darkened by violence and lies, to twilight places indifferent or confused. Sacra doctrina should be enlightenment, healing, food, new life, new hope and direction. Theology can be nursing care for wounded cultures and souls. The Good Samaritan healed in our story and taught all generations corporal works of mercy; but the telling and retelling of his story by preachers and teachers, and the examination, explanation and extension of our story by exegesis and theologians, has enriched us far beyond the mere example of charity-in-action. It has, amongst other things, expanded our notion of what a person needs and what it is to help a needy human being.

Jesus’ call to moral imagination, to compassion, to let our minds be turned upside down and our stomachs inside out, in caring for others, is as much a challenge to the modern theologian as it is to the ancient Jewish scribe anxious to justify himself. So is his call to action not only a call to pour oil and wine on obvious wounds, but to go to the core of what wounds and why and what might be done about it. This is a call to theological thinking and research, teaching and writing that heals, to a scholarly Project Compassion.

To the man born lame and begging at the Beautiful Gate, theological Good Samaritans can say: ‘Silver and gold have I none, nor any magic for your paraplegia, but I’ll give you what I have: the name of Jesus Christ who heals and saves and in that name you may walk with me.’

* Homily for the Conference of the Australian Catholic Theological Association and the Australian Catholic Biblical Association, St Mary’s College Chapel, University of Melbourne, 10 July 2010
THE DAY OF THE ATHEISTS

BARRY BRUNDELL MSC

LAST DECEMBER Melbourne hosted the Parliament of the World’s Religions. Then in March this year, again in Melbourne, people of the opposite persuasion assembled for the Global Atheists’ Convention in response to the invitation ‘...to hear world-class atheist speakers, and meet Australian and internationally acclaimed atheists, skeptics, humanists, rationalists and academics in one of Australia’s most vibrant and exciting cities.’

Even before these events there was a program on *ABC Compass* which explored the views and attitudes of atheists (29th March, 2009). Because of these and other similar public addresses and debates, God has been a much discussed and debated topic in recent times.

My focus in this reflection is on the atheists and what we are to make of this recent re-awakening of the God debate.

First, to avoid attributing to all atheists and skeptics the views of a few high profile atheists, it is to be borne in mind that there is a range of points of view amongst them on how to be atheists. Many atheists and agnostics are nice enough people who genuinely do not have any religious faith or desire to believe. Some state that they find unbelief liberating. Their unbelief is a matter of conscience for them. They mostly disapprove of the confrontational tactics of militant atheists and simply want to get along with those who do not share their unbelief.

Michael Shermer is one such. He is an American science writer and is the editor of *Skeptic* magazine. He founded the Skeptics Society in the United States, a group dedicated to exposing and debunking pseudo-science. He is in favour of co-operation and collaboration with religious believers. He stated on the *Compass* program:

I think it’s more important that I understand and embrace religion because we need to work together to solve—say—the global warming problem, rather than my first trying to convert them all into secularism and then we’ll solve the global warming problem. That isn’t going to happen. Before, global warming has its problems. OK, we need to address the problem now.

Phillip Adams essentially agrees:

I think basically it [religion] may be a virus. I’ve always hoped that the CSIRO would find a virus so people could be cured of religion. But short of that, it’s a fact of life and I think we’ve all got to try and get on a bit better with each other—atheists with God-botherers, God-botherers with us.

We who value our Christian faith can generally agree: there is no call for hostility towards those who do not share our beliefs. They are not opponents against whom we need to defend ourselves. Still, the philosopher-theologian in me cannot help wondering if they have thought their position through.

The militant atheists give atheism a bad name, as Mike Carlton wrote in his *SMH* column (March 20-21, p.14), referring to Richard Dawkins: ‘Heaven’s above, this po-faced cynic gives atheism a bad name’. The more assertive, belligerent and insulting they are in their opposition to religion and faith, the less attractive they are as human beings. Perhaps they might even arouse interest in what they are attacking.

Militant atheism is not as popular as one might think. Our age is one in which spirituality is a ‘good thing’. The secularization of Australia is found wanting by many, and the tide has moved on, from secularism to post-modernism. Spirituality has been making a return for some years now—it is culturally acceptable, even admired. The militant atheists are faced with that cultural shift.

We, too, are facing it, of course; it is a chal-
lenge for us, because the new spirituality is not necessarily a return to Christian faith and practice. It is more likely to be a do-it-yourself religiosity, a syncretism of beliefs and practices from many different sources.

But most importantly of all, I believe, the militant atheists arouse opposition to their message because they are attacking people’s beliefs and often these beliefs are deeply personal to believers. Other things they might attack, things that are less personal and therefore easy targets, such as the Church institution, its less than perfect office bearers, and scandals and other awkward topics. But people are much more attached to their personal beliefs.

Michael Shermer again:

Look if you encounter somebody whose deepest, most cherished belief is God and you say, ‘It’s all bullshit man, why do you believe this crap for?’ That’s the end of the conversation. It’s over. You’ve lost them. You have no hope of converting them.

People with strong religious belief have been ready to die for their beliefs. For the believer a great deal can be at stake. Religion provides meaning, purpose, reason for being, self-understanding, personal identity; it answers the questions, Who am I? What’s it all about? Where do I belong? How should I live? What can I hope for? For anyone with any religious faith a loss of that faith is too bleak to contemplate.

As a consequence, the sheer unattractiveness of atheism and agnosticism does not help their cause. Nothing to hope for; no mysterium tremendum; no Good News of a God who loves; no sense that facts are friendly, that this creation is God’s gift and the first of many gifts; no hope that the deepest longings of our human hearts will be filled. That this that we now have might be all that there is is unspeakably disappointing when one has grown up hoping for so much more

The militancy of some atheists can be counter-productive to their cause. It is not as though they have not been warned. Some emails sent to Richard Dawkins and his co-militants gave them clear warning that they were strengthening the cause of those whom they are attacking. The promoters of the Intelligent Design movement are grateful to Dawkins. William Dembski, a promoter of Intelligent Design, sent an email to Dawkins: ‘I regularly tell my colleagues that you and your work are one of God’s greatest gifts to the intelligent-design movement. So please, keep at it.’

Michael Ruse, an agnostic who takes the position that it is possible to reconcile the Christian faith with evolutionary theory, sent an email to Daniel Dennett to tell him that he (Dennett) and Dawkins were ‘absolute disasters in the fight against intelligent design’:

What we need is not knee-jerk atheism but serious grappling with the issues—neither of you are willing to study Christianity seriously and to engage with the ideas—it is just plain silly and grotesquely immoral to claim that Christianity is simply a force for evil, as Richard [Dawkins] claims—more than this, we are in a fight, and we need to make allies in the fight, not simply alienate everyone of good will.”

We might expect that what Dawkins and Dennett have done for Intelligent Design, which we do not approve of, they are doing for religious beliefs that we do approve of, viz. making Christian faith more attractive. Certainly, believers who hear their beliefs being attacked will be more inclined to seek a better understanding of what they do believe before surrendering their beliefs under fire.

In a way, one would like simply to ignore the militant atheists. To respond to someone who, like Richard Dawkins, believes that theology is not a field of study and should not be regarded as an academic subject at all?, and who dismisses biblical interpretation as
‘cherry-picking’ (choosing the nice bits in the bible and leaving out or explaining away the nasty bits), is to treat him with a seriousness he does not deserve. His scholarship on matters biblical and theological is non-existent, yet he confidently holds forth on matters of theology and biblical interpretation. We are dealing with a person with a closed mind. He repeats his set speeches wherever he goes regardless of the responses made to him.

One would like to just ignore him, but Dawkins is such a good communicator that I am concerned that he is making an impression on the more impressionable. His books, along with those of other atheist authors such as Christopher Hitchens, are selling very well.

We scholars need to respond in some way—at least to some of the basic dogmas of the militant atheists—not so much in the hope of being heard by the atheists themselves, but more as a service to believers who seek reasons to believe that they (the believers) are not the kinds of people the atheists claim them to be. The following are some responses that I believe we need to make.

‘GOD IS A SCIENTIFIC QUESTION’
One assertion made over and over in various ways is that God is a scientific subject, statements about God are scientific statements and that believers make many scientific claims. I have already responded at length to these assertions.

Thus, Dawkins in Q&A:

The existence of God is a supremely scientific question. Religion makes scientific claims….I think that the existence of a supreme being—a supernatural supreme being—is a scientific issue. Either there is a God or there isn’t. Either there are gods or there are no gods. That is a […] supremely important scientific question. If the universe was created by an intelligence, then we are looking at an entirely different kind of scientific theory from if the universe came into existence by natural means. If God or gods had something to do with the creation of life, then we’re looking at a totally different kind of biology.

An audience member asked ‘How so?’ Dawkins did not answer. We must assume he did not hear the question. A pity: I for one would have liked to hear his response. In The God Delusion (pp.58-61), he links his claim that God is a scientific question with his rejection of miracles, and says nothing about any incompatibility of the existence of God and modern science, so he has not provided an answer to the questioner as far as I know.

In the same line of argument is the reduction of religious beliefs to philosophy. I was in correspondence some time ago with an academic friend concerning our opposing opinions on Richard Dawkins. We got down to an argument over whether religious belief is a ‘metaphysics’ or not.

I was concerned to reject the claim that the first thing that needs to be established or adequately supported before one believes in God is the existence of God—‘the God hypothesis’. What is at issue is the relationship of faith and reason. My friend was trying to reduce faith and belief to philosophy, wherein God is a metaphysical hypothesis, a concept, a postulate which needs to be adequately established before belief kicks in. I was countering with St Anselm’s description of theology as ‘faith seeking understanding’. (We believe, and then search for a deeper understanding of the mysteries we believe.)

For the believer, God is not a conclusion in a syllogism, or the concluding assertion in a chain of reasoning, an entity whose existence is proven, and then believed in. What is accepted on proof is not accepted on faith. Faith is a personal response to a personal encounter initiated by God, a gift of God. God is believed because encountered inter-personally. And faith is shared—it is not a purely private possession, but a community possession. Our faith relates us to the community; we celebrate our faith together. We communicate with God in prayer and community worship.

Beliefs follow faith, and as we share our faith so we share our beliefs.

Beliefs cannot be established beyond rea-
sonable doubt. The believer has, and must have, reasons and evidence sufficient to assure him/herself that it is reasonable for him/her to entertain this belief. Religious belief is both pre-rational and non-rational—I do not say ‘irrational’, that is something else altogether. A believer who is in any sense a mature believer, is convinced that his or her belief is rational, though not based on rational arguments.

‘RELIGION MAKES SCIENTIFIC CLAIMS’

Richard Dawkins for one keeps asserting that religion does make scientific claims:

It certainly makes scientific claims about miracles […] you cannot reconcile an authentic approach to science with a belief in miracles or, I suspect, with a belief in supernatural creation. At the very least what you should say is that this is a scientific question.8

This leads us to the debate about miracles which raged earlier this year and is likely to be re-awakened when the actual canonization of Mary Mackillop takes place. The prospect has stirred unprecedented religious debate in Australia, which is to be expected in such a secular society. The debate is to be welcomed, even if it does allow much ignorance, prejudice and confusion to be aired, even by people who are expected to know what they are talking about.

The Sydney Morning Herald columnist Peter Cochrane (described as an ‘historian and freelance writer’) quotes the website of the Sisters of St Joseph and deduces somehow that the ‘Church suggests its procedure is scientific.’ The website as quoted by Cochrane explains: ‘A miracle is usually the cure of an organic illness so that there can be scientific evidence of the fact’.9

From that Cochrane jumps to the conclusion that the Church is asking science to confirm, not simply that there has been a cure, but that Mary Mackillop is responsible for the cure. But, of course, the Church does no such thing.

Cochrane writes:

Evidence must show that miracles have occurred. It must show that Mary MacKillop, in death, has persuaded God to cure…there is no evidence available to prove this, yet the Catholic Church insists it has enlisted ‘medical’ experts as well as theologians to confirm this miracle…[and] arrived at a conclusion that is beyond doubt.

When [the Church] invokes science and historical scholarship we are entitled to question it rigorously. Science needs to be defended against hysterics, and in this case the Church’s appropriation of the label ‘science’ is ridiculous. …the Church is working overtime to reinstate medievalism…[It] should stop campaigning for the supernatural and put its time, money and effort into cancer research.10

The problem as Peter Cochrane sees it is that the Catholic Church is appropriating science to support its claim concerning miracles. But we can reassure him on this: all the authorities ask of science is for them to give assurance that there is no medical explanation for the cure. That is not at all the same thing as to claim that the Church’s procedure is scientific, or that the Church is misappropriating science in any way.

After the medical conclusion is in, then faith comes into play. It would be rather strange for a person who has been praying earnestly along with friends and supporters for a long time for a cure, to say, ‘I am a one-in-a-million case of remission!’ when the cancer disappears. Surely it is more reasonable for a believer to say, ‘It’s an answer to prayer!’ or ‘It’s a sign!’

When a person walks by faith, then he/she can ‘see’ miracles. Miracles are not invoked as proofs prior to faith, and do not precede faith or provide a basis for faith.

As we approach the day of canonization, I think we can foresee a re-kindling of this debate.

What perplexes me most in all the debates is the presumption that theologians and Church authorities are so unintelligent as to promote
the kinds of procedures and attitudes that the critics are attributing to them. They seem to believe that we have no brains at all.

REJECTION OF MIRACLES
The rejection of miracles is a consequence of a rejection of the notion of a God who transcends the physical world and has the power to intervene in the course of events in the physical world. For the believer in that kind of God the possible is not restricted to the actual—the boundaries of human experience and expectation are not the final horizon. Thus the debate about miracles is a debate about what we may hope for and what is believable. And that debate is a debate between those who believe in God and those who do not—between believers and atheists.

In our present context in Australia we might give the debate about miracles a new title: ‘Mary MacKillop, Christian Faith and the Modern Mind’.

I have been surprised—though perhaps I should not have been—by the response in The Sydney Morning Herald, that of both columnists and letter writers, to claims of miracles through the intercession of Mary MacKillop. Non-believers and skeptics showed themselves to be so dogmatic and vitriolic, and personal in their attacks on the Catholic Church and Catholics! I am not the first to note that non-believers and skeptics can be just as dogmatic and intolerant as the worst religious bigots.

REDEMPTION
This is another doctrine that has come under attack and which calls for special efforts on our part to clarify orthodox teaching. Dawkins’ attack on the Christian doctrine of redemption is typically ignorant. He, along with Christopher Hitchens, cannot accept the notion that ‘Jesus died for my sins’. For Dawkins it is a repulsive notion. We can assure him that however he understands the doctrine, if it leads him to find it repulsive, no orthodox Christian could accept it either.

Dawkins:
The New Testament—you believe, if you believe in the New Testament, that God, the all powerful creator of the universe couldn’t think of a better way to forgive humanity’s sins than to have himself put on earth, tortured and executed in atonement for the sins of humanity? What kind of a horrible, depraved notion is that? (Q&A, as above.)

However, what we read in the New Testament is something very different. Redemption is the effect of God reaching out in love to us, overcoming the gulf that had opened up between humanity and its creator through the sinfulness and disobedience of human beings down the ages.

Redemption is the story of our loving God reaching out to us, coming amongst us in Christ, the Word of God, joining us in solidarity in our human condition, walking with us and leading us back to God, who is a communion of love, so that we can live in God and God can live in us.

Coming into our world, Christ came into a hostile environment. He was too good for this world, and so he faced many enemies who eventually put him to death. In that way, and that way only, did Jesus die for our sins. It was foreseen, inevitable, but still God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son to certain persecution and death for our sakes.

All this so fits our experience, personal and communal, that the doctrine of redemption by Christ makes eminent sense to a believer, and it is a source of unending joy and hope, giving enormous conviction of being loved by God. It is anything but repulsive.

Conclusion
All in all, I dare to hope that the efforts of the atheists have done more good than harm. They help keep the subject of religion alive as a topic for discussion. Perhaps we should be grateful to the militant atheists and agnostics, as our efforts as theologians and scripture scholars and teachers to enable believers to understand their faith more deeply will be especially appreciated thanks to them!
NOTES

2. ABC Compass program, 29th March 2009. See also ‘What believers share with atheists’ Cathblog Published: June 22, 2010 by David Timbs.
3. Compass program, loc. cit.

It is easy to say what one ought to believe, what to hope for, and what to love. But to defend our doctrines against the calumnies of those who think differently is a more difficult and detailed task. If one is to have this wisdom, it is [...] necessary that a great zeal be kindled in the heart.[...]

Wherefore, when it is asked what we ought to believe in matters of religion, the answer is not to be sought in the exploration of the nature of things [rerum natura], after the manner of those whom the Greeks called ‘physicists’. Nor should we be dismayed if Christians are ignorant about the properties and the number of the basic elements of nature, or about the motion, order, and deviations of the stars, the map of the heavens, the kinds and nature of animals, plants, stones, springs, rivers, and mountains; about the divisions of space and time, about the signs of impending storms, and the myriad other things which these ‘physicists’ have come to understand, or think they have. [...] 

For the Christian, it is enough to believe that the cause of all created things, whether in heaven or on earth, whether visible or invisible, is nothing other than the goodness of the Creator, who is the one and the true God. Further, the Christian believes that nothing exists save God himself and what comes from him; and he believes that God is triune, i.e., the Father, and the Son begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the same Father, but one and the same Spirit of the Father and the Son.

Among us, [...] ‘the righteous man lives by faith.’ [...] And there are truths about things unseen, and unless they are believed, we cannot attain to the happy life, which is nothing less than life eternal.

—Augustine, Handbook of Faith, Hope, Love.
MARY MacKILLOP’S prospective sainthood has brought miracles into public discussion. Reports of contemporary local miracles make interesting human stories. But they also provoke the ire of those who see them as mumbo jumbo and further evidence of the irrational character of religious faith.

The points and counterpoints in this debate are predictable. But another angle may be found in an apparent oddity in the processes of saint making.

Martyrs do not require miracles to qualify for inclusion in the public worship of the Catholic Church. They need only evidence that they died for their Christian faith. But other candidates for sainthood do need miracles, as well as evidence that they have lived lives consistent with deep faith. Miracles are broadly understood as events that are associated with prayer and are not susceptible of a natural explanation.

This intriguing difference between martyrs and other saints illuminates the place of miracles in the Catholic tradition. In it the martyr’s death is equivalent to miracles worked through the saint. Both point to a rent in a world that is declared to be self-enclosed.

The Roman world of the first Christian martyrs was politically enclosed. The sacred and the political were joined in the worship of the Emperor. The Roman imaginative world was one in which the public welfare depended on the tight union between the empire and religion.

Christianity, like Judaism, challenged this with its faith in a God whose claims and favour could not be locked into Imperial institutions. The central story of Jesus Christ was of a death at the hands of the Imperial authorities and a Resurrection that made his scattered followers the kernel of God’s people. They represented the new way of living that God had opened through Christ’s death and rising.

To the Roman authorities this faith located Christians as a set of outsiders who gave communal allegiance to a God beyond the Empire and so tore the tent that housed the sacred.

This view led the Roman authorities to persecute Christians, offering them the choice of recanting their allegiance to Christ or face torture and death designed to destroy their dignity and their humanity. Christians saw the death of martyrs as a demonstration of the power of their God who gave martyrs strength to endure being hacked to bits. They saw it as a vindication of the Church in its belief in a God whose claims and ways of acting lay beyond the control of the State. The martyrs by their death symbolised that rent in an apparently sealed world.

The miracles associated with faith and prayer also tear open a world that is seen as self-enclosed and whose possibilities are narrowly defined. In daily experience the world is enclosed by the forces of fate, like plague, famine and the contingencies of sickness and health. These tend to restrict our hope and sense of what is possible. Our world can also be limited by imaginative frameworks that limit reality to what we can perceive, and restrict our hopes to the ways in which we can make the visible world work for us.

Miracles open a gap in the canopy that we build over our world. They point to a more mysterious reality and to incalculable possibilities that arise from the recognition of a God...
on whom the world depends. The lives of saints, miracles and all, point to that deeper reality of a God who transcends the world and analysis of it. Miracles associated with faith are symbols of God’s presence and power within the world.

Seen from this perspective both miracles and the deaths of martyrs are symbols. They point to something beyond themselves. The twin qualities of miracles are that they are human events that are out of the ordinary and that they occur within the context of faith. For Christians who accept that faith they disclose a God who is intimately active in the world. Miracles do not demand that others believe in their God, although they do invite them to reflect whether their imagination of the world may be too circumscribed.

If miracles are seen as symbols, the questions about whether they really exceed the powers of nature will appear tired. Their verification demands simply that healings should be beyond our present power to analyse or to replicate. It does not demand that scientific reflection will never be able to explain or replicate them.

Central to the miracle is the context of faith within which the extraordinary healing is situated. Without that they are no more than an unusual event. But even unusual events lead us to ask questions.

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2473 Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he [sic] is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude. ‘Let me become the food of the beasts, through whom it will be given me to reach God.’

2474 The Church has painstakingly collected the records of those who persevered to the end in witnessing to their faith. These are the acts of the Martyrs. They form the archives of truth written in letters of blood:

Neither the pleasures of the world nor the kingdoms of this age will be of any use to me. It is better for me to die [in order to unite myself] to Christ Jesus than to reign over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for us; I desire him who rose for us. My birth is approaching. .(St Ignatius of Antioch)

I bless you for having judged me worthy from this day and this hour to be counted among your martyrs.... You have kept your promise, God of faithfulness and truth. For this reason and for everything, I praise you, I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. Through him, who is with you and the Holy Spirit, may glory be given to you, now and in the ages to come. Amen. (St Polycarp)

—From The Catechism of the Catholic Church.
THE PAROCHIAL SERMONS AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

DANIEL ANG

The recent Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890) by Pope Benedict XVI in Birmingham, England, has brought into view perhaps the most significant figure of nineteenth-century Catholicism. Even in his own time, Newman’s reputation as a Christian intellectual and writer was unrivalled. He attracted controversy on account of his theological creativity and conviction, an uncompromising commitment to the deepest principles of Christian faith, particularly as expressed by the ancient Fathers, and what the Tablet lauded as the ‘great fact’ of the day—Newman’s high profile departure from the Church of England for the Roman Catholic Church in 1845.

A deep thinker attuned to the delights and fragility of Christian life, Newman penned hundreds of works throughout his lifetime including theological tomes, pastoral collections, letters, essays, devotions and meditations, and narrative poetry.

Elevated to the cardinalate by Leo XIII in 1879, Newman became a touchstone of English Catholicism and some fifteen thousand admirers lined the streets of Birmingham on the event of his death. The Times well captured his spirit when it wrote in its obituary, ‘Cardinal Newman is gone to that rest which for him will not be happiness if it does not give work to be done.’

Fittingly, Newman’s legacy continues to be a source of vitality and challenge for the contemporary Church.

It is this profusion of insight and personal virtue that propel Newman into the prospect of sainthood during our life time. Of course, as others have acknowledged, the persistent and widespread call for his canonisation over the preceding decades has, to some degree, disadvantaged attempts to make objective assessments of Newman’s significance for our day. As the editors of a compelling work on Newman affirm:

Once great thinkers in the history of the Church—Augustine and Thomas Aquinas come immediately to mind—receive the status of ‘holy doctors’ our perception and presentation of their work, perhaps inevitably, become oversimplified and even something of a caricature (Nicholls 1991, 5).

The same phenomenon can be observed following papal elections: an aura of authority and irrevocability is often cast backward over earlier works regardless of their status as personal or speculative reflection. Notwithstanding the danger of romanticism, which threatens to alienate us from our own saints, the Church’s recognition of Newman’s importance invites us into consideration of his work, the project of reflecting upon the enduring insights of this Victorian clergyman for spirituality in our times.

Much has been written of Newman’s life which saw him progress from a non-sacramental, Bible-based Anglican upbringing, through an Evangelical conviction, into the High Church tradition of the Oxford Movement, and then finally to Roman Catholicism. It is a story well documented, including by Newman himself in his Apologia Pro Vita Sua (1864) which became a best seller on publication.

Readers new to Newman are encouraged to take up Ian Ker’s standard account, John...
Henry Newman: A Biography which has recently been republished and provides a basic introduction to the contexts and content of Newman’s array of theological, literary and spiritual works. The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman was published in 2009 and is a sound introduction for those interested in Newman’s theological principles.

While his Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine (1845), Idea of the University (1852), and Grammar of Assent (1870) count among the most impressive tomes of this material, it is in Newman’s numerous parochial sermons, both as an Anglican pastor and Catholic priest, that contemporary readers gain best access to the robust spirituality of its author, a spirituality which underpins and informs Newman’s theological writing.

The first volume of Newman’s Parochial Sermons was published in 1834 and their popularity led to seven more volumes, bringing together a collection of Newman’s preaching at St Mary the Virgin at Oxford between the years 1825 and 1843.

Preached without the florid enthusiasm of his evangelical contemporaries, Newman’s sermons elaborate a variety of themes which draw their appeal from the power of the Gospel itself: religious truth and error, the basic idea of the Church, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation, and the centrality of baptism in Christian life.

The intention of Newman’s sermons was to prepare the listener for conversion and to promote the central themes of the Oxford Movement which sought to emphasize the catholicity of the Church of England, apart from the poverty and liberalism of Protestantism and the corruptions of the Roman Church. In the midst of growing secularism, liberalism and non-conformism, Newman sought to reawaken his listener, both in heart and mind, to the elements of an authentically Christian spirit.

The sermons are neither rhetorical nor bland in style and ground themselves in the pastoral concerns of those who gather in the Church, inviting the listener to connect the particularity of their lives to the universality of the divine self-disclosure. As such, Newman’s preaching outlines a spiritual itinerary or pathway that is not innovative, introspective or sensational in any way but rather attends to the primacy, depth and implication of God’s Word for Christian living.

Underlying and directing Newman’s spirituality is a philosophic certainty of the existence of truth and so, too, an awareness of the possibility of religious error. Writing in a time in which non-conformist traditions were in the ascendency, Newman remarks in a sermon of 1830:

All this is fulfilled before our eyes; our religious creeds and professions at this day are many, but Truth is one: Therefore they cannot all be right, or rather almost all of them must be wrong’ (Ker 1994, 346).

Confidence in the reality of truth and its unity focuses the Christian on its discernment and pursuit though Newman acknowledges that this is an endeavour fraught with potential danger and misapprehension.

The discovery and embrace of truth will demand first the renunciation of those false measures by which we approach the Gospel and by which we would have ourselves identified. This includes the lure of ‘private judgement’, a self-devised standard of truth, which Newman held to be the stumbling block of the Dissenters. In his sermon, ‘Truth Hidden When Not Sought After’, Newman laments:

The present confused and perplexed state of things... these men say... provided we think our-
selves right, one set of opinions is as good as another, that we shall all come right in the end if we do but mean well, or rather if we do not mean ill (Ker 1994, 350-1).

A careless indifference to the demands and unity of religious truth undercuts the spiritual life from the outset and leaves one imprisoned by ignorance on all sides.

Newman warns also of the dangers of rationalism in this search for truth, a peril of the Enlightenment legacy. While reason and education are to be prized as necessary helps in the seeking and gaining of truth, Newman holds that:

To rationalise in matters of Revelation is to make our reason the standard and measure of the doctrines revealed’ (Ker 1988, 121).

Newman makes clear that we do not know God on account of our own ingenuity or due to any natural talent; we know and approach God as receivers of divine self-disclosure. Hence, as Ker affirms, the great lesson of the Gospel for Newman is faith. It is on faith, not self-reliance, that intimate knowledge of the mysteries of God depends. Preaching on the subject of ‘The Apostolical Christian’ in 1843, Newman supposes that there are many who are:

…not open sinners… do not deny Christ, who honour Him with their lips, [who] are religious in a certain sense, and yet obtain not the crown… They have no claim upon the prize, because they run on their own ground’ (Ker 1994, 367).

Neither sheer strength of will nor exertion of the mind are adequate for the seeking and gaining of spiritual truth; rather, truth is sincerely desired and attained in the same measure as we place ourselves in dependence before God, in ‘direct faith, obedience and worship’ (Ker 1994, 375). This project is the work of a life time, an incessant battle to overcome the illusions of self-sufficiency in their various guises, only at the end of which will come our beatitude:

Let us remember that in its turn the time of labour and fear, and danger and anxiety, will come upon us; and that we must act our part well in it. We live here to struggle and to endure. The time of eternal rest will come hereafter’ (Ker 1994, 354).

Newman’s sermons raise the matter of religious truth as a confrontation and a gift that comes with responsibility: to seek out the truth and give oneself to its promise and demand.

In conceiving of spirituality as the endeavour to gain a true view of things, Newman’s sermons adeptly penetrate to the inner dispositions which impede everyday people from living in complete availability to God. One of the primary reasons identified for this impoverished condition in Christian life is a failure or reluctance to recognise our own fragile and undisciplined character. In other words, Newman points to a deficit of self-knowledge as a source of our complacency and half-heartedness: ‘it is our nature, our way not to obey, and we do not know this’ (Ker 1994, 103).

In order to walk the path of authentic discipleship, then, we must first admit our propensity to mistake good feelings for real religious principle and acknowledge the great distance that lies between our feelings and our acting. In fact, in an 1831 sermon, ‘Promising without Doing’, Newman contends that our only grounds for trust that we will make good by our actions in Christian life is the fact of our having done so previously,

I would have a man disbelieve he can do one jot or tittle beyond what he has already done; refrain from borrowing aught on the hope of the future, however good a security for it he seems to be able to show; and never take his good feelings and wishes in pledge for one single untried deed. Nothing but past acts are the vouchers for the future. Past sacrifices, past labours, past victories over yourselves—these, my brethren, are the tokens of the like in store… ‘Deeds, not words and wishes,’ this must be the watchword of your warfare and the ground of your assurance. (Ker 1994, 104-5).

The Christian life, then, includes profession but is fulfilled only in practice. One who lives in obedience to the Gospel, who com-
mits themselves to act in faith, whether it is serving the needy or curbing one’s temper,
…evinces more true faith than could be shown by the most fluent religious conversation, the most intimate knowledge of Scripture or doctrine, or the most remarkable agitation and change of religious sentiments’ (Ker 1994, 107).

Thus, the embodied character of Christian spirituality comes to the fore. Newman insists on the necessity of surrender in deed and act, as in the manner of Christ himself who perfectly proclaims and acts upon his promise, ‘I come to do your will, O God’.

It was this ability to preach with both insistence and invitation that ensured Newman’s sermons offered not simply edification but nourishment in the depths of God’s Word and God’s plan for humanity.

In ‘The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life’, a sermon of 1836, Newman demonstrates his ability to cast the light of the Scriptures on the vicissitudes of human experience. Drawing on Jacob’s exchange with Pharaoh in Genesis 47, one in which the patriarch curiously describes his 130 years of life as ‘few and evil’, Newman grounds the shortness of human life in the overriding sense of its great possibility. While each day seems to pass slowly, filled with the various duties and sorrows that all undergo, the years seem to pass by ‘as a dream, though we thought it would never go while it was going’ (Ker 1994, 231).

This paradox of time, its tedious length and yet ephemeral, fleeting quality, introduces us to the mystery of our own creation and destiny. We detect in the midst of everyday life the presence of a soul and a calling to what surpasses the measure of time. We are baptised into a world to come and from this perspective our worldly pilgrimage appears inadequate:

Our earthly life then gives promise of what it does not accomplish. It promises immortality, yet it is mortal; it contains life in death and eternity in time, and it attracts us by beginnings which faith alone brings to an end’ (Ker 1994, 231).

This paradox, of continuity between two worlds, brings to mind the thought of Henri de Lubac, himself a great admirer of Newman, who would remark, ‘eternity, which is beyond the future, is not exterior to the present like the future’ (de Lubac 1987, 85). For Newman, it is precisely in our experience of present life, both its great joys and disappointments, that we are called to recognise that it is unfinished, incomplete and therefore ‘not the whole.’ Time calls us to eternity; our experience of the everyday intimates a consummation in the everlasting.’

The imaginative power of Newman’s preaching is further exemplified in the concluding passages of this 1836 sermon where he submits,

All that we see is destined one day to burst forth into a heavenly bloom, and to be transfigured into immortal glory. Heaven at present is out of sight, but in due time, as snow melts and discovers what it lay upon, so will this visible creation fade away before those greater splendours which are behind it, and on what at present it depends. In that day shadows will retire, and the substance show itself. (Ker 1994, 235-6).

Here we arrive at the heart of Newman’s presentation of the spiritual life, as a way of sanctification that involves an arduous movement from the merely apparent to the real, from the contingent to the eternal. It was a trajectory that appears in Loss and Gain, a novel written by Newman in his Catholic years, and was to be the principle that adorned Newman’s gravestone, Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem (‘From shadows and appearances into truth’). All the coordinates of Christian life, from the sacred Scriptures, the teachings of the Church, the liturgy, to our bare experience of this passing world are understood by Newman to lead to this realisation, our home in God who alone is real.

In this year of beatification, the parochial sermons of John Henry Newman recommend themselves for spiritual reading as a ‘classic’ in the Christian spiritual tradition. In their treatment of religious truth and error, their empha-
leads us ever closer toward its ultimate subject:

Life passes, riches fly away, popularity is fickle, the senses decay, the world changes, friends die. One alone is constant; One alone is true to us; One alone can be true; One alone can be all things to us; One alone can supply all our needs; One alone can train us up to our full perfection; One alone can give meaning to our complex and intricate nature; One alone can give us tune and harmony; One alone can form and possess us. Are we allowed to put ourselves under his guidance? This surely is the only question. (Ker 1994, 320).

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...if we wished to imagine a punishment for an unholy, reprobate soul, we perhaps could not fancy a greater than to summon it to heaven. Heaven would be hell to an irreligious man [...] thrust into the society of saints and angels. How forlorn would he wander through the courts of heaven! He would find no one like himself; he would see in every direction the marks of God's holiness, and these would make him shudder. He would feel himself always in His presence. He could no longer turn his thoughts another way, as he does now, when conscience reproaches him. He would know that the Eternal Eye was ever upon him; and that Eye of holiness, which is joy and life to holy creatures, would seem to him an Eye of wrath and punishment. God cannot change His nature. Holy He must ever be. But while He is holy, no unholy soul can be happy in heaven. Fire does not inflame iron, but it inflames straw. It would cease to be fire if it did not. And so heaven itself would be fire to those, who would fain escape across the great gulf from the torments of hell. The finger of Lazarus would but increase their thirst. The very 'heaven that is over their head' will be 'brass' to them.


18
OTHER AUSTRALIAN SAINTS?

ARCHPRIEST LAWRENCE CROSS

AUSTRALIA HAS SEEN saints other than Blessed Mary of the Cross. There would be little argument that Caroline Chisholm and Eileen O’Connor are saints, which is to say, powerful evangelical signs in the ‘whirl of secularity’, but Australia has another hitherto unknown saint who died far away from the land of his birth, hidden and unknown because he was a monk in the strictest monastic order in the Western Church, the Carthusian hermits. Dom Hugh Weld lived most of his life in the Charterhouse at Parkminster, England, while his latter years were spent in a Carthusian monastery in Italy. It was here that he died, at Maggiano, near Lucca in 1952, a lifetime and a world away from Government House, Hobart, where he was born to Governor Frederick Weld and his wife, Filumena Weld, on 3 May 1876.

As a Carthusian hermit he lived entirely alone, usually leaving his cell only to celebrate the liturgy with his fellow monks, and to eat in common with them on Sundays. Otherwise the Carthusian monk works, prays, studies and eats alone. The only time spent relaxing with others is the weekly walk during which they can speak of whatever they wish. Theirs is a life hidden in God, yet so many Christians do not understand or appreciate the real nature or value of such a life of apparent withdrawal.

The vocation of the solitary is barely understood even by Christians, not even in the age when so many modern men and women long for the refreshment of solitude, silence and communion in the midst of their stressed lives. When even the outlines of the life of contemplative monks and nuns are suggested to them they protest that such a life is a waste or that it is selfish. Such a stance reveals that many modern Christians do not seem to understand that prayer, as communion with God, is a profound communion with all.

The traditional Christian view, and particularly in the Christian East, is that the life of solitude, while involving an external separation from society, is at the same time a life lived in deep communion with the whole Church and with all. Dwelling ‘on the frontier’, separated from all, the solitary is at the same time united to all. Living in conditions of the utmost simplicity and poverty, he or she is identified with all in their need and poverty before God. In fact, ‘the solitary is called to experience with an especial directness the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection, into which all Christians are called to enter.’

In the case of our unknown Australasian saint, his solitary life should perhaps be seen as the fruit of a deeply Catholic upbringing and of a committed and public witness to Catholic faith by his parents and his ancestors. It is complementary to the life of Mary of the Cross. Geoffrey Hull has written that Mary of the Cross’s passion for justice ‘was inimical to the spirit of her grasping age which filled the poor with envy of their social betters and fired them with the ambition to clamber up the ladder of social success in a manner that implied contempt of themselves.’ But the gift of the solitary life can also help our present age to recover a more balanced relationship to the material and spiritual world, because the life of the solitary is the same life of grace opened to all Christians, but lived more intensely. It is closer to us than we imagine. The life in Christ, sought in the silence of the cloister and in solitude, by pure prayer, by the purification of the passions, the forsaking of the world and its preoccupations,

...this very same life is communicated to all Christians. Through the Eucharist ‘they live now this life in Christ’, are endowed with a royal
dignity, are assimilated to Christ by the Bread of life, are ‘transformed by his Blood into a sanctuary more beautiful than the temple of Solomon.’

Such was our saint, as we shall explain.

His father was Frederick Weld (or Wylde, 1823-1891) of Chideock, Dorset, the son of one of the leading Catholic families of England. Frederick Weld’s grandfather founded Stonyhurst. His uncle, Thomas Weld, was England’s first post-Reformation Cardinal and his second cousin, Roger Bede Vaughan, was the second Archbishop of Sydney. The circle in which our unknown saint grew up was very different to that of the MacKillop family so afflicted with poverty and illness.

His father, Frederick, was a good and honourable man, devoted to promoting democratic principles. It is said of him that he was nevertheless inclined to be autocratic in his personal style and lacking in the common touch. He spent some eleven years in New Zealand, for a time as head of government, before returning to England in 1854. Some five years later he married his distant cousin Filumena Phillips (her Leicestershire family was later known as Phillips de Lisle) in England on 10 March 1859. Appointed Governor of Western Australia in 1868, Frederick and Filumena (always affectionately known as Mena) arrived there in September 1869 along with the six children of the first ten years of their marriage. There were another six children yet to come, our unknown saint amongst them. It is almost certain that on her 1869 voyage to Western Australia, Filumena Weld, the mother of a saint yet to be, met Blessed Mary of the Cross in Adelaide during a visit to the new Josephite foundation.

Governor Weld’s six year term in Western Australia was a full one developing the colony both physically and institutionally, but there is one matter that can give something of the measure of the man in these years. Under pressure in 1872, he refused to commute the five year sentence of the son of a leading colonist who had been convicted of the manslaughter of an aborigine. The authorities in London overruled him and the Colonial Office reduced it to one year. Governor Weld’s correspondence shows how distressed he was by this humiliation. As the Australian Dictionary of Biography put it, “It was small consolation when Secretary of State Kimberley commended him privately on his solicitude for the welfare of the natives.” It would seem that the Governor was always his own man. Protestants in the Legislative Council suspected dark Catholic purposes in every clause of his Education Bill of 1870, and the Roman Catholic clergy reported him to Rome when at an official dinner party he asked the Anglican bishop to say the grace. The Governor stuck to his guns and the Education Bill was passed and the Pope made him a papal knight when he heard the Governor’s side of things.

As the mother of twelve children, all of whom grew to adulthood (a sharp contrast to the MacKillops where death and sickness were always at hand), Filumena Weld proved herself a woman of energy, intelligence and deep Catholic faith. The spirit of the mother of this saint is evident in the story of her voyage from Western Australia to Tasmania in 1875, a blue water journey in oceans never safe, not even today. Frederick had sailed to Tasmania in early 1875 to take up his post as Governor. Filumena was to follow on a suitable ship with the children. The vessel chosen was sold before the family was ready, so Filumena chartered her own boat to take her to Hobart. The weather was appalling, the passage very rough, and the deck cabin flooded constantly. The

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COMPASS
Governor wrote of this journey: ‘The captain turned out to be an ex-convict who drank like a fish and knew so little about his work that Mena had to give directions to the crew when to reef the sails.' What the public record does not mention is the fact that the future saint received his baptismal name during this perilous voyage to Tasmania. Mena promised St Raymond of Pennafort, to whom she had a strong devotion, that if the family survived the voyage and she was blessed with another child, she would honour St Raymond in the naming of that child. She later kept this promise. The story gives a glimpse of the spirit of this lady, mother of a saint, who after raising twelve children, a busy public life and Sir Frederick’s death, spent her last years from 1891 to 1903 as a nun in the convent of which her daughter, Edith Mary, was Prioress.

Sir Frederick, almost in the spirit of the Christian knight at the end of his days, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land after his health broke down in 1887 and died at Chideock in July 1891. He was survived by all twelve children, many of whom had already become monks or nuns, and their mother was to follow them. The culture, time and place are widely separated, but the Welds evoke the memory of the Cappadocian family of saints who gave the Church Macrina, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and their blessed parents and siblings. Raymond John Lisle Weld was born in Hobart and completed his education with the Benedictines at Fort Augustus Abbey in Scotland. Thereafter he joined the Carthusian hermits in what is still the largest Charterhouse in the world, St Hugh’s or Parkminster at Cowfold in Sussex. His monastic name was Hugh and he was ordained priest in 1902. He died at the Charterhouse at Maggiano in 1952.

What was he like? There are few first-hand descriptions of him, but those that do come down to us are consistent in depicting a man who is simple, joyful and filled with light, whose very presence had a healing and consoling effect upon anyone who met him. A particularly well-written description of Dom Hugh appears in *Asking for Trouble* by Bruno Scott James, an author of wide experience both of the world and of the Church, ranging from monastic solitude to Fr Borelli’s street kids in Naples. Here is Scott James’ description:

He is one of the very few men whom I would, without the slightest hesitation or reserve, call holy. He had all the simplicity and joy which are the characteristics of a man living in close union with God. He also had a delightful boyish streak in him that made him one of the most enchanting companions without any vestige of the smugness that is only too evident in many monks and professional men of God ... during all the twenty years that I knew Dom Hugh he was always his tranquil and serene self. I never saw him disturbed, I never knew him other than kind and patient, and I never left his presence without feeling a better man.

He was no scholar, but he had the direct vision of one whose eye, in the words of Scripture, was simple and filled his person with light. His advice in all the trouble that I brought to him was always prudent, practical and to the point. When he spoke of prayer and the spiritual life he did so with the utmost simplicity, but in a way that only a man can who speaks not merely from books but from experience. His friendship was one of the greatest privileges I have ever enjoyed, and I believe that it has not ceased with his death.

Why have so few ever heard of him spoken of as a saint? The answer to this is to be sought in the attitude of the Carthusians to the whole business of saints. This can be best illustrated by events that occurred at the Carthusian monastery at Burgos, in Spain, earlier this century. It happened that a brother died and two fellow monks were delegated by the Prior to dig and prepare the grave. The brothers miscalculated and were digging close to one of the oldest parts of the monastic cemetery. Suddenly one of the diggers was startled to find fresh blood on his shovel. They then dug and uncovered the body of a monk who seemed like a young man sleeping. They hurried to the Prior to tell of their discovery. Surely this was a saint! The Prior agreed but
instructed them to fill in the grave. The Carthusians had sufficient saints and no need to seek more.

What then is Dom Hugh’s claim to sainthood? First, we must make no mistake. Dam Hugh’s simplicity and joy were won at a price. That price is always conformity to the Cross of Christ. An ascetic struggle always lies behind the joy and the spiritual beauty. This is a pattern amongst all the saints, and particularly the monastics. St Anthony of Egypt spent upwards of twenty years in solitary struggle with the demons of his original disordered nature. It was more than twenty years before he kicked down the door of his cell to emerge as the light-filled teacher, friend and guide for other Christians. St Seraphim of Sarov followed the same pattern. I mention him because the joy and simplicity of Dom Hugh, the transforming and consoling power of the Holy Spirit that was clearly experienced in his presence, recalls St Seraphim. Clearly the ascetic struggle had made his soul ‘into a sanctuary more beautiful that the temple of Solomon’ and his physical presence released into the world something of the power and grace of that one great sacrifice of Christ. Nothing illustrates this better than what happened immediately upon Dom Hugh’s death. These events also remind us of the theme of local Church and its authority in the matter of saints.

To make sense of the events that followed Dom Hugh’s death, we must remember that the Carthusians live entirely apart from the world. The only occasion on which the locals of Maggiano would ever have seen Dom Hugh, and then from afar, would have been when the monks took their weekly walk through the countryside. However, the villagers and countryside people seemed to perceive the very moment of Dom Hugh’s death. Crying ‘Il Santo e morto’, all the village and country people came flocking to the monastery. These people of the Church living in the villages and countryside knew that Dom Hugh Weld was a saint. How they knew is still beyond any explanation, but they were so sure that they demanded relics of Dom Hugh and in one account removed things from his cell.

Why is it that the holiness of Dom Hugh did not come to the attention of other Churches when it is clear that his life and the people of Maggiano both proclaim him to be a saint? It may be that those who exercise authority in the Church take little or no account of the authority of the people of the Church, particularly in the matter of saints.

This story of Hugh Weld is presented as a parallel to that of Blessed Mary of the Cross who would agree that while ‘it is right to keep the secret of a king, it is yet right to reveal in worthy fashion the works of God’ (Tobias 12:11). The life of Dom Hugh Weld was clearly such a divine work and an important though hidden part of our Australian Christian heritage.

NOTES
2. Ibid.
5. B. Bobrinskoy, Nicholas Cabasilas, Sobornost Series 5: No.7 (1968) 483-505.
6. Frederick Weld’s journal tells that he met Filumena or ‘Mena’ de Lisle at Wardour, the home of Frederick’s relatives, the Arundells, on the last day of 1858. She was introduced to him as Mena and he did not realise that her name was really Filumena until he asked her about the meaning of her name as they were walking together after Mass on New Year’s Day, 1859. The reason that this is of interest is that Frederick Weld had stopped in Rome on his way back to England from New Zealand and particularly sought out the shrine of the Roman martyr, Philomena. He made a pilgrimage to her shrine to ask for her intercession in finding such a wife who would ‘walk with
he to heaven’, to use his own phrase. He met such a one on the very first day of his return to England. When she told him the meaning of her name on the second day of their acquaintance he responded with ‘How curious’. She asked him why that should be so. He replied, ‘Perhaps I shall tell you some day.’ They were married in early March after a very swift courtship, given the times and their situation.

8. Lady Weld’s biographer was Dr Heather Vose.

Her husband, Noel Vose, assisted with information for this article and has continued his wife’s work after her untimely death. I am indebted to them for their help and most particularly for the information on the connection between Julian Tennyson Woods and the Weld family and for the almost certain fact that Filumena and Blessed Mary of the Cross met each other in 1869 in South Australia.


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On writing about the Saints:

It has always been a valuable work to write about the noble lives of the saints so that they may be a mirror and example and, as it were, a seasoning for human life on earth. In this way it is as if they continued to live after their death, challenging many who were in a state of living death, and summoning them to true life.

—Bernard of Clairvaux, *Life of Saint Malachy*.90

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In the first instance the lives of the saints manifest the inherent values of the gospel tradition. In every age the saints demonstrate existentially that in times that are decadent, ridden with confusion or ennui, or in periods of doubt, it is not only possible to live out the gospel, but that the gospel can be enfleshed in an extraordinary manner. In that lived tradition the saint witnesses to the truth of Christ (and hence, is a martyr in the most profound and widest sense of the term) and, at the same time, renders prophetic judgment on the age. The saint transforms the abstract claims of preaching, teaching, and theology into lived realities.


23
LAY MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP IN TODAY’S CHURCH

Not Nympha nor Apphia but a Woman of Our Time

ROSEMARY CANAVAN

I feel like Nympha or perhaps Apphia, women of the Christ community at Colossae and the Lycus Valley. At least I feel like Nympha as long as she is understood to be a woman as there is some doubt about the translation of the name in Col 4:15. All we hear of Nympha in the letter to the Colossians is her mention in the greetings to the assembly in her house. And Apphia is also meagerly attested as ‘the sister’ in Philemon 2, also in the greetings. These are women of their time in the early communities of believers, followers of Christ, identified ‘in Christ’ (Col 1:2). Their leadership is notable by the mention of their names among others who are notable leaders of the community.

I am the Pastoral Associate of one of three parishes now in a Cluster with one parish priest. The three churches are about four kilometres apart from each other, a little less than the distance between the ancient cities of the Lycus Valley in modern day Turkey: Colossae, Laodikeia and Hierapolis.

The churches of these ancient cities were a cluster in the sense of being instructed to read the letter in each of the churches. Nympha hosted one of these churches in her house.

Indeed I do not host a ‘church’ or assembly in my house; however, I am the ministry presence in the parish. The Parish Priest resides in the neighbouring parish and visits once a week for weekday mass and occasionally on the weekend. Regular weekend eucharist is presided by a priest who does not live in the Cluster and has no pastoral role there. I belong to a Cluster Ministry Team that consists of a Parish Priest, Assistant Priest, a Deacon and two Pastoral Associates (one a religious sister and myself a lay woman).

So what I am led to reflect on is my role in this time of transition, where the church as we knew it no longer exists and the emerging church is not yet developed fully but is groaning into birth. In looking for answers and for models, as a scripture scholar in training, I turn to the subject area of my doctoral thesis and thus my preoccupation with the ancient city of Colossae and the Letter to the Colossians.

The women named here, Nympha and Apphia, offer a surprising insight for me in the paucity of information. Firstly they are named. Apphia is ‘the sister’ as Timothy is ‘the brother’ (Col 1:1) denoting leadership in the community.

Recently I gave a reflection at the weekend eucharists and my reflection was well received and yet the community is not sure how to name me. They know I am a lay Pastoral Associate, a married woman with grown up children. Yet in this Cluster I am their first experience of a lay Pastoral Associate. Their experience is of religious sisters. Often I am referred to as ‘sister’ not in the sense of The Letter to Philemon and Apphia, but as a member of a religious community. This is clearly not who I am. Another parishioner joked about me being ‘Father Rosemary’ and that is such an oxymoron I have difficulty even laughing about it. It appears usual for the Ministry Team
to be listed beginning with the Parish Priest and working through the recognizable ordained titles before coming to the Pastoral Associates who are then distinguished between religious and lay. The tension between ‘team’ and ‘hierarchy’ is in the nomenclature and the reality of the new ways that we share ministry and leadership are not easily communicated through this.

This dilemma of language has brought me to an understanding of what it really means to be a part of the non-ordained priesthood of believers, what it means to take up the call to leadership and ministry of the baptized faithful in an authoritative appointed role. I can see that the grappling with the role of Pastoral Associate, which for me is but two days of my week while a full-time doctoral student, is about the growing of a new model of church. We do not really have the language or ritual for what is emerging and that is still to come. I am very aware that my role as a Pastoral Associate is different to others who hold the same title. The title embraces such a broad spectrum of work that it evolves for each person in the role according to their gifts and the needs of the parish or parishes of work.

It is possible for us to imagine the life that Nympha might have had and why she was able to be named as hosting an assembly in her house. I prefer to think of her as a woman of her time and context able to live out her baptismal call to ministry in the community of the faithful. She is likely a model for other women of her time. Similarly, Apphia offers an image of a woman of her time and context where the community knew what it meant to call her ‘the sister’. She also was able to live out her call to ministry in the community of believers.

My overwhelming call is to teach and it is that enlightenment that drew me to study scripture and complete a Bachelor of Theology and Honours and undertake a doctorate. My ministry in the parish and the Cluster brings together a career of management and training with the scriptural and theological study, tutoring and lecturing in practical grounded life in our church. Ministry keeps my teaching real, human and relevant. The opportunity to give a reflection draws on all of my learning as an opening to a conversation with others on the journey in this time of transition.

There are many models of church and ministry being tested and refined and offered for discussion. My sharing of my experience is to add to the mix of the richness that is being discovered as we try to understand our way forward with fewer priests. I do not have a magic solution but reflecting on the early church helps me make sense of where we are today. Nympha and Apphia cannot be described within the modern terms of Pastoral Associate nor Pastoral Director or any one of a number of similar designations. They were known by their relationship to their community as hosting an assembly or as ‘the sister’. We have no idea of their particular gifts but they remain as names among the community leaders. There is no doubt that we need a range of leadership in our communities now and into the future. Whatever their designation, they will be women and men of our time ministering in the context of their call through baptism.

1. The disagreement about whether Nympha is the name of a woman centres on the fact that both male and female options are possible. It is the placing of accents on the name that differentiates it between male or female and yet these accents would not have been part of the original text, thus the ambiguity.
2. My doctoral thesis is entitled ‘Clothing the Body of Christ in Colossae: a visual construction of identity’
THE WORLD MISSIONARY CONFERENCE
EDINBURGH 1910-2010
A Time for Reflection
GIDEON GOOSEN

In this article I would like to recall some of the salient features of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, and then ask some questions in this, the centenary year of the conference. A centenary seems an ideal time for reflection, review and planning. This article is not a detailed critique or presentation of Edinburgh 1910, but rather a recalling of some salient points which can serve as a basis for reflection today on mission in the local church.

Background to Edinburgh 1910
By way of some background information it is helpful to recall that, prior to Edinburgh 1910, there were previous missionary conferences which can be traced back as far as 1854, but these were on a smaller scale and regional as opposed to global. In 1910 the major Protestant denominations and missionary societies, predominantly from North America and Northern Europe, sent 1,215 representatives to Edinburgh, Scotland. They were mainly from Europe and North America with a few token representatives from the global south. No Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholics1 were invited. According to some commentators it was both the culmination of nineteenth-century Protestant Christian Missions and the formal beginning of the modern Protestant ecumenical movement. It was unprecedented in scope, preparations and consequences.

It is interesting to note that in retrospect some commentators have called Edinburgh the beginning of the modern Protestant ecumenical movement. Fifty years after the conference, and twelve years after the foundation of the WCC, J.H. Oldham, looking back, interpreted the significance of the conference in terms of the history of ecumenism rather than the history of missions.2 True, it was one (significant) event in a chain of conferences that did lead to the 1948 establishment of the World Council of Churches, but it was planned as a missionary conference albeit with ecumenical overtones. The word ‘ecumenical’ was in fact part of the official title in the planning stages, but then discarded because of the limited composition of Christians at the conference.

We can recall that the general situation in Europe and North America was distinctive at that time. It was full of hope and pride in what humankind (North America and Europe) had achieved particularly since the Industrial Revolution. There were a number of World Fairs where great technological inventions and achievements were proudly on display. The first World Fair (or ‘Expo’), during this the Period of Industrialization, was in London in 1851 and then, leading up to the 1910 Conference, other cities followed: Paris (1889), Chicago (1893), Paris (1900) and St Louis (1906). There was much global confidence in technology and humanity. The future looked very bright. In art there was post-modernism where new ways of expressing oneself artistically were tried. Colonialism (Spanish, British, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Belgium, and French) was still very much alive guided by a nineteenth century anthropology. Unfortu-
nately, it has to be admitted that mission was intertwined with colonialism, acquisitiveness, expansion, aggrandizement and feelings of superiority and racism.

**The Colonial Context**

There were a number of assumptions behind the Edinburgh conference which need to be mentioned. Let me select a few key ones. Mission was not so much about *mission to the world* as *mission from Christendom to ‘heathendom’*. Use of words like ‘conquest’, ‘soldiers for Christ’, and ‘Vexilla Regis prodeunt!’ (‘may the troops of the King prevail!’) were common enough. This underscores the combative ambient and language in which missionaries saw mission to non-Christians. It was said at the conference that the statement that ‘the only faith which will conquer Europe and America is the faith heroic and vigorous enough to subdue the peoples of the non-Christian world!’ Note the language of ‘subduing’. The tone and language used was often reminiscent of the crusades. The historical context of the conference was still very much colonial and imperial. After a message from the King read out in Edinburgh at the conference, we read that with a single accord and impulse the whole Conference, monarchists and republicans alike, sang ‘God save the king’. The conference had restricted the mission of the church to certain geographically demarcated portions of humanity. It was further assumed that European Christendom was the norm for expressing Christianity.

Not only were there colonial overtones but some racial ones as well. Azariah, an Anglican indigenous Indian participant, spoke out and offended some. He remarked on the way the white missionaries did not befriend the locals. He commented: ‘Too often you promise us thrones in heaven, but will not offer us chairs in your drawing rooms.’ Azariah’s speech had much to say. It was perhaps the first shot in the campaign against missionary imperialism.4

**Ideas Regarding Non-Christians**

As regards the participants, we may ask, what was their theology of religions other than Christian? From what we know they were well aware of a variety of opinions regarding the non-Christian religions adopted by Christian men. Overall their attitudes were very enlightened for that time although some (as one would expect) were not able to see any good in other faiths.

It is encouraging to read that the missionaries insisted that non-Christians must be approached with real sympathy and respect. Their insights were profound. It was said that their [non-Christians’] confused cloud-world will be found to be ‘shot through and through with broken lights of a hidden sun’ (reminiscent of rays of truth in the much later document, *Nostra Aetate*, Vat II). ‘Christianity, the religion of the Light of the World, can ignore no lights however broken’. Christianity, it was said, must absorb all the broken lights into its central glow. This may shed light on her own truths, forgotten or neglected. By going into the world the Church may recover all the light that is in Christ and become, like its founder, a real *Lux Mundi*. Naturally not all accepted the idea of some light in other religions. And the assumption was still that Christianity would eventually replace all other religions.5

If we think of the three categories sometimes used to describe approaches to other faiths, exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist, the above approach is far from the exclusivist approach of one end of the spectrum. Their thinking was progressive for their time but, we need to remind ourselves, they were often missionaries rather than theologians. However there
was a curious historical turn to the right with Hendrik Kraemer and the 1938 Tambaram Missionary Conference when a more negative approach to non-Christian religions won the day due to the influence of his book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. The nub of the problem was the denial of general revelation and the salvific presence of God in other faiths. The role of other faiths in God’s plan still seems to be a point of disagreement among WCC member churches.

**Vision on Unity**

Science was held in great awe at the time with all the inventions and new knowledge that research and technology had produced. The missionaries were likewise influenced by all these great achievements and saw the big picture of the universe and planet earth as a single unit within it. Within this context Gairdner was able to see the work of preaching the gospel on a grand scale as follows:

If we now can see it as one unit among others, it is this that enables us to see it also as a unit in itself, a single whole. And it is because the world has at last come to be realized as a single whole that the enterprise of carrying the Gospel to all the world is gradually being invested with a new realizableness in the minds of men. And it is because that enterprise is being thus invested with a new realizableness that a World Missionary Conference met in Edinburgh in the year 1910 with a new sense of its own world character, a new vision of the goal, and a new desire to be born again into a knowledge of God commensurate with the superhuman task.

This grand way of seeing the planet and the work of preaching the gospel also influenced their vision of Christian unity. As with other aspects of the missionaries’ attitudes, their attitude towards unity was overall surprisingly progressive for that time, What we are seeing is the Protestant arm of Christianity beginning to move towards the desire for a World Council of Churches in at least an embryonic way.

According to Gairdner, their vision of unity was this:

…the world waiting, surely, for who shall carry to it and place in its empty hands one Faith – the only thing that can ever truly and fundamentally unite it or deeply and truly satisfy it, bringing its one human race into one Catholic Church, through the message of the: *One Body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.*

Such was the vision which called together the conference

….and such is the vision which any narrative or account of the Conference must seek to convey to the whole Church of Jesus Christ, since on the whole Church’s welcome and obedience to the heavenly vision depends its revelation. Thus, only thus, may be fulfilled that prayer of all the ages as in heaven, so on earth thy kingdom come.

The focus on unity was reflected in the prayer-life of the participants as well. In the time of worship at the Conference, we read that in their prayers of intercession as in the debates themselves, the theme of the unity of the Church in mission continually surfaced. As one participant remarked: The ever-recurring refrain was ‘that they may be one, that the world may believe.’

Basically two models of unity were talked about at Edinburgh, a minority minimalistic approach and a majority maximalist view.

(1) **Minimalist.** This approach took the line that we are united in our common baptism and hence need do nothing further: there is a Federation of Christian communions and the practice of free intercommunion. An Australian delegate at the Conference supported this approach and denied that ‘any outward organic unity was necessary or practicable or even desirable—it would be material, mechanical, unwieldy, dangerous, inorganic, non-spiritual, external …!’ (It is still possible to hear this view in some quarters in 2010, in Australia!)

(2) **Maximalist.** This approach acknowledged that Christians are imperfect and that the unity we have is minimal. It stressed that a communion must include ‘essential parts of divine revelation or essential means of grace, and that to surrender these, or to do
anything from which that surrender could be inferred, would be a culpable neglect of trust.\textsuperscript{12} It was felt that these all have some fragment of vital truth—and all these fragments must be included in a higher unity.

**Goals**

The slogan ‘The Evangelization of the World in This Generation’ was often quoted as the aim of the conference, or to put it another way: to offer the Saving Gospel to all the world. Expectations were very high as can be seen in that the chairman, John R. Mott, thought that this conference was a truly kairos moment with a number of factors coming together to make a huge leap forward in missionary work, especially in East Asia.\textsuperscript{13} Together with this was the aim to get greater collaboration between churches in their missionary work and to achieve greater unity among churches.

The work of the Conference was in receiving and discussing the reports of eight commissions which had been set up beforehand. The reports had been made available before meeting. Because the titles of the commissions give a fair indication of the contents of the Conference, I will mention them and their date of presentation:

1. Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World (June 15, 1910).
2. The Church in the Mission Field (June 16, 1910).
3. Education in Relation to the Christianization of National Life (Jun 17, 1910).
4. Missionary Message in Relation to the Non-Christian World (June 18, 1910).
5. The Preparation of Missionaries (June 22, 1910).
6. The Home Base of Missions (June 23, 1910).
7. Missions and Governments (June 20, 1910).
8. Co-Operation and the Promotion of Unity (June 21, 1910).

**Changes Over One Hundred Years**

Now let me fast forward to 2010, the year of the centenary of the Conference. Firstly you could ask how the missionary situation has changed over the one hundred years since Edinburgh 1910. The answer can be provided by enumerating a few very significant points:

- by the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century most people throughout the world had been reached by the gospel;
- the percentage of Christians in the world is roughly the same as in 1910;
- most Christians are now from the southern hemisphere;
- whereas in 1910 it was countries other than Europe and North America that needed evangelization, now the old Christian countries in Europe need it;
- today the secularization of western culture is a threat to Christianity;
- in 1910 it was said that the para-churches, Evangelicals and Pentecostals work without ‘ecumenical discipline’; today there have been significant merges of churches and ecumenical sensitivity in missionary work;
- in 1910 there was no global forum for Christian churches, no World Council of Churches as yet; now we have the WCC and Global Christian Forum which together embrace all denominations;
- the original mother church/daughter church (superiority/inferiority) relationship has changed into a partnership of equals; there has been a movement from accommodation to inculturation;
- mission has moved from being church-centred to God-centred (missio Dei).

**The centenary: A Time for Reflection, Planning and Review**

From the above it is clear that the mission world has changed profoundly over the hundred years. Christian churches have to rethink what mission is and how best to carry it out. This is part of the reflecting, reviewing and planning part of any thinking Christian church and particularly appropriate in this centenary year. Here are some headings and topics which could form part of that process of review. I am thinking of the local church, that is the local parish, the parish pastoral council, the di-
What is mission?

We noted above the move from church-centred mission to God-centred. What does this mean? It indicates a whole new understanding of mission as David Bosch has explored within the context of globalization.14 Any consideration of mission must include an ecclesiology of church-with-others, a broad understanding of salvation which takes cognizance of justice, liberation, contextualization and inculturation. It must include the idea that God’s grace is operative throughout the world and is not restricted to Christians. It must include the role of witness as a form of evangelization. It also means a transformation from a theology of mission to a missionary theology. Mission is thus still necessary, but it has changed. In 2004 when Samuel Kobia took up his post as general Secretary of the WCC he soon called on the churches to confess and repent and invited them to a conversion in thinking and attitudes in missionary vision.15 Given the list above of changes from 1910 to 2010, it is clear that a re-thinking is necessary.

How does all this translate to the local church? For the local church it might mean more effort at trying to discern God’s will for the local church. It is less a question of what the local minister or local parish council wants and more a question of what God wants for this local church, in this place, and at this time. That requires a lot of discernment. How many are prepared to do this? How often do parish councils pray and discern before taking decisions? This is light years away from the maintenance model of parish life where business is as usual because ‘that is what we have done for the last fifty years’.

Research in Australia has found that many mainline churches have settled in to a maintenance pattern and all but lost a sense of mission. Parish and diocesan pastoral councils could look at their agendas and see what it is that they discuss at their meetings. Is it the annual fete, parish parking places and fund raising or is it how to reach out to those who have abandoned their Christianity, those who have no convictions, or the impact of secularization on parishioners?

What model of mission?

At a basic level is the question of what model of mission lies behind our activities. Should mission be based scripturally on the relatively modern (Colonial expansionism period) conversion model of Matthew 28: 19-20, or on the newer reconciliation model of 2 Cor 5:17-20 or indeed the coercive model of Luke 14:23 (‘make them come in’) which was certainly alive during the Crusades and in Medieval Europe.

Schreiter rightly points out that whatever model we chose, we should tease out the distinctive set of practices and conceptions for the conduct of mission according to that model.17 Should Christians be handing out copies of St. Luke’s gospel at train stations, distributing DVDs on Jesus and his teachings, or walking with the homeless and wounded? Do we aim at 5% increase in members of our Christian church, or 5% more people improving their relationship with their God? Do we see mission as aimed at increasing our church membership or aiding others to become more fully aware of what they already are – children of God? As we asked above, is our missionary work church-centred or God-centred? How much time, effort and prayer is put into discernment, or does the priest/minister know best?

Church–Mission connection

At Edinburgh the fact that some evangelicals and Pentecostals were working in the mission fields as more or less independent missionaries raised the question of the connection between church and mission. Can an individual do missionary work without a church? Beginning with the notion of church this is impossible. Kobia insisted that reflection on mission
cannot and must not be de-linked from basic questions related to what the church is, how it is constituted and what its mandate and organizational forms are. Unlike Edinburgh 1910, today the WCC includes Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches as well as having a working relationship with the (post-Vatican II) Roman Catholic Church.  

In addition to this we have the Global Christian Forum which includes all those not members of the WCC.

An examination of ecclesiology is all important here. What Christ realized in his life, ministry, death and resurrection is carried on in the church as Karl Rahner points out. The church is a continuation of the mystery of Christ. It is his continuing historical and permanent presence in our history. The church is Christ’s body. Christ came to preach the Good News to all and so this Body the church is missionary by nature. Therefore missionary work is intimately tied up with church. It comes down that through baptism a person becomes part of the body of Christ, the church. Baptism is not a private affair with the individuals committing themselves to Jesus.

The church is also human as evidenced by all the sexual abuse scandals by clergy, but there are also other failures by all Christians on occasions. However this should not deflect Christians from what should be the main mission of the local church.

Ecumenical commitment

Edinburgh mentioned the lack of ‘ecumenical discipline’ among some Pentecostal and evangelical churches in the mission field. How much ecumenical commitment is their in our parish and diocesan councils and how is it manifest? The NCCA Multi-dimensional Covenant among Australian Churches signed in Adelaide in 1994, was a great step forward but has it been implemented at local level? This covenant not only proposed that members pray together but included exploring with one another ‘issues and strategies for mission’ and the ‘shared use of physical resources’. How much of this has been done? Where is it written down?

Another dimension is that of planning together. Firstly within the church do lay people and their ministers plan their approach to mission together? The Catholic Church has been slow to use synods in spite of the ARCIC Document, Authority in the Church (1977) which encourages it. When will Catholics, for example, see ‘Church’ not as hierarchy only, but as hierarchy and lay together? Secondly the planning regarding mission, or some aspects of it, could be planned with other local Christian churches. This is sometimes done but more could be done.

Other Faiths

The question of other faiths did come up in 1910 at Edinburgh in the context of preaching the gospel to ‘heathendom’. The world was very different then since it had not experienced the devastation of two World Wars and the huge migration of peoples that subsequently occurred. Today’s world is characterized by multicultural societies and questions relating to other faiths arise spontaneously. This is another obvious outreach for all Christian churches. What do we think of other faiths? Are parishioners at least generally aware of the contents of documents like Nostra Aetate and Lumen Gentium (Catholic documents) and World Council of Churches documents, Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (1979) and Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions: Taking stock of 30 years of dialogue and revisiting the 1979 Guidelines (2004).

Do we in our parish discussions address how we might progress our commitment to dialogue with other faiths? There are many ways of dialoguing: life, action, discourse and religious experience. Which of these are part of the local mission plan? How are they implemented?

Reflection

All these considerations give us plenty of food for thought, review, discernment and planning
today. We can simply note the centenary of Edinburgh 1910 and continue the maintenance business as usual or we could use it as a point of review and renewal. There is more than enough for any parish or diocesan council to use in reviewing and planning missionary strategies for today. For that to occur acknowledgment that the context of mission over the last one hundred years has changed and vision and effort are required to meet the challenges. We cannot resolve the challenges of today with the mindset of the past.

A useful strategy would be for local churches to re-visit the 1994 Covenant. In the light of this document, local Christian churches need not only pray together, but sit down and explore ‘issues and strategies’ and work out how they can have ‘shared use of physical resources’. Sixteen years after the signing of this covenant we still have churches spending millions on new church buildings on housing estates for the exclusive use of their own denomination. This is not good enough and looks too much like ‘business as usual’.

There is also the need to be convinced we can learn from one another. No one has all the answers. This was mentioned back in 1910 and today we see a revival of this idea in the term ‘receptive ecumenism’. Azariah, the same Indian participant mentioned above at the 1910 conference, said that all Christians, American, Continentals and Japanese, Indian and Chinese, need to work together: ‘We ought to be willing to learn from one another, and to help one another.’

As we know, Centenary Conference was called from 2nd to 6th June 2010, in and around the historic sites of the 1910 Conference. The Edinburgh 2010 General Council invited 250 church and mission leaders to come to Edinburgh and also welcomed many visitors for the Sunday Celebrations. It remains to be seen in the following months whether this centenary celebration can provide new perspectives on mission and renewed action for the 21st century.

NOTES

2. Ibid.
5. Stanley, The World...246.
8. The Continuation Committee which followed after the Edinburgh 1910 Conference, led to the formation of the International Missionary Council (IMC) which in turn joined the WCC in 1961.
9. Gairdner, Edinburgh...6,7.
10 Ibid.,7.
11. Stanley, The World... 90.
12. Gairdner, Edinburgh...205.
18. Scherer, Edinburgh...197.
20. Ibid.
BETWEEN BUREAUCRACY, SUPERVISION AND ORIGINALITY

The Power of Personal Narrative

GEOFF NUTTING

With the submission of a doctoral thesis in ministry studies freshly behind me, I felt it suitable light relief, last February, to offer at an MCD research seminar the following reflections on my experience both of bureaucracy and of supervision. This experience is not limited to the mere six years that is the ordinary ration of time for that degree-enrolment (by design, a part-time commitment). Rather, it stretches back over more than half a century. What I reported on may conveniently be divided into these three phases:

• Act 1: late 1950s, towards an MA degree in musicology
• Act 2: late 1980s, towards a research degree in Religious Studies—a project never consummated despite diverse enrolments
• Act 3: twenty-first century: towards a doctorate in Ministry studies

Regrettably, time constraints meant that my comment on the most recent phase had to be minimal. My presentation, I said, might best be regarded not as a finished product but as a foretaste of a research paper—in-progress—one of which the abstract has by now been accepted for the MCD’s centenary conference in July. Such a paper, I ventured, might be entitled On the Ministry of Academic Bureaucracy and Supervision; and in it I would claim that, ideally, such supervision is of the whole person, not just of a project.

The forthcoming paper is one of innumerable possible outflows of my thesis research, and it will be helpful if I begin by relating it broadly to the doctoral thesis. Degrees in Ministry Studies are atypical, in that reporting on personal experience in the thesis is not merely allowable—it is positively encouraged. My own case stretches this permissiveness to the limit, in that the four central chapters are, quite explicitly, diverse narratives of my personal journey through life; and most other chapters are significantly biographical (or, as academia prefers me to say, ‘autoethnographic’). Our MCD ethics committee, in giving its permission for my project to proceed, did express concern some readers of this journal may perhaps share, as to the validity of autobiography as academic research.

Though I deprecate the widespread obsession with methodology, I have I trust sufficiently allayed that concern in the chapter of my thesis which, as it happens, I most enjoyed writing, the one entitled Methodology. If I have a continuing ethical concern, one that applies equally in this article, it is the ordinary human one to remain respectful of the confidentiality of others. For the 1980s segment of what I discuss today, persons and places will mostly be un-named unless by pseudonym; and I ask readers kindly to refrain even from privately guessing who might be who.

The Enneagram

One further preliminary explanation. My the-
sis seeks to test the validity of the somewhat controversial personality theory known as the Enneagram. My method is to examine what light it may shed on a whole life history: of seventy-three years to date! Commonly, this theory is presented as an analysis of nine styles of pathology in individuals, and how they may be transcended. The distinctive postulate of my thesis is that what we are as personalities is precisely our relationships; and my concern is with the fruitfulness or otherwise for original research of relationships between enrolled student, bureaucracy and supervisor.

Bureaucracy

A quick look, first, at bureaucracy in Enneagram perspective. What we find was put in a nutshell in a throwaway remark by Russ Hudson, the foremost younger Enneagram expert, at a 2007 professional training workshop I attended in Coolangatta. Universities, he said, ‘are very Six-ish institutions’. As handsome evidence of the truth of Hudson’s assertion, I produced a visual aid: a 2004 guide (of Polish provenance) to a university’s MA programme in European studies. Running to some thirty-seven pages, it was truly exemplary. What is meant by ‘Six-i-sh’ is that, below the Universities’ belt of pure truth seeking the following issues can loom large:
- Pecking order
- Authority of bosses at different levels, and of rival power-groups
- Pressures to conform to group thinking
- Concern for detailed rulebooks, such that it can be said ‘you will always be correct if you do so-and-so’.
- And behind it all, a love-hate relationship to deviance

A mild illustration from times long past is furnished by the fate of my MA thesis in musicology. Completed in nine months flat, it bears the submission date February 1960. The date of award on my Master’s degree certificate, however, is 7 July 1961. Bureaucracy at Durham in those days was, as I remember it, minimal by today’s standards. I doubt they had then any worries about potential litigation or the withdrawal of government funding. But their rulebook decreed something that had been overlooked: namely, that before formal acceptance of a thesis, the final title had to have been registered with them for a minimum of twelve months. My beloved supervisor, Arthur Hutchings, Professor of Music, was famous as a law unto himself, accustomed to get his way, and endlessly my advocate. But to my knowledge not even he bothered to challenge this law of the Medes and Persians.

Supervision

In the writing of that MA thesis, the supervisory relationship was virtually the only external influence; and by bureaucratic standards even this might appear to have been reprehensibly minimal. Arthur Hutchings, at Durham, and I working in London libraries, were about 400 kilometers apart. There was no email, and unless they were rich nobody then used the phone over such distances. Once, early in the piece, I wrote seeking Arthur’s advice as to whether I need read any general history of the period whose music I was studying. He responded naming a mercifully short book, which I duly read. Once, later, I made the big journey to visit him, with a short sample of my thesis drafting; but that seemed more like a friendly social visit than a critical poring over my original work.
Those two contacts with my supervisor, one face-to-face, were as far as I can recall the only ones. Most certainly he never saw from me anything remotely resembling a finished thesis-product until it appeared on his desk for formal assessment. Nor were there any research seminars, or peer-researchers around with whom to share one’s stuff. No one vetted my English. Still, in re-reading my MA thesis (perhaps for the first time in forty years) for the purpose of that MCD seminar, I was struck by how much I had achieved, virtually single-handed, in how little time. I could pick holes in it, indeed a few things make me shudder: like how often I used the ‘royal we’ instead of ‘I’, or the plague of exclamation marks. Still, back in 1959 the bluntest and most rigorous of my former lecturers, who had assessed it, told me that, as MA theses went, it was one of the best.

**Originality**

This is to claim no particular virtue for myself as an individual. Rather, it is to instance the fruitfulness of right relationship. What we are as personalities is precisely our relationships. Second only to my relationship with my parents, my relationship with Hutchings was decisively shaping for me from the moment he had offered me a place as an undergraduate; and at that distance of nearly 400 kilometres he was, by his very being, closer to me than any other of my lecturers could have been if sitting beside me. *He was in me*, and *I in him*. From my first encounter at age eighteen he had shown towards me what Simone Weil has declared to be ‘the supernatural virtue of justice’. ‘This justifying virtue’, she wrote, ‘consists of behaving exactly as though there were equality when one is the stronger in an unequal relationship. Exactly, in every respect, including the slightest details of accent and attitude…’

Many anecdotes could, at this distance in time and space, safely be told reflecting how, in his typical blunt economy of words, Hutchings had become my mentor, and what in Enneagram lore is termed my ‘totem’. One of the most memorable is of how once, as he was crossing Prebends bridge over the river Wear, Miss Scott, the prim and proper Principal of St Aidan’s Society, passed him in the opposite direction. ‘Drunk again, Professor Hutchings?’, she greeted him. ‘So am I, Miss Scott, so am I’, he responded. But suffice for now to give you some hint of the potential for close relationship as laid bare in Enneagram analysis, under the categories Type 5 and Type 8.

**Enneagram type 5**, the style deeply ingrained in me, is natively fearful, but deals with it in a way the dead opposite of the ‘Sixishness’ I described above. We *Fives* seek security by distancing ourselves as much as we can from others, both spatially and emotionally, especially from crowds. We become the natural outsiders to group thinking. We pride ourselves on an ‘objectivity’ that can be the dead opposite of what most people think. Stuck in our head most of the time, we can’t help but become ‘original’; but this will be fruitless unless others are prepared to honour it.

**Enneagram Type 8**, the style exemplified by Hutchings, is in a way very similar. *Eights* will do what they choose to do regardless of public opinion, just as Fives will think what they think and couldn’t care twopence if no one agrees with them. Both despise hypocrisy and false pretensions. For such unyielding individualism, they can respect each other as being both, in their way, ‘strong’. But Eights have made a priority from early days of being on top of things, in control of their life. Whereas Fives, in everything except their intellectual specialties, tend to lack assertiveness; and also to be obsessive in distracting themselves, endlessly putting off the job that needs to be done. Experience has confirmed for me what Enneagram theory would predict: that *Eights* can be the most natural and effective allies of Fives, generous patrons and advocates.
Finding a Supervisor

Over forty years ago, in his bestseller *The Road Less Traveled*, psychiatrist Scott Peck gave this counsel which I cite from memory: ‘Don’t just passively accept the services of the first professional would-be therapist you find; if the relationship doesn’t feel right, just pay their fee and look for another’. More pointedly, Peck added (and here I cite him verbatim from my ancient file of handy quotes):

If it is relevant to you, don’t hold back from asking what the therapist’s feelings are about such issues as women’s liberation or homosexuality or religion. You are entitled to honest, open and careful answers.

I would like to think that any supervisor approved by MCD would be unruffled by such questions, and prompt to give honest, open and careful answers. But experience elsewhere in academia, not to mention the Enneagram, has taught me to see such candour as a gracious privilege rather than an automatic entitlement, human nature being what it is. For a cautionary tale, I’m coming now to Act 2 of this parable, set in the 1980s: ‘Towards Mastery in Religious Studies’. But this will need some backourcing.

Sick of Syllogism

In late 1983 I became, at least for a long season, a somewhat changed person. In the wake of a second turning point in a mystical development fostered by time I spent regularly as Guest of Cistercian monks, I became sick to death of my old addiction to tight logical analysis. For the first time, a variety of Christian mystical texts became overnight an open book to me; and within a month or two I was moved to offer, as it were, new wine—a paper on Julian of Norwich—to ANZAMRS, an Australasian learned association for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. For such a new undertaking I had received no academic training whatsoever; but my offer was taken up, probably because in musicology I had presented three previous papers at ANZAMRS conferences, two of which were subsequently published in their journal.

Whatever the limitations of this premature brain-child (or rather heart-child) of mine, my first Julian paper, six months later I was competently assured that I had got it right, understood Julian aright. This was in Norwich, UK, where I was attending an international conference on mystical perception. The assurance came from the two conference organizers: a French medical professor, and RitaMary, an American Catholic Religious. Each held a PhD in Julian. RitaMary, who was then editor of a journal on mysticism, warmly urged me to pursue Julian research under appropriate supervision, and to keep in touch. Back in Australia the first bit, about appropriate supervision, proved easier said than done.

Act 2, Scene 1

One of Australia’s ‘ancient’ universities. Their English department sported a lecturer who declared willing. He had done Julian research under the learned American editor—a Catholic Religious—of the definitive scholarly edition of Julian in translation. What need to look further? I enrolled. But ‘John’, it turned out, though a Catholic academic, professed no competence in Julian’s theology, let alone her mysticism: his expertise, he protested, was solely textual. With him, a ‘Sixish’ person, security-minded, wary of his boss—and perhaps of me—I felt no resonance.

Nor was I encouraged by what I found when, in his English department, I attended a young woman’s postgraduate seminar paper on the distinguished Australian Catholic poet James McCauley. My own experientially based comments on that paper were, I found, warmly received by women present; indeed one of them most excitedly continued the discussion with me to the end of my homeward tram journey. However, a male present at that seminar had blurted out these words: ‘The Professor
wouldn’t allow you to write that in your thesis’; and with one accord all the male postgraduates had said ‘Amen’. It was not that McCauley was *infra dig* with the Professor; but in a thesis you were supposed to write from the head, not the heart. For me, no further evidence was needed, to decide I had no wish to paddle my canoe in such a forbidding God-professor’s kingdom.

*Act 2, scene 2.*

Perhaps, I thought, a Department of Religious Studies would be more concerned with personal meaning. Rather belatedly, such departments had started to sprout in Australian universities, including two in the state where I lived at the time. At one of these I tried my luck. Promptly its Acting Head advised me that in our State there was only room for one such department to thrive, and that was his own. But that was OK. ‘I would be happy’, he said, ‘to supervise you personally for an MA thesis on Julian, and you could treat the topic however you wished’. Perhaps I should have smelt a rat, but I sensed no problem until bureaucratic issues arose, successively in two forms that cost me much effort to no effect.

First, we were urged to apply for research funding. Such an invitation at MCD is very simple with clear boundaries and great goodwill; but there, a quarter century ago, boundaries were unclear. I sought subsidy to spend research-time resident in a variety of contemplative communities. My supervisor couldn’t see the point of that, but asked for a formal written justification. This I provided, with attached letter from Sr RitaMary in which she strongly affirmed that what I proposed was exactly what was most needed. That got nowhere.

The second bureaucratic request was that we write a detailed thesis outline and justification of topic, with an indicative title. Unlike a comparable requirement at MCD for a doctorate in ministry studies, this too came with no clear boundaries. Under my chosen title, ‘The Christian Psychotherapy of Julian of Norwich’, I complied in extraordinarily careful detail, critical of secular pretensions to the healing of the psyche. My supervisor, without decisively refusing the project, made plain his worries that that title would run into strife with the large and powerful psychology department of the university, which apparently might claim for their own discipline copyright on the word ‘therapy’. And anyway, he himself didn’t feel it was the right word. Probably this man was not himself what is called an *Enneagram Six*; but Six-ish issues ran deep in him.

Hoping a change of supervisor might resolve problems, I was once impertinent enough to suggest to him that his Evangelical background made it hard for our minds to mesh fruitfully around Julian’s meanings. Though clearly he was uncomfortable with what he regarded as being labelled, and sought to deflect it, I was formally transferred to a Catholic colleague. But the latter’s special research interests could hardly have been more remote from Julian studies.

If I benefited from that 1980s enrolment, it was mainly from the stimulation of involvement in a postgraduate research seminar which routinely allotted a whole evening to a single presentation, and to which I myself contributed two. I had, beyond that, something to show for it: two journal publications on Julian, and a solicited review, heartily approved by RitaMary, of a trendy new translation of the *Revelations*. But a completed thesis was not among the fruits. I formally withdrew, stating in part (in the final report required of me) that appropriate supervision had proved to be unavailable.

To my supervisor, who had to read this report with me before passing it on to higher echelons of the bureaucracy, this assertion was clearly a body blow. Sensing he risked exploding before my eyes, I offered to re-word it less bluntly. To his credit he declined this offer, saying it had to be *my* report, how I saw the situation. But he added that my topic had been right on the margin of his own competence to
supervise—he had had in his first degree just one unit in psychology; and he had only taken me on as a kindness to me, knowing there was nowhere else I could have been enrolled.

**Act 2, scene 3**

To these, his last words, I had two parting ironies to share at the MCD seminar. First, that I gained very prompt enrolment at that other place which did Religious Studies, the one he had implied could not thrive—and that with a supervisor of exceptional standing in the Australian community of learning. Soon this mentor was to retire and bequeath me to another, but not before spurring me, by his own quick judgment of what was fresh and new in my work, to embark on Enneagram studies. That was just three pages in a seminar-paper where I suggested that Plotinus could be interpreted as an Enneagram Five, and Julian as a Four.

The second irony is now nearer home. Before that, I had also met a truly wonderful potential supervisor, a Contemplative who had published on Julian, and worked under the umbrella of MCD. Gladly would he have taken me on; but he suspected a bureaucratic problem. And sure enough, it turned out that, while under twenty-first century MCD regulations he could have done so, at that time he could not, because I lacked what was then a prerequisite, namely a first degree in divinity. I had to my theological credit only a diploma from Oxford.

How I hate bureaucracy! For an Enneagram Five, it can be a pain in the gut, and risks unmanning us. For folk of my Type it is an enormous relief—a Five-friend half my age doing a theological PhD at La Trobe tells me the same—to have a supervisor who will deal with it for us, painlessly. I am most grateful to have had that privilege over the last four years with MCD, through a supervisor, moreover, whom it was a delight to be with, as indeed I anticipated from the first moment of our meeting. What we are as personalities is precisely our relationships; and my wife attests that in my time of my special community with my MCD supervisor I have grown in humanity. What he has meant for me as person will be always with me.

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**Compatibility of the Personality Types**

Each personality type thinks differently, has different values and approaches, and wants different things in a relationship. Some types have more elements in common with each other (for example, two Positive Outlook types or two Withdrawn types); however, with the lens of the Riso-Hudson Enneagram, the strengths and trouble spots can be specified for each combination of the nine personality types.

What are your relationship

* Values? * Expectations? * Decision and Thinking Patterns?
* Coping Mechanisms?

There are concrete answers to these compatibility questions. However, you need to know your own type (as well as the other person's) accurately before you can fully benefit from this incredibly valuable resource.

—From the Enneagram Institute website.
BOOK REVIEWS


At a meeting today that I was a party to a NSW trade unionist was coming to grips with the fact that Christianity had played a part in the life of unionism. It was newish to him, and much of a relief for him. During the ramblings of the constructive conversations and exchanges he spoke of the age in which we live and that it militates against action in charity and care, with people labeled as ‘bleeding hearts’. In his newfound Christian context he then corrected himself and made a pertinent remark that perhaps this is not such a derogatory comment for Christians. This book takes up that theme.

In many ways the chapters are a reappropriation and deepening of the spiritual impulse behind the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart into today’s world and contemporary Christian and Catholic culture. It is a revived spirituality, and as such a renewed piety, all around an ancient biblical theme. Frank Fletcher perhaps names it most appropriately in his chapter, referring to it as ‘heart spirituality’. It is hard to go past the impact of the phrase. The author, and indeed editor, places it within the context of mystery and poetry, a listening to the murmurs (a particular sounding of the heart). There is a kind of looking and seeing that derives its point of departure from the heart.

Another MSC stalwart Barry Brundell speaks of ‘kindness’ as an immediately recognizable feature of the members of the MSC family, indeed ‘love and kindness, humility and simplicity’, characteristics of the good shepherd himself.

And so to the essays in particular. There are 12 short pieces in all, each readable in a manageable single session, though there is no need to do so. The first six, in the main by Frank Fletcher along with a lay woman Kerrie Hide and fellow MSC Anthony Arthur take up the theme of ‘Discovering the Heart.’ The second set invites us into ‘Loving the World’, with Frank accompanied by confreres Barry Brundell and Peter Malone, and married couple Brad and Jacinta Sinclair. The whole is introduced by Michael Fallon and closed succinctly in prayer before the Sacrament by Fabian Byers.

These are well read and respected authors and disciples of the ways of the heart, offering a sense of warmth, depth and understanding as they invite us further into the mysteries of the heart of the triune God. Parish groups, prayers cells, senior students and university students will find a contemporary sense of holiness and challenge.

—Gerard Moore


(Order from your local religious book centre or direct from St Pauls Publications, 35 Meredith St, Strathfield 2135. To order by phone: 02 93943400. Or to order over the net http://www.stpauls.com.au/product/3747.)


The topic of sin has fallen under suspicion both in church and society in recent decades. For many it seems unduly negative and associated with unhealthy guilt. In this fine collection of essays, however, 24 writers demonstrate that discussion about wrongdoing can be con-
constructive and positive. As the editor, Neil Darragh writes, talking about sin is ‘about overcoming the obstacles to a more gracious future that transforms the limitations of the present.’

This is an eminently readable book, each essay being of very manageable length (generally 6-8 pages) and they can be read in any order. However Darragh’s introductory essay which sets the framework for the ensuing discussion is worth careful reading before embarking on the contributions from the other writers who come from a diverse range of church and professional backgrounds.

Within the constraints of a short review such as this it is impossible to detail the rich variety of this collection. Suffice to say that the discussion, far from being negative, is stimulating and wide-ranging.

Jenny McLaughlin, for example, observes that today’s teenagers are far more exposed to other faiths and values than were teenagers in previous generations. Drawing on her many years’ experience teaching adolescent girls in a Catholic school, she illustrates how they are unlikely to accept that an action is categorically right or wrong simply because of divine or church decree. They need to see the relevance of Catholic teachings in their lives and only then, delve into the nature and relevance of sin.

Glynn Cardy, an Anglican priest, lists some of the difficulties posed by traditional notions of sin. While the church speaks of God’s unconditional love and acceptance, its liturgy suggests a picture of God as a stern disciplinarian. The sin-language of the Church can also appear to function as a form of control whereby God is co-opted by a male-elite to keep in place minorities such as women, gays, and divorcees among others. Here traditional sin-talk has a political dimension that runs counter to the liberating message of the gospel. Moreover, insofar as it is associated with the schema of redemption whereby Jesus’ death is seen as a sacrifice of atonement, traditional sin-talk is seen to inculcate an unduly negative view of human potential.

Elizabeth Julian’s examination of the way in which the figure of Mary Magdalene has been portrayed in Western tradition (identifying her, for example, with the ‘sinner’ who anointed Jesus’ feet in Luke 7) illustrates the long association of women and sin in church tradition. Diana Atkinson shows how this had been detrimental to women’s self-esteem and offers a forceful challenge to the church to confront the sinfulness of its institutional sexism, arguing that there continues to be a general reluctance by the Catholic hierarchy to deal with the issue of this injustice within the church.

To talk of sin raises the issue of guilt. Indeed, as Darragh observes, this may be said to be its intention. An important distinction must be made between enabling and disabling guilt, and Trish McBride’s provocative essay on forgiveness may be singled out for its advice to preachers and pastoral workers. Undoubtedly Jesus taught us to forgive. Yet, as McBride demonstrates, there are times when to exhort those who have been sinned against to forgive their abuser immediately can actually be harmful.

Several of the authors explore the root or underlying basis of personal wrongdoing. Chris Marshall for example, considers sin as ultimately a betrayal of trust and provides a fine reflection on the story of the Prodigal Son. For Stuart Sellar the story of the Rich Young Man shows sin to be a hardening of one’s heart, a refusal to listen.

This book is a timely and apposite addition to a series by this publisher on spirituality and theology. It is recommended reading.

—Damian Wynn-Williams

(This review was first published in Tui Motu InterIslands, July 2010)
Ageing and Spirituality across Faiths and Cultures; Elizabeth MacKinlay (editor); Jessica Kingsley Publishers, UK/USA, dist. by Footprint Books; PB $39.95 [9781849050067]; 272pp; 230x150mm; 2010

Collection of essays that examine ageing in the context of the many faiths and cultures that make up Western society. Also provides carers with the knowledge required to deliver sensitive and appropriate care to people of all faiths. Chapters are written by members of the world’s major faith groups about the beliefs and practices of their older people. Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist perspectives are covered, as well as those of ageing veterans and ageing religious sisters. Issues of appropriate care are also addressed, and the book includes recommendations for policy and practice. Is intended for academics, policy makers and practitioners in health and social care, aged care workers, pastoral carers, chaplains and religious professionals, in hospital, residential and other care settings. Contributors are all based in Australia. Chapter notes; notes on contributors; references; subject index; author index. Author is both a registered nurse and an Anglican priest. She is Director of the Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies at St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Canberra, and a Professor in the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University. She was Chair of the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing in 2008 and the ACT Senior Australian of the Year for 2009. Previous books include The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing (2001) and Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age of Life (2006).


Reissue of a novel, first published 2005, as The Black Dress: Mary MacKillop’s early years. Written for teenage and young adult readers and based on the early life of Blessed Mary MacKillop (1842-1909), founder of the Sisters of St Joseph. Story is told as the recollections of MacKillop at the end of her life as she faces death. She recounts the trials of growing up in a poor family and her developing sense of religious vocation. This edition includes a new epilogue that includes reference to MacKillop’s 2010 canonisation. Teacher notes are available from the publisher’s website. Book was awarded the Young People’s History Prize, 2006 NSW Premier’s History Awards, and named a Notable Book in the 2006 Children’s Book Council of Australia Awards. Sydney-based author is an experienced writer for children and young adults.

First Steps in Religious Education; Brendan Hyde & Richard Rymarz; Connor Court; PB $29.95 [9781921421044]; 131pp; 210x150mm; 2008

Handbook designed to assist those preparing to teach Catholic religious education in early years’ classrooms. Topics include the nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools; the human, religious and spiritual development of young children; Godly play as a way of religious education; dealing with difficult issues; personal and liturgical prayer with early years’ students. Activities and questions appear at various points in the text, and further questions and activities are included at the end of each chapter. Tables; chapter references. Hyde is a member of the School of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, and was an experienced primary religious educator and a Curriculum Adviser with the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne. Rymarz has been appointed to the Peter and Doris Kule Chair of Religious Education at St Joseph’s College, University of Alberta, Canada. Both authors contributed to the To Know, Worship and Love textbook series for the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Hell on the Way to Heaven; Chrissie Foster & Paul
Kennedy; Random House; PB $34.95 [9781741669527]; eBook $34.95 [9781742741024]; 383pp; 235x150mm; 2010

Autobiographical account of a mother’s experiences of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. Two of Chrissie and Anthony Foster’s daughters were abused by Fr Kevin O’Donnell in the Catholic parish of Oakleigh, in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. O’Donnell was jailed at age 78 in 1995. The book presents a damming account of the parents’ dealing with the Catholic hierarchy, culminating in their failed attempts to meet with Pope Benedict XVI during his World Youth Day visit in 2008. Colour photographs. Co-author Kennedy is an ABC television presenter and senior print journalist.

Identity and Mission in Catholic Agencies; Neil Ormerod (editor); St Pauls; PB $24.95 [9781921032813]; 126pp; 215x140mm; 2008

Collection of presentations originally given at the Mission and Identity Conference held in Melbourne in 2007. They contribute to the ongoing discussion about issues and problems regarding mission and identity confronting Catholic agencies, in areas such as health, education and social services. Topics include Catholic identity and mission; common challenges for agencies; sustaining mission focus in a transition period; and succession planning and generational change. Contributors include Chantelle Ogilvie, Neil Ormerod, Bishop Michael Putney, Frank Quinlan, David Ranson, Mark Raper SJ and Ray Reid. Foreword by Philip Wilson, Archbishop of Adelaide; introduction by editor; notes on contributors; footnotes; references and further reading. Editor is Professor of Theology at Australian Catholic University and Director of the Institute for Theology, Philosophy and Religious Education. Previous publications include Creation, Grace, and Redemption (2007).

Jesus: A portrait; Gerald O’Collins SJ; Darton, Longman and Todd, UK, dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB $36.95 [9780232527193]; 262pp; 215x135mm; 2008

Drawing on a lifetime of scholarship and devotion, the author aims to present a non-sensationalist portrait of Jesus, based on the biblical texts. The preface sets out the preconditions of the study, examining the gospels as sources and the process of their development. The opening chapter draws on Augustine’s notion of the Beauty of Jesus to provide a framework for the following chapters. Aspects of Jesus considered include Jesus as healer, story-teller, teacher, the suffering servant, the Lord of glory, and abiding presence. Also presents Jesus as God’s Kingdom in person, as both divine and human, his use of parables, and the significance of miracles. Endnotes; select bibliography; index of names. Author is an Australian-born Jesuit priest and former Professor of Systematic and Fundamental Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome. At time of publication he was Research Professor at St Mary’s University College, Twickenham, England. This is his fiftieth book. Previous books include The Bible for Theology (1993) and The Tripersonal God (2004).

Mary MacKillop: Made in Australia; Daniel Lyne CP; St Paul Publications; PB $14.95 [9781921472596]; 96pp; 185x125mm; 2010

Reissue of an introductory presentation of the spirituality of Mary MacKillop (1842-1909), first published 1994. Focuses in particular on the ‘Australianness’ of MacKillop, and explores the key spiritual and theological themes that shaped her life. This ‘canonisation edition’ includes a new foreword by Sheila McCreanor RSJ; photographs; and further reading lists. Author previously produced a major study, Mary MacKillop: Spirituality and Charisms (1983).

The Paschal Paradox: A meditation on the contemporary challenge of priestly life; David Ranson; St Paul Publications; PB $17.95 [9781921472237]; 109pp; 215x140mm; 2009

Series of meditations on the experience of contemporary priestly ministry, both its delight and its challenges. The reflections are based in what the author terms the paschal paradox: that new life requires entering into the experience of death.
Topics include: The Risk of Letting Go; Finding New Life; Rising Anew with the Priestly Heart; and The Priest a Spiritual Leader. Book has its origin in material presented by the author at the New Zealand National Assembly of Diocesan Priests in 2008. Footnotes. A former Cistercian, the author is a priest of the Diocese of Broken Bay and a senior lecturer at the Sydney College of Divinity, where he teaches spirituality at the Catholic Institute of Sydney. Previous books are Across the Great Divide: Bridging spirituality and religion today (2002) and Living in the Holy Spirit: Elements of Catholic spirituality (2008).

The Price of Freedom: Edmund Rice, educational leader; Denis McLaughlin; David Lovell Publishing; HB $45 [9781863551205]; 480pp; 240x155mm; 2007

Revisionist study of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice (1762-1844), founder of the Presentation Brothers and the Irish Christian Brothers. Focuses specifically on Rice’s contribution as an educational leader, but also examines his earlier life, as a son, victualer, husband and father. Author critiques many long-held traditional interpretations. Foreword by Cardinal Edward Clancy. Map; list of key events in Rice’s life; glossary; footnotes; appendices; bibliography; index. Author holds a doctorate from the University of London and three degrees from the University of Queensland. He is an Associate Professor in the Research Centre for Creative and Authentic Leadership, Australian Catholic University.

The Trinity: Insights from the mystics; Anne Hunt; ATF Theology dist. by John Garratt Publishing; PB $37.95 [9781570756290]; 206pp; 230x155mm; 2010

Author of three previous books on the Trinity, Hunt seeks to bridge the gaps between mystical experience and doctrinal theology by examining the experiences of eight mystics from the second millennium of Christianity to discover what they can contribute to understanding of the Trinity. The mystics considered are William of St. Thierry (ca. 1080-1148), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Bonaventure (ca. 1217-1274), Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1328), Julian of Norwich (1342/1217-1274), Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), John of the Cross (1542-1591) and, Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906). Footnotes; references and further reading lists for each chapter; index of names. Author is Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy at the Melbourne campus of Australian Catholic University, and a former Principal of Loreto Mandeville Hall, Melbourne. Previous books include The Trinity and the Paschal Mystery (1997), What Are They Saying About the Trinity? (1998), and The Trinity: Nexus of the mysteries of Christian faith (2005).

What Catholics Believe: A reference for parents, catechists, teachers and staff in Catholic schools; Gerard Hore; St Paul Publications; PB $17.95 [9781921472572]; 96pp; 220x150mm; 2010

Concise overview of the central beliefs, practices and history of the Catholic Church. Written for those working in Catholic schools who are unfamiliar with Catholicism, but also suitable for others, such as parents and catechists. The 12 chapters are: The Church; Jesus Christ; God; Church History; A very thin outline; Prayer; Revelation: Tradition and Scripture; Sacraments; Religious Life; Liturgy; Church Year; After Death; and Right and Wrong. Questions for reflection or discussion are included at end of each chapter. Also includes a collection of common traditional prayers; text of the Nicene Creed; glossary; index. Imprimatur of the Bishop of Townsville, Michael E. Putney. Author has worked as a teacher and principal in Queensland provincial Catholic primary schools for three decades and is now as an Education Consultant with the Townsville Catholic Education Office. He holds Masters’ degrees in School Management (University of Central Queensland) and Theology (Australian Catholic University).
PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

October 2010—January 2011

For the Sundays of Ordinary Time 27 Year C to Ordinary Time 4 in Year A

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the readings for Sundays between October 2010 and January 2011, from the Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year C to the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

1. The First readings generally are selected with the Gospel reading for the specific Sunday in mind. This could appear to make the first reading simply a precursor to the Gospel. However it would be important to allow the unique insights and celebration of the First (Old) Testament readings to be honoured in their own right. The First Testament readings between November 2010 to January 2011 fall into three main types of literature: prophetic (Is, Mal, Zech, Zeph), historical (2 Sam, Mac) and wisdom (Sirach).

*Readings from Isaiah dominate this period (in Advent 1-4, Nativity, Baptism, OT 2-3). The selections come from two different authors (called First Isaiah, chapters 1-39, and Second Isaiah, chapters 40-55) writing at different periods of Israel’s history, before the 6th century Exile, and during or after the return from captivity. The Isaiah selections for Advent and Christmas are from First Isaiah written in the 8th century BCE at a time of political crisis. The prophet looks to a hopeful future brought about by Gods presence through an anointed one, a future king. This king should not be interpreted as Jesus, but one from the immediate royal household of Isaiah’s time. Christians reflecting on the prophet saw in Jesus a way in which Isaiah’s vision was expressed in their own day.

The selections in the Sundays Ordinary Time (OT) from Second Isaiah are songs of Gods servant, who will suffer and bring liberation to Gods people. These songs look to a future time of freedom and religious fidelity. Gods concern about the social consequences of the nations political alliances shape the various stages of Isaiah and the prophetic voice that is sounded throughout these stages. This particular focus through Isaiah provides an opportunity for the local Christian community to reflect on the political and national issues which will preoccupy us in our time and within our country: a new federal government, ongoing concerns over our climate, the use of wealth, and global peace.

2. The Second Reading for each Sunday is drawn from the letters of the New (or Second) Testament, with the exception of the Feast of the Baptism (Jan 9) when the reading is from Acts 10. This reading is very important. It sets up the future missionary agenda for Paul in the Book of Acts. God’s community is called to be inclusive of all peoples, rather than ex-
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Paul attempts to address issues of elit-

ism and factionalism amongst the

Corinthian disciples of Jesus, concerns

that are still with us.

3. The Gospel readings during October
to January are from Luke and Matthew.

•We conclude the Year of Luke with texts

from Lk 20 and 21, taken up with spir-

itual or theological watchfulness to what

is happening and alertness to Gods pres-

ence in the events that occur. These

readings prepare for the final Lukan

reading on the Feast of Christ the King

(Nov 21), where the dying Jesus offers

compassion and forgiveness to a repent-

ant criminal. Within our Australian con-
text, this gospel reading subverts the

conventional image of leadership. Luke

portrays a leadership exemplified by

compassion and forgiveness. Given the

political discourse over asylum seekers

in mid 2010 in the lead up to the fed-
eral election, compassion is a national

issue.

•The new liturgical year which begins on

Advent 1 (Nov 28) also commences our

readings from Matthews Gospel. This

will be the principal gospel throughout

the rest of the liturgical year in 2011. Written in the mid 80s of the first cen-
tury to Israelite followers of Jesus, it presents Jesus as the authoritative pres-
ence of God who is able to interpret the

Torah for disciples in a time of dire

change. Advent 1, when Mt is first pro-

claimed, continues the theme of watch-

fulness, and subsequent Sundays prepare

us for the coming of the teacher-like-

Moses, Jesus. The readings in the first

Sundays of OT from Mt begin to explore

the nature of Jesus’ ministry (OT 3).

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

October 3—Ordinary Time 27: Hab 1:2-3;
2:2-4. The prophet cries to God for deliver-
ance from violence. God offers a vision of the
called to act authentically from faith. **Theme—Acting in Faith.** In a world of violence, the disciple is encouraged to retain a perspective and trust centred on God. Local communities abound with living examples of such contemporary disciples.

**October 10—Ordinary Time 28:** 2 Kings 5:14-17. A Syrian (and foreign) army-officer obeys Gods prophet from Israel and is healed of leprosy. He seeks to offer the prophet a gift in return. 2 Tim 2:8-13. A revered early Christian hymn about Jesus that encourages closeness to him. Lk 17:11-19. Jesus heals those who are excluded from community life because of their disease. **Theme—Inclusion & Healing:** The first reading and the Gospel invite a reflection on the power of healing, ultimately about inclusion in community life. How does the local Christian community seek to include those who are excluded into its life? Who are the true healers in our community?

**October 17—Ordinary Time 29.** Ex 17:8-13. Moses prayer for victory is effective. 2 Tim 3:14-4:2. The minister is encouraged to be faithful to what has been taught, to Scripture, and to the task of courageous proclamation. Lk 18:1-8. An unnamed widows persistence gains justice and response from an elite judge. **Theme—Prayer:** The Eucharist is the local church’s moment of deep communion with all humanity and creation. How might these become a more explicit focus of our Eucharist celebration and intercession today?

**October 24—Ordinary Time 30** *Sirach 35:15-17,20-22.* According to the wisdom writer, God shows deference to the poor whose prayer “pierces” the clouds. 2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18. The writer affirms Gods fidelity in a time of suffering and trial. Lk 18:9-14. Jesus God subverts the cultural preference for favour and privilege. **Theme—God listens.** God responds to our cries in times of difficulty, loneliness and distress. God seeks to be with all who struggle. What makes us sad? What is difficult? What do we deeply desire?

**October 31—Ordinary Time 31** *Wis 11: 22-12: 2.* A song about Gods wisdom, patience, love and forgiveness for humanity. 2 Thes 1: 11 – 2: 2. The writer prays that his audience will be faithful to their call, reveal God to others and remain patient for Gods final coming. Lk 19: 1-10. Zacchaeus’ conversion reveals the essential attitude of the potential disciple: open to change, ready for justice, and available to provide hospitality. **Theme—Openness.** The second reading readies us for the final weeks of the year as we turn our thoughts to the many ways God comes into our lives. Zacchaeus in today’s Gospel expresses this openness in action which surprises everyone. Who in our faith or civic communities reveal a similar spirit?

**Nov 7—Ordinary Time 32:** 2 Mac 7:1-2,9-14. Jewish martyrs witness to Gods power to raise them up. 2 Thes 2:16-3:5. God is faithful and loves us especially in adversity. Lk 20:27-38. Jesus teaches about a vision beyond the present which is a share in Gods life. **Theme—Gods Life:** People constantly reflect on their present and commit themselves to God even in adversity. They witness to Gods presence in their world and beyond what appears to be. Our communities are filled with such ordinary and faithful witnesses.

**Nov 14—Ordinary Time 33:** *Mal 3:19-20.* The prophet affirms that Gods care (sun of righteousness) will continue to be revealed to us in the midst of difficulty. 2 Thes 3:7-12. People are encouraged to continue to live committed to the present world rather than focus purely on the world to come. Lk 21:5-19 Jesus encourages his disciples not to be led astray, or follow messianic pretenders who promise everything. **Theme—Fidelity.** In our local community, many model fidelity to love God and follow Jesus even in the midst of difficulties. These people can be named and celebrated. (A little note about today’s gospel: This is apocalyptic writing at its best, not literal descriptions but theological insights into Gods presence.)

**Nov 21—Christ the King:** 2 Sam 5:1-3. David is anointed king over Israel. Col 1:12-
20. This is a rich hymn celebrating Jesus cosmic, universal rule and leadership of the Church. Lk 23:35-43. Jesus final word before death is forgiveness to a criminal. Jesus compassion continues right to the end of his life. This is the true celebration of this Feast: Jesus as King, or perhaps more relevantly as Universal Authority, reveals his authority through his forgiveness. Theme—Compassion: Jesus shows that a true leader (in political, civil or church life) is one who models compassion, especially to those who seem undeserved. Such leadership goes against the convention in which compassion is shown only to those who deserve it. Jesus approach is non discriminatory.

**Liturgical Year A**

**Nov 28—Advent 1:** Is 2:1-5. God’s vision for Jerusalem: a place of union and justice. Rom 13:11-14. Paul encourages spiritual alertness in the present. Mt 24:37-44. Jesus encourages disciples to keep awake, spiritual alertness and sensitivity to what is now needed. Theme—Alertness: This first Sunday of the new liturgical year begins with encouragement to live sensitive to Gods presence to oneself, the community and world. Spiritual alertness is necessary for recognising Gods advent. What ways are helpful in deepening our sensitivity to Gods presence?

**Dec 5—Advent 2:** Is 11:1-10. The prophet envisions a new era of social communion, cosmic harmony and deep kindness initiated through Gods spirit through the root of Jesse. Rom 15:4-9. Paul encourages community hospitality and unity as his readers await Gods coming. Mt 3:1-12. John the Baptist proclaims Jesus coming encouraging his audience to be open and repentant. Theme—Conversion. The Baptists message announces what is essential for us as we prepare for the birth of Jesus: openness to God and our world, and a spirit of conversion. These have universal and cosmic implications (as in Isaiah).

**Dec 12—Advent 3:** Is 35:1-6a, 10. Gods coming will bring cosmic and earthly renewal, and human liberation. The whole universe and all that enlivens it will be liberated. James 5:7-10. We patiently await Gods coming. We live peaceably with all. Mt 11:2-11. Jesus announces his mission of liberation and healing. Theme—Liberation and healing. Our world struggles and is in need of Gods healing. God desires our wholeness, healing and happiness. We celebrate Gods desire in our Sunday Eucharist.

**Dec 19—Advent 4:** Is 7:10-14. God promises through the prophet that King Ahaz will receive a sign of royal perpetuity. The King resists Gods promise. Rom 1:1-7. This introduction to Paul’s great letter summarises the heart of the Gospel: Jesus role with humanity. Mt 1:18-25. The announcement of the birth of Jesus to Joseph: Jesus is named God-with-us. Theme—Gods presence. Every Eucharist is a celebration of Gods presence in this community, and through this community to the world. Many desire to experience this presence. Examples abound, can be named and celebrated.

**Dec 25—Nativity:** Is 9:2-7 The prophet honours a future anointed leader who will be a source of authority and hope. Titus 2:11-14. Gods grace has appeared in Jesus who offers us hope and release. Lk 2:1-16. The birth of Jesus in a city setting. Theme—Birth. The metaphor of birth is a reminder of hope, promise, newness and freshness. Jesus birth brings the promise of these to our world. Can we celebrate how this is happening around us, and name where hope and promise are needed?

**Jan 2, 2011—Epiphany of Jesus:** Is 60:1-6. Gods light shines on creation and humanity. This makes a difference to how our world is perceived. Eph 3:2-3.5-6. The mystery of Gods universal and hospitable love means that we share in Gods life. Mt 2:1-12. The wise follow the stars; their eyes are on the heavens, their ear to the Scriptures and their desire on Jesus. Theme—Being Enlightened. At the core of every being is the inner light of God. We
affirm our search for God and the way we draw close to God through Jesus. Epiphany is a continuous feast (however unrecognised) in the heart of every human being. Can we identify its manifestation today in the hearts of those we know?

**Jan 9—Baptism of Jesus:** Is 42:1-4, 6-7 God delights in the Servant, who will bring liberation to the disconsolate. Acts 10:34-38. Peter acclaims to Cornelius Roman household that Jesus is Gods baptised and anointed one. All people, no matter their social or ethnic background, belong to God. Mt 3:13-17. Jesus is baptised and declared beloved. Theme—Being Beloved. In a world of turmoil, this celebration offers an opportunity for the baptised community to remember and celebrate its belovedness. God delights in us. This is an important moment to name who God is for us, and we for God, especially when contrary voices seem to dominate.

**Jan 16—Ordinary Time 2:** Is 49:3, 5-6 Gods Servant is chosen from before time, with a mission of restoration to a broken and dispersed people. 1 Cor 1:1-3. This is the beginning of a famous letter, in which the Corinthian Christians are reminded of their call to sainthood, and their relationship to God and Jesus. Jn 1:29-34. John the Baptist recognises Jesus as the chosen one and possessor of Gods Spirit. Theme—Spirit Possessed: Our communion with Jesus through baptism and Eucharist reminds us that we, like Jesus, possess the Spirit of God. We are called, like the Servant, to proclaim restoration and hope to people.

**Jan 23—Ordinary Time 3:** Is 9:1-4. A beautiful poem of Gods overwhelming vision for humanity: light, peace and freedom in the midst of oppression. 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17-18. Paul addresses the problem at Corinth of division. The true source of unity is Jesus, the Good News. Mt 4:12-23. Jesus presence and ministry echoes the Is reading of liberation. Jesus calls his first community of disciples. Theme—Liberation and Hope: The hope expressed in the vision of Isaiah in the first reading touches our deepest desires. Mt’s Jesus expresses this as he calls his first disciples. How is our local faith community an expression of that hope and liberty, of Isaiah’s vision?

**Jan 30—Ordinary Time 4:** Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13. The humble are invited to seek God. They are Gods true people. 1 Cor 1:26-31. Societies rejected and foolish ones reveal the power of God evident in Jesus, Gods wisdom. Mt 5:1-12. Jesus speaks the essential qualities (Beatitudes) at the heart of discipleship. Theme—Humility. Humility is not about putting ourselves down or allowing others to walk over us. It is the truthful realisation of who are before God: we are people of the earth (humilis Latin, earth) in communion with all people and creatures. Living by such an attitude opens us up the power and action of God, which makes us blessed.

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All must listen with reverence to the readings of God’s word, for they make up an element of greatest importance in the Liturgy. Although in the readings from the Sacred Scripture God’s word addresses all people of every era and is understandable to them, nevertheless, a living commentary on the word, that is, the homily, as part of the liturgical action, fosters a fuller understanding and effectiveness of the word.

—General Instruction on the Roman Missal, 29.