REPORT FROM World Youth Day in Madrid that caught my attention was that of protesters at the welcome to Pope Benedict. In the face of more than a million cheering young people a number of—one must admit—very brave and dedicated protesters were chanting: ‘God yes! Church no!’

We can only guess what those protesters may have understood the Church to be, but clearly their experience of Church had been different from that of the young pilgrims.

Perhaps for the protesters the Church was no more than an institution experienced as impersonal, hierarchical, authoritarian, oppressive. The Church is indeed an institution, established by Jesus on a solid foundation, guaranteed to last for all time and equipped to resist the forces of the ‘underworld’. We thank God for that. It is good to know that the Church will stand till the end of time. But ‘institution’ is a cold word, very impersonal, even forbidding when used of something as big and, allegedly, as ‘powerful’ as the Church.

Vatican II reminded us that the Church institution is a people—the People of God. It is a community called together by God. It is a community with heart that supports, challenges and encourages each of its members. It is a community that prays together, a community of people who try to follow Jesus’ command to love one another as Jesus has loved each one of them. We can warm to this type of Church. It is wonderful to be here!

The Church is a community of people who care. In everyday situations people are often not very caring; no-one puts much effort into mending relationships. If someone down the road offends we often go our separate ways, cease to be on speaking terms and have nothing more to do with the person who has offended. In the Church it must be different. Relationships are important; the Church is a community to be worked at. When conflicts arise, they need to be resolved. Jesus said to his followers (us): ‘May you be one as I and the Father are one’

Thus being Catholic entails more than being in a personal relationship with God, seeking to ‘save my soul’ and live a decent life. That would be far too individualistic. Being Catholic is to be a truly caring person as a member of a caring community of people united in Christ. That is what it means to be ‘in the Church’.

The Church is God’s family where we are cared for, where we experience God’s lavish gifts of love, especially in the sacraments. We are bonded to Christ, the Lord of life, at baptism, we hear God’s Word as Good News, we are nourished at the table of the Word and of the Eucharist down the years. This is the nourishment we need for our journey, our pilgrimage through life, a journey which concludes when we are called into the fullness of life. The Church nurtures us through life, and so we know the Church as ‘Holy Mother Church’. For the same reasons the Church is described as ‘the community of salvation’.

The Church is also a sacrament, ‘the fundamental sacrament’. Sacraments are earthly realities that disclose and channel spiritual or heavenly realities. Thus the Church community is more than a simple gathering of people, it is an instrument for channelling God’s saving action. To use St Paul’s favourite term, the Church is the Body of Christ and we are all members of that Body.

The Church has been entrusted by Jesus with his mission—to tell the Good News of God-and-us, and to continue Jesus’ ministry of healing, casting out evil, showing the way to fuller life and attracting others into the community of salvation.

The Church is all this and more. We could go on to celebrate the treasures of spirituality, theology, art and architecture that the Church
has accumulated down the centuries.

The protesters were not recognising all these reasons to celebrate the Church, otherwise they could hardly reject the Church. They were rather put off by another side of the Church—the other side. It is to be noted that all the beauties of the Church that we have mentioned above are what God has done and is doing in the Church. The rest of the story is what we human beings have done and are doing in the Church.

The Church is a divine institution, but also a human community, and human beings, even dedicated members of the Church, are not perfect and often far from perfect. People can do bad things and entertain prejudices, and structures can become rigid and oppressive. As was said at the time of Vatican II by eminent members of the Church hierarchy, the ‘Spotless Bride of Christ’ (the Church) has blotches and barnacles all over her; the Church, far from being perfect and complete is ‘semper reformanda’ (‘always in need of reform’). Thus those of us who love the Church have to be able to love her, warts and all!

The million and more pilgrims who cheered Pope Benedict were able to see at least some of the beauty of the Church. The protesters, on the other hand, saw only the ugliness. It brings to mind an old quotation from the Rev. Frederick Langbridge, English poet and religious writer (1849—1923):

Two men look out the same prison bars; one sees mud and the other stars.

If we indeed are blessed enough to see the stars, perhaps an appropriate prayer for us is the song of David:

One thing I ask of the Lord, for this I pray,
to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. (Ps. 27.4)

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

Mother and Teacher of all nations—such is the Catholic Church in the mind of her Founder, Jesus Christ; to hold the world in an embrace of love, that men, in every age, should find in her their own completeness in a higher order of living, and their ultimate salvation. She is ‘the pillar and ground of the truth.’ (1Tim 3.15) To her was entrusted by her holy Founder the twofold task of giving life to her children and of teaching them and guiding them—both as individuals and as nations—with maternal care. Great is their dignity, a dignity which she has always guarded most zealously and held in the highest esteem.

—Pope John XXIII, encyclical Mother and Teacher (Mater et Magistra) 1961, opening words.
WHY DO HUMANS COMMIT VIOLENCE?

Violence, War and Rioting in the Modern World and René Girard’s Mimetic Theory

JOEL HODGE

Why do humans commit violence? Why do humans cause suffering to others? These are some of the most difficult and heart-breaking questions of human life. The power of violence and its reciprocal nature is ever-present. Take, for example, the riots in London or the trans-national tit-for-tat between the American Pastor, Terry Jones, and Afghani Muslims over the burning of the Koran. The provocative moves of the Pastor and the ferocious nature of the mob violence in Afghanistan in response were disconcerting. Similarly, the meaningless gang violence in London by young people without strong social ties and looking to acquire capitalist goods was very confronting and surprising to the West. Yet, as the renowned scholar of violence, René Girard¹, claims, we should not pinpoint this violence necessarily on any particular religion or culture. Instead, as Girard has famously argued, violence itself is religious and cultural, i.e., it creates religious and cultural structures by which humans reconcile themselves to each other transcendentally. Thus, the reversion to mob violence is a deeply engrained human mechanism to resolve problems and construct social identities.

Yet, why does violence occur in the quick and frightening patterns that it has appeared in, for example, the Koran-burning case or in the London riots? Girard argues that this is so because violence is reciprocal in nature. In other words, humans imitate each other’s violence to the point of destroying each other. Humans experience an imperative to imitate and reciprocate the violence of one’s rival in order to gain identity and power. What is the root of this reciprocity in humans? According to Girard, it is rooted in the nature of human desire that he argues is mimetic, i.e., humans desire according to the desire of another:

Professor Girard has made what he takes to be an authentic anthropological discovery (something true independently of its discoverer), to wit: that human desire is triangular and mimetic. It is mimetic in that it is to do with imitation; it is triangular in that transaction is three-cornered: the source (model) which stimulates the desire, the respondent (disciple) in whom the desire is implanted, and the thing (object) then desired (J. Alison, ‘Girard’s Breakthrough’, The Tablet. 29 June 1996, p. 1).

In analyzing the major literary works of modern Western culture, Girard identified the nature of mimetic desire as a dynamic force that moves human beings into action. He sees it as good in that it enables humans to gain consciousness, form relationships, and learn language and love. Advertising is one of the most powerful exploiters of mimetic desire as it establishes trends by stimulating desire through modeling products as necessary to ‘keeping up’ and maintaining one’s identity.

This power could even be seen in the London riots where young people just broke into shops where they knew they could acquire the capitalist goods they ‘needed’ to maintain their identities, often revolving around the latest technology goods and gang-related attire. Interestingly, even the gang identities of the
young people were formed and beholden to the market. Yet, because the market to which they were drawn gave no positive social ties, particularly lacking family context and supported by welfare, the young people felt able to acquire what they wanted.

Girard has effectively shown how mimetic desire is intimately connected to acquisition. For Girard, desire in its distorted form leads to acquisitiveness, rivalry and violence. Girard (1977, 145) noticed that mimetic desire became pathogenic and distorted as objects of desire become so alluring (that is, when someone else has it or the market constantly advertises a product) that it is violently grasped at and even fought over. When law or moral conscience becomes weak, the imperative of desire triumphs. Denial of the other occurs when the model becomes a rival as the subject wishes to acquire what the model desired by grasping at the object of desire. In this circumstance, the subject asserts the ownership and priority of his/her desire over the other’s desire (Oughourlian, 1991, 18). At the heart of distorted human relations, then, is a grasping and possessiveness that Girard calls acquisitive desire (and which the Bible represents in such stories as the Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel narratives). This grasping desire can lead to rivalry and scandal:

As rivalry becomes acute, the rivals are more apt to forget about whatever objects are, in principle, the cause of the rivalry and instead to become more fascinated with one another. In effect the rivalry is purified of any external stake and becomes a matter of pure rivalry and prestige. Each rival becomes for his counterpart the worshipped and despised model and obstacle, the one who must be at once beaten and assimilated (Girard, 1987, 26).

Thus, once the conflict and rivalry are established, the object is usually forgotten and the rival becomes the focus of scandal for the subject. Girard (2001, 16) calls this state of rivalry the skandalon, in which the rival becomes a block to the subject’s desire so that the rival takes the subject’s focus, rather than the original object.

For example, in the case of the Pastor and the Afghan people, the object that each desires is the honour, protection and supremacy of their tradition, and each believes that the other is an obstacle to achieving this desire. This dispute itself can be seen within the broader context of US-Islamic relations: as the traditional victor in the cycles of violence (the US) is challenged by a usurper (Islamic groups) in which both desire to possess and hold power. The Pastor’s action cannot be seen in isolation, but must be placed in a context where he feels threatened religiously and culturally by the onset of Islamic claims to power and truth. As groups and traditions meet, they become aware of the relative nature of their truth claims and pretense at supremacy, which provokes the desire to achieve it as the other desires the same thing.

In a similar way, the marketplace (within a cultural setting) can become a block or scandal to desire. For example, if the market is stimulating desire through advertising and social modelling, yet does not give the means to achieve that desire, then violence can result. In the case of the London riots, certain subsections of the populace were attracted to certain products because they identified with gang models as well as the more general modelling for new technology. As social order disintegrated and the system of exchange that regulates desires and acquisition no longer could be protected by the state, young people saw their chance to acquire what they wanted in mob-like actions.
Thus, a shared desire can lead to scandal and rivalry which escalates into mob violence. Girard argues that this movement toward escalation and crisis is a perennial problem for human societies and is that which is most feared culturally, particularly by primitive societies without a complex security apparatus (as is seen in archaic myths which seek to guard against and create order out of chaos). Despite even the sophistication of the state (that gives us some sense of security), crisis and social violence can still occur, as was shown in the London riots. A point of provocation and scandal, such as the death of a young man shot by the police, can set off a mimetic cycle of violence, where violence imitates and reciprocates violence to establish the supremacy of rights of one group over another. In the case of the London riots, the state was drawn into a rivalry with some sections of its own populace as each side sought to establish its claims to justice and supremacy, particularly in the use of violence.

The nation-state, of course, must maintain a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, and wipe out any illegitimate use, to maintain security and order. It does this through a controlled use of group violence. Yet, this controlled violence is never sustaining and permanent as it requires constant ‘vigilance’, that is, use of force to maintain order. Yet, as the state applies more force, the criminals or enemies of the state escalate in their use of violence (as is seen in gang warfare or even in the current war on terror).

This escalation occurs as each side provokes the other and attempts to defeat the other. For example, the Pastor burns the Koran and the Afghan mob takes vengeance, which leads the Pastor to claim he will not retract his position but perhaps even go further. As this rivalry becomes more extreme, each party becomes a scandal to the other heightening and solidifying each other’s desire to the point that the object is forgotten and victory becomes the priority. The scandalous nature of the other is pathogenic to the point of conflicting fatal violence where the rival/victim is believed to deserve death so the subject can achieve the object of desire. The cycle of violence moves from a sole focus on the object of desire to being fuelled by the mob seeking to achieve what they supposedly didn’t have: justice and retribution for wrongs and for a share in the honour and status that the other supposedly had prevented them from having.

Yet, even the nature of desire and rivalry cannot fully explain why humans embark on such fool-hardy and destructive rivalries. Ultimately, according to Girard, the subject’s attempt to grasp at the other’s object of desire is an effort to gain the ontological depth which the model seems to have in possessing a certain object (Girard, 1987, 296-7). For example, in the London riots, the products were attractive and taken because they gave a certain sense of identity. As one acquired them, one could feel more complete, based on the social modelling prevalent through the market, media and friendship groups. Girard (1987, 296-7) calls this ‘metaphysical desire’ where the radical distortion of mimetic desire from a pacific and autonomous relation with the model-other to rivalry over a common object of desire results in the denial of the other and the insistence on the priority of ‘me.’ In the process of building identity and being, I acquire the other’s desire which I then mistakenly try to grasp because I believe I should be the only one to have it. In this grasping, there is angst and fear originating from the sense of ontological ‘lack’ in human being that drives the subject to assert itself and grasp at that which the other seems to possess: ‘ontological density’ and wholeness of being (Henri de Lubac in Bailie, 1997, 132). This lack that leads to distorted desire can be identified with what the book of Wisdom (2:24) calls ‘the devil’s envy’. This envy causes a vicious cycle of violence originating from the inability to acquire what the other has in order to be like or better than the other.

This rivalrous violence is not consistent with the inner workings of mimesis itself, but
is a distorted possibility that results from the denial of the anteriority of the other’s desire (Girard, 2001, 15-16). Mimetic rivalry results from a pathological self-deception based on a false view of the self and one’s desire; a self that cannot pacifically come to terms with the other and so must assert itself over against the other. Violent rivalry is used to fill the hole created by the human inability to pacifically come to terms with the other, resulting in a violent mechanism that builds distorted identity.²

Reconciling Human Beings: The Victim at the Heart of Human Culture

Girard (1977, 148) argues that, while mimetic rivalry gives the human a sense of identity built over against the other, rivalries aggregate in human groups and eventually result in collective violence. This collective violence, according to Girard (1977, 68-88, 1986, 12-23, 1987, 24-5, 2001, 24), is resolved through the expulsion or killing of a victim.³ This act of ‘victimage’ unites and reconciles human desire through the transformation of acquisitive mimesis into conflictual mimesis, i.e., from the acquisition of desire to the conflict over desire which may eventually lead to the unification of desire against some object or other (Girard, 1987, 26). This kind of mob violence is exemplified by the Afghan mob which takes vengeance that unifies and reconciles them against the Pastor (and the foreign substitutes for him).

Girard’s account of violence contrasts with conventional views. Girard says the conventional view of violence is that it is a spontaneous act of aggression from a subject to an object. Girard argues that this is a superficial view, which allows a violent person to be identified as different and deviant from the rest of ‘peace-loving’ humanity (Girard, 1997). Girard (1997) claims that, in fact, violence comes from competition and rivalry over common desires, which implicates all humans in violence, not just ‘deviants’.

Moreover, Girard (1997) argues that violence and rivalry are not caused by differences between human beings, such as differences over culture or religion or between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ people. On the contrary, violence displays a lack of difference between desiring subjects and models. The fear (discussed above) of having nothing in one’s self—that we have no ontological density but are only disguise—leads us to grasp for being through that which animates being, desire. This fear—which Herbert McCabe (2003, 70) says is a ‘disbelief in oneself’—is accentuated (as Girard points out) when we encounter the other and realise the lack of difference between oneself and the other; that there is nothing definitive that differentiates ‘me’ from you and makes me better. In this circumstance, we need to manufacture differences and claims that give me priority over you. This grasping at desire and power makes the current rivalry between the Pastor and Afghan mob seem arbitrary.

The establishment of a victor is the beginning of difference, which serves to obscure the fact that all humans are the same; that they contain no original desire or identity apart from that formed with the other.⁴ Differences are used as a means to define one’s self or group over against the other and control competing desires.

In analysing ancient myths and modern anthropological studies, Girard found that the crises of human groups are resolved through the scapegoating of a victim. Seeking to scapegoat is the first reaction of the Afghan mob to resolve the crisis. Girard says that the way that vengeance and mob violence give satisfaction to our desires, and so fulfilment to our sense of being and identity, is at the foundation of group and personal identity. Vengeance and mob violence seek to recover a loss of identity and being by imitating the violent desires of the other (for status and victory) and inflicting that violence back onto those accused. According to Girard, these kinds of rivalries are resolved in the unification of desire that occurs in scapegoating a rival or victim.
The victim is not actually the real cause of the crisis, but is identified in some way with the rival or problem as scapegoat. Girard argues that the scapegoat is a substitute by implication because he/she is not the real reason for the crisis, but is labelled as such. In the case of the Afghan mob, they undertake a conscious process of substitution by killing foreign victims for their real rival and crisis. For the London riots, the police become the scapegoat, though this recedes as the media and general public side with the police to stamp out the violent actions of ‘deviant’ young people (whose delinquency, or family, were to blame). In the end, the victim is inconsequential as long as he/she can be blamed for whatever problem or crisis the group is facing. In making this accusation and carrying out the punishment, the group is able to resolve their crisis and re-gain unity and power. This scapegoating produces a newfound cultural unity and order built on the lie of unanimous violence that the victim is guilty (of some crime or problem). In this way, the mimetic contagion of violence snowballs and spreads like a disease that collapses differences and cultural institutions and structures (Girard, 2001, 21-4).

After the expulsion or killing of the victim, a ‘miraculous’ unity can be seen to be given to the group. The group is fascinated by the power of their unified desires that they cannot believe they were the only ones responsible for their unification. In archaic myths, the victim is believed to be the ultimate mediator/model and reconciler of mimesis because all desire has been satisfied and reconciled in the expulsion or killing of him/her. The victim is claimed to have some supernatural power to mediate and unify all desire. In myth, Girard (1977, 275, 2001, 65-72) argues, the victim is represented as a god or demon who had manufactured the whole violent process. Thus, the supernatural victim deserved to be killed because he was a threat who wished to reveal his/her power to the community. Thus, there is an appeal to transcendence where the mimetic power of the mob violence is recognised to not substist in the human agents themselves (Girard, 2001, 96). In fact, the mob violence had provided a definitive mimetic movement toward and reconciliation with the other, for which the human longed. Therefore, the mimetic power of the mob violence leads to the demonisation or deification of the victim who had reconciled all desire. The victim is both malefactor and benefactor—the cause of crisis and its solution (Girard, 1977, 251).

Girard (1977, 257-64, 2001, 71-2) says the twin nature of the victim results from the ‘double transference’ where both order and disorder, good and evil, are ascribed to the victim through supernatural agency. Drawing on Rudolph Otto’s observation about the dual nature of ‘the sacred’ in primitive or archaic cultures, Girard argues that this dual nature is based on the transference of blame for crisis and praise for restoring order onto the victim. The good and evil traits of the victim provide the foundation for culture to define difference between people, particularly by establishing the definitive difference about who is in the group and who is out of the group (Girard, 1977, 251). The deified victim also structures and orders human desire in ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ways based on the original cycle of violence. These structures are institutionalised in law and prohibitions (made in order to avoid violence). Meanwhile, rituals are also developed to imitate the original mob violence, so to reproduce their miraculous effects. Myths are used to justify and make sense of the power of mob violence and the victim.

The Hebreo-Christian Break-through

In his analysis of ancient and modern literature and culture, Girard found that the scapegoating that lay at the heart of human culture was discussed in a different way by the Bible than that seen in comparable myths. Girard argues that the victim’s role in culture and myth is steadily exposed by the Hebrews and is definitively revealed in Christ, who is
killed as victim and is claimed to reveal God as his forgiveness exposes the distorted cycle of desire and violence. Christ breaks through violence and death with an alternative to the vengeful desires of the mob in self-giving love, which definitely overcomes violence. Jesus’ words on the Cross, ‘Forgive them for they know not what they do’ (Lk 23:34; King James Version), highlights the burgeoning Christian consciousness of the victim in forgiveness and the mob’s amnesia in violence.

The Resurrection, according to Girard (2001, 123), vindicates Jesus as the innocent victim. The Gospels show that death does not have the ultimate say over the victim, nor is violence the ultimate arbiter of human life. Instead, the victim is revealed and humans are shown that they can live without violence, which most importantly subverts the power of the mob by disrupting its unanimous support:

The essential factor … is that the persecutors’ perception of their persecution is finally defeated. In order to achieve the greatest effect that defeat must take place under the most difficult circumstances, in a situation that is the least conducive to truth and the most likely to produce mythology. This is why the Gospel text constantly insists on the irrationality (‘without a cause’) of the sentence passed against the just and at the same time on the absolute unity of the persecutors, of all those who believe or appear to believe in the existence and validity of the cause, the ad causam, the accusation, and who try to impose that belief on everyone (Girard, 1986, 109).

By taking Jesus as the central reference point, Girard argues that the Gospels expose and disrupt the unanimous power of mimetic violence in the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. The association of God with the victim and forgiveness is a distinctively Christian belief as the divinity is usually associated with death and violence:

The problem is that the social other which forms us is, and was before we came along, a violent other, full of the distortions, cruelty, murder and exploitation which abound all over the planet. …There would be no way for us even to perceive fully the violence of the other which forms us unless there were something different, if you like, a different sort of other, which is not part of the violent other which forms us. That is precisely what is made present by the gratuitously self-giving victim [Christ].

By providing a real point of differentiation, it is possible for the early Christians to recognize the true nature of human violence, culture and religion. For example, in the case of Jesus’ crucifixion, violence encompassed all people, even Jesus’ friends and fellow Jews, in what Girard defines as ‘false transcendence’ (Girard, 1986, 105-6 & 150-64; 1987, 217; 2001, 96-8). This false transcendence even overcame the Israelites of Jesus’ time, who were meant to be free from the violent idol worship of the surrounding peoples. This false transcendence of violence was exemplified in the disciples led by Peter, who were ready to fight for Jesus’ Kingdom; and in the Israelite leaders who goaded Jesus to come down from the Cross to inflict his vengeful power.

Furthermore, Girard (2001, 103-36) argues that the anthropological and interpretative power of Jesus’ death and Resurrection is reflected in how the Gospels contrast to and deconstruct conventional mythic stories of the gods. Girard makes this claim by outlining important distinguishing markers between the Gospels and ancient myths. These include: the representation in the Gospels of the unanimous and overwhelming power of mimetic violence, which even encompasses Jesus’ followers; the death of Jesus as a human (not as a monster or supernatural god); the lack of supernatural power exercised by Jesus, particularly surrounding his death; Jesus non-involvement in the cycle of mimetic rivalry and violence; Jesus’ Resurrection not being immediate and not a direct result of the mob violence; Jesus’ return from the dead not as a vengeful god but as loving human being; the repentance from and recognition of mob violence after the Resurrection by the small minority who had abandoned Jesus; the lack of demonisation of Jesus by this minority, who recognise his divin-
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Girard (2001, 128) says the ‘two words, without cause, marvellously describe the behaviour of human packs.’ Girard (1986, 111) also highlights a text from Acts of the Apostles that shows the ignorance of the mob: ‘Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea of what you were really doing.’ This last passage is from Peter, who after the Resurrection suddenly understands the cycle of violence that had occurred and preaches Christ crucified as God. Secondly, the Gospels’ realisation of Jesus’ conscious and purposeful sacrifice in which he accepted death on a cross for humanity. This realisation enabled them to see how Jesus lived outside of mimetic violence and offered a new, loving way of being to loose humanity from their ‘persecutory unconscious’ (Girard, 2001, 126): ‘A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence —by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence’ (Girard, 1987, 219). The Gospels’ recognition of the injustice and self-sacrifice of Jesus’ death, which led to their awareness of mimetic violence, saw them re-locate the experience of the transcendent Other in the non-violent love of Jesus, rather than in the violence of the mob (Girard, 1987, 169-70; 2001, 96-8).

In this new experience of loving and pacific transcendence, Girard (2001, 131) argues that Jesus’ Resurrection provided the Gospels with the anthropological key to see the innocence of the victim and the lies of the mob. The mob’s story is finally defeated because their distorted belief in violence and envy is overcome by the gratuitous mimesis of God as victim, who offers a new avenue for faith and human being in mimesis. For this reason, the Resurrection shows itself to be different from pagan ‘dying-and-rising’ stories. It is not a miraculous event that involves subservience to an all-powerful deity, but a personal encounter with a gratuitous Other who brings humanity to a new understanding of life and new actions that are self-giving.

Firstly, the Gospels’ awareness of the mimetic violence of the mob that seeks a victim. Girard (2001, 128) says the ‘two words, without cause, marvellously describe the behaviour of human packs.’ Girard (1986, 111) also highlights a text from Acts of the Apostles that shows the ignorance of the mob: ‘Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea of what you were really doing.’ This last passage is from Peter, who after the Resurrection suddenly understands the cycle of violence that had occurred and preaches Christ crucified as God. Secondly, the Gospels’ realisation of Jesus’ conscious and purposeful sacrifice in which he accepted death on a cross for humanity. This realisation enabled them to see how Jesus lived outside of mimetic violence and offered a new, loving way of being to loose humanity from their ‘persecutory unconscious’ (Girard, 2001, 126): ‘A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence —by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence’ (Girard, 1987, 219). The Gospels’ recognition of the injustice and self-sacrifice of Jesus’ death, which led to their awareness of mimetic violence, saw them re-locate the experience of the transcendent Other in the non-violent love of Jesus, rather than in the violence of the mob (Girard, 1987, 169-70; 2001, 96-8).

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COMPASS

For example, the Gospels particularly expose the false belief in the transcendence of the mob by contrasting what Girard (2001, 131-6) calls the false and true resurrections. In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, the story of John the Baptist’s death is recounted in which Herod and others believe John has been ‘raised up’ (Mk 6:16) (Girard, 2001, 134). The Gospels clearly show that Herod’s belief in the resurrection of John is linked to his death because after Herod makes a statement of his belief, John’s death is recounted in which Herod is involved (Girard, 2001, 134). Herod is afraid of John returning from the dead after having been involved in his death. The Gospels are giving a case of where the victim is divinised by his murderers in a false resurrection based on a sacred fear that the victim will return with vengeance. The Gospels show that this false resurrection is based in the false transcendence of the mob violence that divinises the victim as part of its persecutory unconscious (Girard, 2001, 126 & 134).

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, then, is not a violent, exclusive act made to appease God but an inclusive one: it offers humanity a way out of violence through God’s non-violent love. By dying on the Cross and being raised, Jesus is believed to be making present God’s gratuitous mimesis to all humanity. In other words, Jesus’ return from the dead is not as a vengeful god but as loving human being, whose divinity is recognised in his loving self-giving and pacific being. According to Girard, this encounter with Jesus’ perfect loving self-giving develops a new understanding about mob violence, ritual and myth amongst the early Christians. This new understanding is grounded in a new form of mimesis that establishes self-sacrifice for the good of the other as the perfect mimetic model, rather than sacrifice over and against the other. It is this model that is implemented within the life of the Christian community and is particularly exemplified by the martyrs.

According to Girard, because of the effect of the Hebreo-Christian revelation, it is almost impossible (at least in the West) to scapegoat a rival or victim without some pang of conscious awareness at the time or at a later date. This revelation of the victim has disrupted the unanimity of the mob. For Girard this is exemplified in the stoning of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, in the Acts of the Apostles. The crowd that stones Stephen must place its hands over its ears in order to complete the mob violence. In other words, Stephen’s proclamations of Christ and his forgiveness to the persecutors were having such an effect on the mob that they had to purposefully try to block them out in order to complete their violence. Ultimately, this effort is ineffectual (as witnessed by the eventual conversion of one of the members of the mob, St Paul).

Girard argues that the concern for victims has slowly permeated Western culture to the point that the victim has become a sacred category. The awareness of the victim has become so widespread in the West that Western culture can no longer effectively and unanimously scapegoat its victim. For example, the scapegoating of Saddam Hussein could not be effectively accomplished by the Americans because no good accusation could really be found to get rid of him. Further, the actual killing of Hussein was greeted with horror in the West for its brutal mob-like character. The dissenting voice that raises objections cannot be silenced. Unfortunately, however, those who are accused of being victimisers can still be scapegoated (e.g., dictators, paedophiles, mobs). Girard calls this victimising the victimisers the final sacred category in the West because it can justify mob violence (at least in the short-term).

The final answer for Girard lies within the Christian tradition itself. Only as we can be immersed in the life of God’s pacific and loving mimesis can we escape the cycles of violence and fulfil our ontological yearning for fullness of being and relationship. Only an effective mimetic alternative will rid humanity of its constant reversion to violence. However, this Christian path is not easy as it requires
It is this model that is implemented within the theism that establishes self-sacrifice for the good amongst the early Christians. This new understanding about mob violence, ritual and myth to Girard, this encounter with Jesus' perfect is not as a vengeful god but as loving human being raised, Jesus is believed to be making non-violent love. By dying on the Cross and humanity a way out of violence through God's appease God but an inclusive one: it offers then, is not a violent, exclusive act made to return with vengeance. The Gospels show that division of the mob violence that divinises the members of the mob, St Paul). Girard argues that the concern for victims has tended to be characterised by violent, rivalrous webs of human relations based on misunderstanding and denial. The distorted mimetic formation of the human self in its relation to others is resolved through the unification of desire against a victim. The ontological confusion at the heart of human being and culture is resolved by victimage.

The final answer for Girard lies within the discovery of what has been termed 'the mimetic insight'. From this discovery, there developed two other major insights. To summarise, Girard’s mimetic theory has three major parts: A) human desire is mimetic or imitated, i.e., humans desire according to the desire of the other; B) human cultures use scapegoats or victims to resolve mimetic conflict and create unity; and, C) the Hebreo-Christian revelation, in contrast to myth and sacrificial ritual, reveal the scapegoat mechanism within culture as well as human desire as mimetic, and provides an alternative way for structuring desire and culture.

The biblical book of Genesis describes this situation in the scene in which humans reject loving communion with God (the complete mimetic triangle) to grasp at the object of their desire. This desire is stimulated by the serpent, which precipitates the human’s (adam) envious denial of its own mimetic creatureliness: ‘You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’ (Gen 3:4-5; italics added). Good creation is distorted by envy in which humanity grasps at its desire to be like and better than its Creator and model. The human beings’ attempt to grasp the object of their desire in a false autonomy based on the imitation of the serpent results in their rejection of the communion with the Other. This false autonomy results in the formation of self-identity and consciousness, though in a distorted and violent form that becomes ingrained in human culture.

Through studying ancient literature such as the Greek tragedies, Girard (1977 & 1987) discovered the same mimetic interactions in ancient literature as in modern literature, but also noticed the added feature of collective violence centred on sacrifice and victims. He began to observe how human culture has tended to be characterised by violent, rivalrous webs of human relations based on misunderstanding and denial. The distorted mimetic formation of the human self in its relation to others is resolved through the unification of desire against a victim. The ontological confusion at the heart of human being and culture is resolved by victimage. When difference ostensibly leads to violence, such as between cultural or religious groups, it usually masks the fact that there exists a crisis of difference and identity within the groups involved. In other words, the groups have begun to lose their own identity as feel that it is threatened and need to re-define it over against others.

The rioting young people in London were labelled and abused in different kinds of ways as ‘deviant’, who should be eliminated. Certainly their actions were reprehensible and some commentary sought to understand them, yet much of the commentary went beyond this into sensationalism and blame. While it can be justified to restrain unjust violence, this restraint is only effective if repentance and conversion are made possible following this. Thus, while each individual has a moral responsibility for their actions, this responsibility should be seen in some context so that the conditions for repentance and change are at least made available, that is, we should analyse the actions in the light of stimulated desires fed by gang identity, the market and state welfare. I am in agreement with some commentators that state welfare can isolate people from real social networks, yet so can the capitalist market in its worst form as we each become individual consumers acquiring what we want.

As you pointed out in your speech, your Government wishes to employ policies that are based on enduring values that cannot be simply expressed in legal terms. This is especially important in the light of events in England this summer. When policies do not presume or promote objective values, the resulting moral relativism, instead of leading to a society that is free, fair, just and compassionate, tends instead to produce frustration, despair, selfishness and a disregard for the life and liberty of others.

—Pope Benedict to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Holy See, 9 September, 2011.
'A MATTER OF JUSTICE AND NECESSITY'

Women’s Participation in the Catholic Church.

MARY COLOE PBVM

Abstract.
This article expands on a statement made by John Paul II on the necessity for ‘real equality’ for women. It begins by elaborating on two aspects of this statement that with regard to women, ‘history has conditioned us,’ and ‘the Gospel contains an ever relevant message.’ The article examines some sayings about women in the tradition, and argues that the tradition has been shaped by Aristotelian philosophy rather than the Scriptures. Finally it notes some contemporary thinking with regard to opening the diaconate to women.

Introduction.
On the eve of the 1995 Beijing Women’s Conference John Paul II stated:

We are heirs to a history which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. Women’s dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity.

If objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry. May this regret be transformed, on the part of the whole Church, into a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision. When it comes to setting women free from every kind of exploitation and domination, the gospel contains an ever relevant message which goes back to the attitude of Jesus Christ himself.

As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area... this is a matter of justice but also of necessity (para 3 & 4).²

There have been many statements made about women and their participation in the Catholic Church, but this one of John Paul II has received very little attention and yet it has the potential to be profoundly liberating. His letter notes that historically the Church has been conditioned in its consideration of women, and that this uncritical conditioning has resulted in the marginalisation and servitude of women as well as the impoverishment of the whole global society. He then, on behalf of the Church offers an apology and continues by speaking of a desire for the transformation of the entire Church to achieve the liberating vision of the Gospel. Finally he names the urgency of this transformation, to achieve real equality in every area, ‘as a matter of justice and necessity.’ His words, spoken sixteen years ago, continue to provide a prophetic challenge to the contemporary Church, but more than rhetoric is needed.

A ‘History has conditioned us.’

i. Attitudes towards women in Church history.

The opening statement by John Paul II began: We are heirs to a history which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. The fol-
Following excerpts from Church history provide evidence of how deeply conditioned the Christian Church has been when it comes to women. Tertullian (160-230):

Do you know that each of your women is an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age; the guilt must necessarily live too. You are the Devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law. *(The Dress of Women 1.1.2)*

St. Ambrose (375):

We know that Adam did not sin before the woman was created; indeed, after woman was made, she was the first to violate the divine command. She even dragged her husband along with her into sin and showed herself to be an incentive to him. *(On Paradise, 10, 47)*

St. John Chrysostom (345-407):

A wife has just one purpose: to guard the possessions we have accumulated...God maintained the order of each sex by dividing the business of human life into two parts and assigned the more necessary and beneficial aspects to the man and the less important, inferior matters to the woman. *(The kind of women who ought to be taken as wives, 4)*.

St. Augustine

I cannot think of any reason for woman’s being made as man’s helper, if we dismiss the reason of procreation. *(Literal Commentary on Genesis 9:5)*

Martin Luther:

He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions, tills the soil, plants etc. The wife on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home. *(Commentary on 1 Tim 3:16)*.

In the light of such patronising and misogynistic statements it is a relief to read the words of John Paul I: ‘God is Father, but especially God is Mother’; and the words of John Paul II stated at the beginning of this article. But, while the rhetoric of justice for women in gradually creeping into the tradition, this is not yet being met with action in terms of significant changes to Canon law and Church order.

### ii. The source of history’s conditioning.

Far too often the Scriptures are blamed for the discrimination against women, prevalent in so much of our heritage. Certainly, the Scriptures, particularly the Old Testament, reflect a patriarchal society, but the tradition’s misogynistic attitude has its basis not in the bible but in Greek philosophy.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.)

And a woman is as it were an infertile male; the female, in fact, is female on account of an inability of a sort... The male provides the ‘form’ and the ‘principle of movement,’ the female provides the body, in other words, the material... *(‘On the genesis of the creatures,’ bk. 1, chap. 20)*

Aristotle’s understanding of the human person and society continued into the Roman world in which Christianity began and developed. Such philosophical thinking about gender differences is based on a false understanding about the process of human conception. In ancient times it was believed that only the male was active in the generation of human life. The woman was a passive recipient of the male seed and the carrier of life, but she contributed nothing to life’s origin.

If, then, the male stands for the effective and active, and the female, considered as female, for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon. *(Aristotle, *De Generatione animalium*)

From this wrong ‘biology’ came an understanding that women were deficient and that only the male was the true and complete sex,
females were a deviation. Thinking that women were physically deficient and inferior may have been a factor in treating women as socially and politically inferior.

I want to stress that this attitude towards women does not come from biblical teaching but from the philosophy of Aristotle which has its basis in ignorance about human biology. But as the early Church developed within this Greco-Roman world, Greek philosophy became the milieu for Christian theological thinking. Aristotle’s view about the inferiority of women is reflected in Patristic writings and the theology of Thomas Aquinas who wrote:

In the higher animals, brought into being through coitus, the active power resides in the male’s semen, as Aristotle says, while the material of the foetus is provided by the female.’ (Summa Theologica 1a. 118, 1 ad 4).

These philosophic considerations work out of a dualistic perception of the human being understood as matter and spirit, with the woman always identified with the material and the man identified with what was considered the higher faculty of rationality and spirit.5

...drawing...

The entire human person is within the sperm. Women have no role in the act of procreation.

This understanding of human conception, which had its origins four hundred years before Christ, continued throughout most of our Christian tradition. So certain were scientists about the male being the sole source of life, that even when microscopes began to be used

male prejudice saw in semen miniature human beings, complete with arms and legs. As late as the 19th century, the view persisted that only the male contributed to the creation of a human life, with the woman providing the womb receptacle to incubate and nourish this life. (See figure.)

It was not until 1827 that Karl Ernst Von Baer identified and described the female ovum using a microscope.7 The discovery, that woman also was an active participant in human procreation, has had profound affects on the understanding of the human person and also of human society. Following Von Baer’s work, no longer could a woman be considered an inferior biological specimen of the human race. But this is a very late discovery—1827. In the 1800’s we knew more about electricity and the solar system than we did about human life.

What I want to insist on here is that the perception of women’s natural inferiority to men emerged from Greek natural philosophy and was based on false biological knowledge. But this is the philosophic milieu taken for granted throughout most of Christianity and therefore this necessarily is the prevailing world view that informs and shapes Christian theology, and that influences biblical translations, Church architecture, rituals and canon law.

iii ‘The Gospel contains an ever relevant message.’

By contrast, the New Testament on the whole proposes a positive portrayal of woman and sexuality.8

Women were included in the discipleship group of followers of Jesus (Mark 15:40-41; Matt 27:55-56). Women were the first to receive the Easter proclamation, and in the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene is the first to experience an appearance of the Risen Jesus and commissioned to proclaim the Easter message to ‘my brothers and sisters’ (John 20:17). For this she has been given the title in the Church, Apostle to the Apostles.9
Women were not included in the list of ‘the Twelve’ as these were the foundation group, modelled on the twelve patriarchs who were the foundation of Israel; this group did not continue beyond the foundation time. In the New Testament world, women were leaders of House Churches (Nymph, Col 4:15; Apphia, Philemon 1:2; Mary, Acts 12:12); a woman named Lydia was the first European convert, and her home provided the first welcome to Paul and his Gospel (Acts 16:14-15). Women were prophets (Acts 21:9), they prayed and prophesied in community liturgies (1Cor 11:5) and Priscilla was a travelling missionary like Paul (Acts 18:2, 19; 1Cor 16:18; 2Tim 4:19; Rom 16:3). Paul names Phoebe, ‘deacon’ and ‘leader’ of the Church in Cenchreae (Rom 16:1-2), and commends Junia, calling her ‘outstanding among the Apostles’ (Rom 16:7). These New Testament writings give evidence of the active participation of women in the community.

In the New Testament communities the titles used to describe leadership were elders (presbyteroi), overseers (episkopoi) and stewards or administrators (diakonoi); none of these roles is linked to the Eucharist in New Testament times. In the New Testament there seems to be little distinction made between these titles and it is not until the next century that these developed a hierarchical structure. The term ‘priest’ (hieros) is never used to describe a Christian ministry in the New Testament, nor is there any ritual called an ‘ordination’. Here we need to be aware that the term priest (hieros) in both Judaism and pagan religions meant an official linked to the sacrifice of an animal in a Temple. Within the New Testament the primary description of worship was the ‘Lord’s Supper’ and this was a meal celebrated within a house, and there is no indication who presided over this meal—it may have been the owner of the house, or a travelling missionary, or an apostle if one was present. The first time there is any mention of who led the Eucharist occurs in the Didache (ca. 100) and in this text the presider is called a ‘prophet.’ ‘But permit the prophets to offer thanksgiving as much as they desire’ (Did. 10:7). ‘Every first fruit then of the produce of the wine-vat and of the threshing-floor, of thy oxen and of thy sheep, thou shalt take and give as the first fruit to the prophets; for they are your chief-priests’ (Did. 13:3). Within the New Testament, named women held all of these roles: prophet, householder, travelling missionary, apostle.

An investigation into the New Testament and the possibility of women’s priesthood was conducted by the Pontifical Biblical Commission from July 1976 through January 1977. When the Biblical Commission studied all the relevant information, some of which I have briefly noted above, their conclusion was that the New Testament alone was inconclusive on whether women could or could not be ordained priests. This was a unanimous decision (17-0). The seventeen members of this Commission were all priests appointed by the Pope in view of their outstanding biblical scholarship. Their findings are very significant when we consider that the Church looks to Scripture and Tradition as the two sources of Revelation. In 1977, the verdict was that Scripture alone could not determine an answer to the question of women’s ordination.

iv Women in the Tradition.

If the Scriptures are unable to provide a conclusive answer, an examination of Church Tradition may bring greater certainty. It has become commonplace to hear phrases such as ‘women have never been ordained’, or ‘women have never been priests’. A study of historical documents and epigraphs provides evidence that such statements are wrong. As I will demonstrate, in the early centuries women were ‘ordained’, they were consider part of ‘clerical orders’, they were called ‘presbytera’, ‘diakonos’, and ‘diakonissa’ and two that we know about were given the title ‘episcopa’. While noting these terms, it is also important to recognise that at present there is no certainty what roles these women had in relation to sac-
ritual and prayer for the ordination of a deaconess: the people, the laos, and two that we

The above sampling of the traditions regarding the ordination of women has not been widely known, because history has given lit-
tle attention to women’s experience. But as more and more evidence from history comes to light there can be no doubt that for centuries within the Catholic tradition, in a variety of jurisdictions, women received ordination to different roles, women were considered as clerics, women bore titles that today we would associate with deacons, priests and bishops, and in some of these roles women exercised ecclesiastical and sacramental authority.

While there has been a ruling on the non-ordination of women to the priesthood in the Catholic Church, the witness of Scripture (Phoebe) and tradition provides a precedent for considering the ordination of women to the diaconate. In 2002, under the presidency of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger the International Theological Commission recognised the role of women deacons in the early Church but hesitated to equate their function during the first sixth centuries with the function of deacons today. If the diaconate were open to women, apart from wider pastoral opportunities, this would enable women to participate in Church governance, which Canon Law at present restricts to male clerics (Canon 129 #1).

D A Matter of Justice and Necessity
I have developed this point at length as there is still much ignorance about women’s roles in the Church in earlier centuries. There are other issues that could also be examined if the Church were to take seriously the words of John Paul II when writing to the gathering of women in Beijing: ‘there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area… this is a matter of justice but also of necessity.’

As a matter of justice and necessity, English translations of our liturgical readings and prayers should include and name women, instead of maintaining the archaic use of ‘man’ as a generic term. In many cases, the use of the term ‘man’ is an inaccurate translation from the original language, since Hebrew, Greek and Latin have different terms for an individual male and for a general collection of people. An accurate and literal translation should make this distinction in English.

As a matter of justice and necessity women should be well represented at all levels in diocesan, national and international committees, commissions and consultations regarding Church matters. We also have been baptized into Christ and share in his royal, priestly, and prophetic character.

As a matter of justice and necessity women should have equal access to financial support in their theological studies instead of only financing the theological education of a few male seminarians.

As a matter of justice and necessity women should have equal access to diocesan support for their discernment of vocation and pastoral formation for ministry.

The list could continue.

Conclusion.

I began this article by quoting parts from a letter addressed to women by John Paul II. In this letter I noted his awareness of the conditioning power of history and the need today for transformation by ‘a renewed commitment of fidelity to the Gospel vision.’ He called the need for real equality in every area ‘a matter of justice and necessity.’ These words I believe provide a prophetic challenge to the contemporary Church. This article has argued that both the Scriptures and Tradition testify that women in the past were ordained into various ministries. Specifically, there is no theological barrier to the ordination of women to the diaconate and this would be one step towards achieving the justice that is essential if we are to be a Gospel community. The Church cannot preach justice with prophetic integrity so long as justice is compromised within its own institutional structures.

The liberating God of the Exodus, who hears the cries of all who are oppressed, laments with us and over us, and over our institution for the centuries of neglect, ignorance and prejudice that have been part of women’s experience within the Church that we too would like to call our home.
NOTES

1 This article is an abridged version of an address given in Brisbane (3/9/2010) to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia.


3 10th September, 1978. This text can be found in La Documentation Catholique, vol 75. 60th year (24 September, 1978) 17:836.


5 The neo-platonic philosopher Plotinus (C.E. 205-270) was the first philosopher to emphasize the connection of matter with evil. He wrote, ‘When something is absolutely deficient—and this is matter—this is essential evil without any share of good.’ Plotinus, Enneads in Plotinus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), Vol. III, 256. Since women were associated with materiality, under the influence of neo-platonism, women became related to evil. See Allen, The Concept of Woman, Plotinus citation on p. 203.


7 Ford, When Did I Begin? 48. In the 13th century anatomists at the University of Bologna had discovered the female ovaries, but this discovery did not lead to changing the Aristotelian view that only the male seed was active in the generation of life; Allen, The Concept of Woman, 432.

8 It is beyond the scope of this article to critically appraise the few New Testament passages that present women within a traditional Greco-roman social ethic such as that found in the Household Codes (1Tim 2:8-15; Eph 5:22-6:9 par. Col 3:18-4:1) and 1Cor 14:34-36 which most Pauline scholars consider to be an interpolation under the influence of the Household Codes. For a critical discussion of the role of these Household Codes in the later decades of the first century see Margaret Y. MacDonald, The Pauline Churches: A Socio-Historical Study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings SNTSMS 60 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9 This title, which became quite common in the twelfth century, appears to date back to Hippolytus, bishop of Rome (c. 170-235) in his Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles. On the title in the twelfth century see, Jane Schaberg, The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Tradition (New York: Continuum, 2002), 88.

10 A number of church Fathers comment on Phoebe and have no difficulty with Paul naming a woman as a ‘deacon’. See for example, John Chrysostom, Homily 30 on Rom 16:1-2. This text is cited in Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek eds., Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 15. John Chrysostom speaks of women ‘who hold the rank of deacon.’ (Homily 11 on Timothy 3:11; cited ibid. 19. Similarly, Theodoret Bishop of Cyrrhus, (Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:11; cited ibid. 19). Phoebe is called diakonos and prostasis and these words are frequently mistranslated. The term prostasis when used to describe the role of an episkopos (1Tim 3:4) and presbyter (1Tim 5:17) is translated as ‘rule’, but when used of Phoebe is frequently translated as ‘helper’ or ‘patron’.


12 In Acts 20:11. Paul breaks bread, but this may simply be an expression for taking food and is not necessarily a Eucharist.


14 A copy of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s Document and a discussion of this document and ‘The Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood,’ can be found in John R. Donohue, ‘A Tale of Two Documents,’ in Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration, ed. Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler (New York: Paulist, 1977); the voting numbers are on pg. 25.
16 The first ritual of ordination is found in The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, dated around 215. See Osborne, Priesthood, 117.
17 ‘Virgins’ were sometimes called ‘Widows,’ and this may have been because they performed the same duties and professed continence. ‘Greetings to the families of my brothers, along with their wives and children, and to the virgins called widows’ (Ignatius of Antioch, Ep. to Smyrneans 13:1. See Roger Gryson, The Ministry of Women in the Early Church (Collegeville: Order of St Benedict, 1976), 13-14, 21-22.
19 Theodore of Mopsuestia, Commentary on 1 Tim 5:9. See Madigan and Osiek, Ordained Women in the Early Church, 22.
20 Tertullian, De exhortatione castitatis 13, 4.
23 A description of these rituals is given in Gary Macy, The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 81. Macy provides an Ordination rite for an Abbess from the Early Middle Ages in Appendix 2 and a 10th century ordination ritual for a deaconess in Appendix 1. For a discussion of these rituals see ibid. pp. 70-73.
25 See especially Madigan and Osiek, Ordained Women in the Early Church, 226.
26 Madigan and Osiek, Ordained Women in the Early Church, 193; also Eisen, Women Officeholders in Early Christianity, 199.
27 Church of Praxedes
28 Inter Insigniores, (1976) and Ordinatio Sacerdotalis (1994).
29 The issue of women deacons was not addressed by the declaration Inter Insigniores. The commentary on this declaration noted that this ‘is a question that must be taken up fully by direct study of the texts, without preconceived ideas,’ and ‘that it should be kept for the future.’ See, From ‘Inter Insigniores’ to ‘Ordinatio Sacerdotalis’: Documents and Commentaries, (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic [Bishops’] Conference, 1996) 61.

Among those who have expressed support for the ordination of women to the diaconate are Cardinal Basil Hume, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, and Bishop Roger J. Vangheluwe of Bruges. See Phyllis Zagano, ‘The Question of Governance and Ministry for Women’, Theological Studies 68 (2007): 358
31 Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, para. 31.

Readers may wish to revisit Compass (Vol. 34, no. 1—Autumn 2000) for reflections on and responses to Woman and Man. One in Christ Jesus (1999), the report on the research project on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia commissioned by the Australian Bishops Conference and undertaken by the Bishops’ Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, the Australian Catholic University and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes.
THE THREE FORMS
OF THE WORD OF GOD

JEAN RICHARD MSC

This is a reflection on the Word of God—or, more exactly, on the ecclesial or liturgical practice of the Word of God. Karl Barth (1886-1968) seems to me to have provided some particularly helpful insights. Called ‘the theologian of the Word of God’, his magisterial Church Dogmatics was precisely a return to the Word of God.

We need to note Barth’s place in the evolution of theology in the twentieth century. All theology, all understanding of the faith, is situated between two poles, that of the Gospel message on the one hand and the actual state of the world on the other. Theologies are distinguishable according to which of these poles they most respond to. Thus, reacting to the ‘liberal theology’ which, according to him, had reduced the Gospel to modern culture, to a simple religious dressing up of modernity, Barth sought to re-focus attention on the pole of the Word of God in opposition to the spirit of the world.

Certainly there was in this endeavour the danger of distorting the Gospel from the world. But on the other hand, the firm anchorage that Barth and his companions had in the Word of God enabled them to strongly oppose the Naziist ideology of the ‘German Christians’ and to inspire a parallel Church, the ‘Confessing Church’.

It is no surprise, then, that the first volume of Church Dogmatics is consecrated to the doctrine of the Word of God. I shall retain a distinction that was characteristic of Barth’s theology, that of the three forms of the Word of God.

The Preached Word

The Word of God impacts upon us first in the form of the preached Word, in the preaching of the Church. Thus, right from the beginning, the context is ecclesial and liturgical. Here we recognise Karl Barth the pastor of the village of Safenwil in Switzerland (1911-1921). For him the principal function of the pastor is preaching, the proclamation of the Word of God. That resonates with us Catholics. For us, also, the first part of the Eucharistic celebration is a celebration of the Word which culminates in the preaching of the homily which applies the Word of God for us today.

The question that arises, then, is how preaching, the homily, can be called the Word of God. For preaching is a human word, a thoroughly human word. The preacher is not a loud-speaker, a voice box of the Holy Spirit. The preacher speaks in human language with human reasoning and sentiments. His preaching shows all his qualities and is affected by all his human weaknesses.

But, by the grace of God, through the inspiration of God, this entirely human word is elevated to the dignity of Word of God. In the human word the very Word of God is expressed and heard. Barth wrote:

Hence the preaching is no longer only the effect of a human will with its own character, it is first of all and above all the proper action of God; thus our human words about God are no longer only human, they are also first of all and above all the very Word of God.

[And he concludes:] The preached Word of God is a human word about God in which, and through which, God Himself speaks of Himself.

This means that the hearers of the preaching can hear the Word of God through the human word of the preacher. But we need to add at this point a corollary to Barth’s exposition or, more precisely, we need to clarify something which is only implicit in his teaching. For the hearers to be able to perceive the Word of God...
in the preaching which they hear, they must be themselves inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is necessary that their human hearing be elevated to the level of the Word of God. We could say that their ears must be attuned with the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. For only the Spirit of God can truly hear the Word of God.

This leads to another question. If the Spirit is present to all the faithful, not just the clergy, could one legitimately exclude any of them from preaching? Enough here to open a few reflection starters. To be sure no group of faithful (women, for example) can in principle be excluded from the ministry of preaching. Nonetheless, it is appropriate that this ministry be confided to the faithful who are the most able, as is the case for other ecclesial functions. Moreover, in our time when we are discovering the fruits of dialogue, it is more than desirable that we establish places and times for sharing the Word, be it during liturgical celebrations or elsewhere.

The Written Word

One more thing as we follow the thread of Barth’s exposition. If the word of the preacher inspired by the Spirit of God becomes Word of God, it is because it is connected with Scripture which itself is Word of God insofar as the Scripture is inspired by the Spirit of God. Here again the progression of the Eucharistic liturgy is very significant. The homily follows the biblical readings and is offered as a commentary and application of these readings from the Old and New Testaments.

Consequently there is continuity between the written Word and the preached Word. All the more is this so since Scripture is itself a written preaching, that of the prophets and apostles:

The origin of this resemblance [the continuity between Scripture and preaching] comes from the fact that Scripture is itself only secondarily something written; it is primarily the account of a preaching pronounced by human lips.

[It follows that:] Jeremiah and Paul are at the beginning, the present-day preacher of the Gospel is at the end of one and the same line.

The continuity between the apostolic preaching and the preaching of the Church presupposes that this latter be faithful to the former:

The reality [i.e. the authenticity and effectiveness] of the preaching is clearly determined by the link to Scripture, which is its foundation.

This is precisely the meaning that Barth attributes to ‘apostolic succession’. There is apostolic succession when the successor is submitted to the predecessor:

Apostolic succession can have for the Church only one meaning: its submission to the Canon [of Scripture], that is, the effective recognition of the word of the prophets and apostles as the rule for every word in the Church.

We can see here Barth making a point against the Catholic conception of apostolic succession, understood as a papal succession down the centuries. This is criticised as being a somewhat legalistic conception, rather difficult to verify historically. Barth is right to insist on the spiritual aspect of such an apostolic succession as being a succession according to the Spirit of the Scriptures. But thereby we recognise another aspect of the catholic conception. It is the bishop, as successor of the apostles, who is the first to receive the mission of announcing the Word of God in the Church; all others exercise this ministry as his collaborators.

The authority of the preached Word depends, therefore, on its continuity with the written Word. But in what consists the authority of Scripture? Why should the preaching of the Church rely
upon it in order to become itself Word of God? It is because Scripture, as apostolic preaching, is testimony concerning Jesus Christ who is himself the Word of God: ‘The prophetic and apostolic word is word, testimony, proclamation and preaching of Jesus Christ’.

However, we must carefully understand the meaning of our faith in Christ as incarnation of the Word of God. It is not only a revelation of the nature of God Father, Son and Spirit. It is above all the revelation of the action of God in the world, for the world. Thus it is not solely the mystery of God that is revealed but also and above all the mystery of the salvation of the world. We can see then that Word of God coincides ultimately with the action of God, God’s creative and redemptive action. As Barth wrote:

The promise made to the Church by this Word [prophetic and apostolic] is the promise of the mercy of God expressed in the person of the One who is truly God and truly man; mercy that takes hold of us in our total inability to help ourselves on account of our hostility towards God. The promise of that word is called ‘Emmanuel’, God with us! Yes, with us who plunge ourselves repeatedly into the same distress, which consists of not being able to be with God. Sacred Scripture is the word of men who have called upon, waited for and hoped for this Emmanuel, and who have at last seen, heard and touched him in Jesus Christ. This word speaks, attests to and preaches this fact.

The Revealed Word

Thus there is anteriority of Scripture to preaching. In the same way we must now say that there is anteriority of revelation, of the revealed Word, to Scripture. Barth explains:

The revelation that the biblical witnesses contemplate and which they indicate beyond themselves is distinct from the word of these witnesses in a purely formal manner, just as any action is always distinct from the most exact account that one gives of it. But this distinction is negligible in relation to this fact which overturns every analogy, namely that, in revelation it is Jesus Christ who has been foretold and who came in the fulness of time—namely the authentic Word of God, literally, really and directly pronounced by God. But the Bible never offers us more than human attempts to express this Word of God by limited human words, thoughts and situations.

Thus, just as Scripture engenders preaching, Barth can say that the revealed Word engenders the written Word: ‘Revelation engenders Scripture which testifies to it’. (110) Thus revelation remains the norm of Scripture, just as Scripture constitutes the origin and the norm of preaching. But revelation, the very Word of God, is the absolute norm, while the human expressions of this Word are relative:

Certainly, this word ‘revelation’ can give the impression of something relative; but the Bible means only an absolute; it is in the knowledge of this absolute that the Church, assisted by the Bible, remembers [in preaching] the revelation that has occurred.

Barth, then, presents the relativisation of preaching and of Scripture in relation to the absolute of the Word of God. And this relativisation at the same time signifies liberation for faith. The text of Scripture should not be interpreted literally as if the absolute of God resided in the very letter of Scripture. It is only the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ that constitutes the absolute Word of God ‘literally, really and directly pronounced by God’.

Catholics are certainly quite in agreement with this rejection of biblical fundamentalism. But this same principle of the absolute transcendence of the Word of God entails another consequence that could disturb the religious sensibility of some Catholics. If we must deny absolute validity to each affirmation of the Bible, all the more we must deny it for the preaching of the Church, including all the dogmatic and ethical teachings of the Church Magisterium. These teaching are quite authoritative; they are even invested with the dignity of the Word of God insofar as one can hear its echo in the words of the Church. But they remain human words which refer to the Word of God which transcends them and judges them.

Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God thus liberates us from biblical fundamentalism; it also liberates us from ecclesiastical absolut-
ism. But it in no wise liberates us from the absolute of the Word of God. On the contrary, it is by adhering absolutely in faith to the Word of God by way of Church preaching and Sacred Scripture that we will be liberated from the unsupportable burden of biblical and ecclesial legalism.

We must admit that this is not a comfortable situation, one of utter repose. We understand that some people prefer the servitude of the Law to the freedom of the Spirit. For this freedom entails an undeniable risk, that of relying on our own human spirit rather than on the Spirit of God. The liberty of the children of God thus relies upon the discernment of spirits, which is itself a gift of God, a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Christian who relies with complete confidence and submission on this Spirit of God can then know the joy of hearing the Word of God in the human words of Scripture and the preaching of the Church.

**Conclusion**

I have presented what seems to me to be the essentials of Karl Barth’s theology of the Word of God. We might describe it as an appreciation and at the same time a relativisation of the written Word and the preached Word. Scripture and Church preaching are appreciated as being Word of God: they give witness to Christ the Word of God; it is through them that the Word of God comes to us. But these two expressions of the Word of God are relativised in relation to the revealed Word, the absolute that is the divine Word itself.

However, the theology of Barth is also significant and instructive in what it leaves out and what it does not say. The transcendence of the Word of God is so emphasised in his theology that the whole immanent dimension of this same divine reality is left aside. This is so with both religion and culture. In religion the immanence of the Word of God (through the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of the faithful) is obliterated. Barth places so much emphasis on the transcendence of the Word of God in relation to every human word that one is given to understand the coming of the Word as only from on high: from divine revelation to Sacred Scripture to Church preaching. No account is taken of the inverse procession, originating in the word of the ‘interior master’ as Augustine referred to it.

The same is true, and even more so, with respect to culture, which is entirely an expression of the human spirit and word. Is there not in this something sacred and divine to explore and to express in a kind of ‘theology of culture’? Barth tends in the opposite direction, to the point of describing as ‘cultural protestantism’ the efforts of liberal theologians to find Christian elements in modern culture. He himself accepts only the judgment of the Word of God on the spirit of the world.

The polarity of transcendence and immanence also pertains to the relationship of Word and Spirit. We place much store today on ‘spirituality’, which is the life of the Spirit, interior religion. By his insistence on the Word as external, transcendent, the preached Word, Barth puts the emphasis on ‘faith’ as in St Paul’s statement: ‘Faith comes from preaching and preaching comes from the word of Christ’ (Rom.10.17).

This provides a criterion for distinguishing different religions. All authentic religions must unite transcendence and immanence. Some, however, (some oriental religions) are characterised by the immanence of their spirituality, while others (e.g. Judaism, Christianity and Islam) emphasise faith in the Word. And each religion in the course of its evolution can pass from one pole to the other. Thus many Christians today seek in oriental spirituality a counter to the legalistic and authoritarian hardening of the external word. A return to the life-giving faith in the Word of God could therefore be just as salutary today as it was in the time of Karl Barth.

Our translation from the original in *Cahiers de Spiritualité Ignatienne* No 125 (2009), p. 43-50. With permission.
THE HUMAN FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

MARIA TIIMON

MY NAME IS Maria Tiimon and I come from the island nation of Kiribati situated on the equator in the Pacific. I am employed by the Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney working for the Pacific Calling Partnership. As Pacific Outreach Officer, my work includes giving speeches and running workshops about how climate change is affecting Pacific Islands, and attending as invited and funded international meetings and conferences and taking part in delegations.

Kiribati is one of the smallest and most low-lying island nations in the Pacific. It is made up of thirty-three islands, twenty-one of them inhabited, and most being only two to three metres above sea level. Kiribati used to be known as the Gilbert Islands.

Our small country is facing critically difficult times due to the impact of climate change on our culture and on our future.

The I-Kiribati are warm, friendly and welcoming people. Visitors, and those working in Kiribati, are treated with the greatest respect, politeness and deference. Kiribati is one of the poorest countries on earth, but because the people are so communal, there are no street-people or beggars. Everybody shares and helps each other.

The I-Kiribati people often live in open houses with their extended family. Living and working in harmony with neighbours and family is an essential part of our culture. Few things go unnoticed in a small community, and privacy is not a priority. As each family still sends for itself, things such as the best places for fishing, handicraft techniques and other skills are kept within the family.

The culture of Kiribati has been preserved by the isolation that comes with being in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Although missionaries began to arrive on the shores in the 1850’s, much of the traditions and beliefs of the people have remained the same.

The people have traditionally lived in a subsistence economy based on crops like taro, breadfruits, coconut and pandanus and fish for their protein. Sadly drought, storm surges, seawater inundation and coral bleaching have already had an impact on these traditional food sources. Several communities in Kiribati have had to move and more can see that they will need to move in the future.

Scientists are still debating about the extent of rising sea levels. I am not a scientist, but what I know is that things are happening that our people have never experienced in the past.

In my recent visits, I had a chance to interview three elderly men from different villages on my home island of Beru.

Iorim Tabuae said, ‘The weather changes a lot, now days you cannot predict it anymore as it changes at any minute. There are also places that we have to move houses towards the inland because the land had been eroded. Our islands are so tiny and we are afraid that we’ll fall on the other side of the sea water.’

Komwenga Tuarai said, ‘The trees are dying out, and now life is getting harder. The breadfruit trees which are one of our main diets are dying out and some of the wells that we used to get fresh water from are becoming salty. Life is very difficult.’

And Bubuti from another village also shared his story with me and said, ‘I don’t know what it is, but we people of Kiribati are now seeing first hand all the changes that are occurring. There are a lot of these changes with
the weather in comparison to the old days.’

My own father said, ‘Maria I know I am getting old, and I might not be here when this happens. My heart goes to my grandchildren and the young generation. How long will they survive? Where will they be with this issue of climate change?’ He also said, ‘I love my country. This is where I was born and I’d rather die here in Beru.’

The President of Kiribati Anote Tong, is very proactive on this issue and is reaching out to industrialized countries to try and negotiate on cutting down their green-house gas emissions.

The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), which represents forty-three countries, Kiribati is one of them, said it could consider pledges on emissions cuts made voluntarily by rich nations if they were made into legally-binding targets.

The group has consistently demanded that industrialized countries toughen pledges to cut greenhouse gas emissions they made at a climate conference last year in Cancun.

The group could consider the emissions pledges under a legally-binding deal, as a first step to keep climate action on track before a review in 2015, also agreed in Mexico, said Leon Charles, AOSIS chief negotiator. (Quoted from the Environment and Conservation Division – Kiribati government website. www.climate.gov.ki.)

I strongly feel that we I-Kiribati people have every right to save our place of birth, our beloved country called Kiribati. While climate change affects everyone, there’s no doubt that it will hit the poorest and the most marginalized groups the hardest.

As Christians, let us all work together, caring for the earth, all creatures and human beings God has created. My hope and prayer is that all people will be more willing to be good stewards, and help other people especially the voiceless and the marginalized whose lives continue to be threatened as a result of climate change.

[...] the natural environment is given by God to everyone, and so our use of it entails a personal responsibility towards humanity as a whole, particularly towards the poor and towards future generations.

How important it is then, that the international community and individual governments send the right signals to their citizens and succeed in countering harmful ways of treating the environment! The economic and social costs of using up shared resources must be recognized with transparency and borne by those who incur them, and not by other peoples or future generations. The protection of the environment, and the safeguarding of resources and of the climate, oblige all leaders to act jointly, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the world. Together we can build an integral human development beneficial for all peoples, present and future, a development inspired by the values of charity in truth. For this to happen it is essential that the current model of global development be transformed through a greater, and shared, acceptance of responsibility for creation: this is demanded not only by environmental factors, but also by the scandal of hunger and human misery.

—Pope Benedict, Videostatement to the UN 2009 Summit on Climate Change.
AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

BISHOP GEORGE BROWNING

Theological Position Paper for Multi-faith Delegations, June 2nd 2011 prepared by Bishop George Browning in consultation with other members of the multi-faith ARRCC Religious Leaders Working Group.

THERE ARE ominous signs that the world order that we have known and relied upon in the past is changing.1 Ecological systems worldwide are under very considerable strain and, in worst cases, are collapsing. Climatologists confirm that the increasing release of greenhouse gases (GHG) is leading the world on a dangerous path of global warming and consequent climate change.2

The changes are also building a growing inequity between human beings, and an inequity between humans and non-human creation. History tells us that unattended inequity is likely to produce a violent correction.

The last twelve months have witnessed extreme weather events, fires in Russia, floods in Pakistan, Brazil and Australia, ongoing droughts in Africa and extreme cold in parts of North America and Europe. While none of these events can be said to be specifically caused by global warming, science has consistently predicted that warming increases the intensity and frequency of such events. Recent research is beginning to confirm that global warming significantly contributed to particular instances of extreme weather.3

The year 2010 recorded the second hottest mean global temperature, while eight of the hottest years recorded have occurred since the year 2000.4 Local government authorities now face the prospect of uninsurable property and, following disaster, all authorities face the prospect of bankrupting litigation.

It is therefore clear that underlying principles of human engagement and cooperation must change, but how are they to change?

Common to all faiths is teaching that life is relational, that human beings, while having the responsibility to care for creation, are also part of it. Humanity’s health is directly related to the health of the whole created order. The Moslem faith, for example, holds that the relationship between man and nature should be like that of a just ruler and his subjects. Abuse of his power shifts him from being a ruler to a tyrant. The end result of man’s tyranny over nature is nature’s revolt against the tyrant, as is happening now.

This tyranny is not historically new, but three factors are new and their combined impact has turned the present moment into one of crisis:

1. Since the commencement of the industrial revolution the capacity of humanity to exploit creation through technology has grown exponentially. Technology enables humanity to impact the created order in ways that accentuate inequity between humans and the very sources of life upon which we all depend. In
addition, while technology has the potential to advance all humanity, the increasing tendency towards ownership and privatisation of even that which really belongs to the “common wealth” has in fact accentuated inequity between human beings.

2. The global human population at the time of Christ was estimated to be 200 million; at around 1800 it was 600 million; currently it is around 6.9 billion. Clearly environmental poverty and human poverty are linked. When local ecologies become degraded, human poverty becomes more desperate, which in turn adversely affects ecological health. We also know that population growth is slowed by educational development and the reduction of poverty.

3. As standards of living increase, every human being uses an increased proportion of available resources. Resources are finite in two respects. First, there is only a certain amount of oil to be extracted and only a certain amount of fresh water available for human need and the retention of healthy river systems. Secondly, only a certain amount of grain can be grown every year. If extreme weather events reduce, or destroy, expected yields, there is a time lag between the immediate pressures of hunger and the next cycle of production. Many global food stocks are now at their lowest level for decades, increasing prices and contributing to civil unrest. It is estimated that exploitation of the non-human creation to feed the human appetite is now running at an annual, compounding, 140%, escalating our debt to the future. With fiscal pressures on governments today it is easier to postpone any commitment to meeting the real environmental costs of production.

Many respected voices, of whom Lord Reece is one, say: it cannot be taken for granted that humanity will journey towards the end of this century without reaching a point where adaptive choice has been so reduced that life as we know it for billions has become impossible.

In the light of this summary situation, we the members of Australia’s faith communities have two responses.

**First we want to argue that this is essentially a moral issue.**

We human beings have no future on this planet if our moral sensibility remains too limited, if we continue to act in our short-term, narrow self-interest, and fail to develop a broader awareness of our well-being being intimately connected with the health of our environment. It is our disconnection from the environment and from each other which has led us to act in ways that have caused untold harm.

1. *It is a moral issue because while the potentially detrimental outcomes of climate change most severely impact the poor, it is the prosperous who most significantly contribute to the cause through a more significant carbon footprint.* It is the responsibility of the world’s prosperous to do two things:

   a) Through commitment to the millennium development goals, peoples of the developed world must work to reduce the growing disparity between rich and poor.

   While Faith communities applaud the Federal Government’s commitment to increase its overseas aid commitment to 0.5% of Gross National Income we implore Australia, now arguably the most stable economic community in the OECD, to increase its commitment to at least the international standard of 0.7%.

   b) The prosperous must also meet the costs of developing countries’ need for adaptation and at a scale which is adequate to meet the
needs. This should be additional to overseas development assistance. Australia’s ‘fair share’ internationally would be in the order of billions of dollars annually. Australia’s current contribution is a small fraction of its fair share of internationally agreed estimates of the need, and it comes out of our overseas aid budget. This is not unacceptable.

Furthermore, the ways funds are spent should be guided by the judgement of those in developing countries who have an informed understanding of what is appropriate in their own context.

2. It is a moral issue because outcomes that arise from choices in the present reduce choices for future generations. We, members of faith communities have always understood we are all inheritors of the contribution that others have made before us and we affect the options available to those who follow us. It is quite unsatisfactory to expect further technological invention to substitute for responsible action in the present. We urge society to have a grandchild mentality, that is to say, a way of thinking that weighs choices in the present against their potential cost to future generations. We urge politicians to provide leadership and not to be swayed by members of society who appear dedicated to their own short-term advantage.

3. It is a moral issue in that how human beings relate to the rest of the created order bears testimony to the inner integrity of humanity itself. If humanity can easily watch the disappearance of other species without feeling the cost, if diversity is diminished without grief, then humanity as a moral species has already been severely diminished. We in the faith communities do not argue for the care of the natural order at the expense of humanity’s needs, but rather for an appropriate balance. The Qur’an confirms the perfect balance within nature: ‘And the earth We have spread out (like a carpet); set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.’ 15: 19. We argue that a way forward must be found in which humanity flourishes because creation retains its healthy equilibrium.

This brings us to our second response—the human vocation.

In his sermon in the Copenhagen Cathedral prior to the 2010 global conference, Rowan Williams said we do not have an environmental crisis so much as a crisis of the human vocation. Has humanity reached its fullest potential when we stand above in a position of power, control and exploitation or when we stand beside, as a partner in service of the common good? While the former proposition in the human domain is decried as wrong, undemocratic and abusive, it has become the accepted model of behaviour in relation to creation.

Our faith communities hold in common an understanding that human beings are vocationally called to be carers of creation. In some faiths we see this vocation as being in partnership with the Creator.

We also contend that in the complexities of life we human beings need to develop sound priorities in our human affairs. For example, most people accept the priority of care for family over against increased status or salary. We want to question the priority that has been given to economic growth above all other priorities. We note that while tragically there are many who are genuinely poor in Australia, equally there are many who are in fact finding it hard to pay mortgages on very large houses and to pay off a glut of consumer goods. Australian housing has the highest per capita floor space of any nation on earth. At the same time social analysis indicates unacceptably high levels of loneliness, mental ill-health and lifestyle diseases.

Unlimited economic ‘growth’ should not be attributed such importance but, rather, ‘human and ecological well-being’. It would be much better if prosperity could be measured in levels of community cohesion, social equity, work/life balance, job satisfaction, rates of physical and mental health; and the quality
and integrity of our environment. On this basis, more value would be placed on the substantial societal contributions of parents nurturing children, along with carers and volunteers.

Moreover, such a change will require us to revise the key factors that currently drive economic growth, such as the pursuit of labour productivity, so that we are no longer locked into an economy that must grow in order to be stable. Research and development of macro-economics for a post-growth economy is required.14

We note with sadness the primacy that is given to the individual at the expense of communities, both human and non-human. We accept as fundamental the defence of individual rights, but we argue that this is only part of the story: communities also have rights, the world’s poor and marginalised have rights, those yet to be born have rights and the whole created order has the right to its own integrity.

We believe that a myriad of different strategies to reduce GHG in the atmosphere are important: public investment in renewable energy, stronger mandatory energy efficiency standards and incentives such as gross feed-in tariffs for energy-generation from renewable sources. However we acknowledge that one policy in particular is the current focus of the political community, namely some kind of price on carbon. We hold that the architecture of a carbon price must ensure that the transition takes place in the shortest possible time frame from dependency on fossil fuels to an embracing of renewable energy. In whatever way the mechanism is designed, flexibility must be created so that Australia’s pollution can be reduced well beyond our current low targets, in response to scientific and international developments.

There should be no granting of free permits. Transitional protection for so-called trade-exposed, carbon intensive industries should be kept minimal. They should be phased out quickly. Furthermore, the pricing mechanism must be designed so emissions are actually reduced within Australia, and they are not outsourced to developing countries through an off-shore carbon credit system.

Finally, the Government should guarantee support for affected workers to transition to other forms of employment, and low income households should be provided with subsidies to prevent undue hardship.

We are aware of the cost this imposes on large sections of Australian society; however the cost of not doing so could compromise the future of humanity itself. Australia has more to lose through climate change than any other OECD country, and the longer the cost is postponed the heavier the burden on our grandchildren.

The ecological limits of the Earth are not negotiable, and we treat responsible action in relation to these limits as ‘unrealistic’ at our own peril.

We, members of Australia’s faith communities commit ourselves to the common good of all Australians present and future, believing that what is morally right will prove to be right for the sustainable future of global humanity within the context of the whole created order.

NOTES

1 ‘We will have to accommodate the fact that due to our own actions, Nature has turned against us and can no longer be relied upon to provide the conditions for the flourishing of life’: Clive Hamilton, Requiem for a species: why we resist the truth about climate change (Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, NSW, 2010), 210.

2 The Dutch Government issued a press release on the 5 July 2010 confirming the core conclusions of the International Panel on Climate change (IPCC), conclusions that had come under very considerable criticism and which had emanated from the fourth assessment report of a potential 3000 scientists worldwide. On 23 June 2010 IPCC announced 831 scientists (from a 3000 pool of inter-related disciplines) will co-author the fifth assess-
AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE


7. Australian Conservation Foundation eco-footprint calculator, using data from the Integrated Sustainability Analysis method developed by the ISA team at the University of Sydney and ACF.


9. Lord Reece is Britain’s Chief Scientist. His remarks were made during his 2010 lecture visit to Melbourne.

10. Australians are estimated to have the largest per capita carbon footprint of any OECD country at approximately 24 tons per annum while many of the poorest in the world have a footprint of less than 1 ton. The Chinese footprint is approximately 5 tons per person


12. Archbishop of Canterbury

13. ‘Ask what would be a healthy and sustainable relationship with the world, a relationship that would in some way manifest both joy in and respect for the Earth’: Rowan Williams, Sermon: Copenhagen Cathedral (13 December 2009), http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2728 (accessed 3 September 2010)


DECLARATION BY THE WORKING GROUP OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

We call on all people and nations to recognise the serious and potentially irreversible impacts of global warming caused by the anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and by changes in forests, wetlands, grasslands, and other land uses. We appeal to all nations to develop and implement, without delay, effective and fair policies to reduce the causes and impacts of climate change on communities and ecosystems, including mountain glaciers and their watersheds, aware that we all live in the same home. By acting now, in the spirit of common but differentiated responsibility, we accept our duty to one another and to the stewardship of a planet blessed with the gift of life.

We are committed to ensuring that all inhabitants of this planet receive their daily bread, fresh air to breathe and clean water to drink as we are aware that, if we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us. The believers among us ask God to grant us this wish.

(The working group consists of glaciologists, climate scientists, meteorologists, hydrologists, physicists, chemists, mountaineers, and lawyers organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican, to contemplate the observed retreat of the mountain glaciers, its causes and consequences. This report resulted from a workshop in April 2011 at the Vatican.)
DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI

Sermon Delivered in the Church of St Damien,

Leuven, Belgium 12 March 2010

LAWRENCE CROSS

Men and women of Leuven, as I walk through your city I see how extremely religious you are (or were?) in every way. From houses and public buildings I see looking down at me the figures of saints and angels; even the street in which I am lodging is named after St Hubert, and there are many fine Churches in every district.

But it was not long before I was faced with a puzzle; every day as I walk to the conference from my lodging I pass the Sint-Jacobskerk. In the grounds of the Church there is a sculpture honouring one Joseph de Veuster (1840-1889). This is a fine sculptural composition, but is it Saint Damien of Molokai? I see a tall man with aristocratic bearing, wearing an elegant and tailored religious habit. He has a noble head, with its eyes fixed upon some spiritual vision in the middle-distance. Under his cloak huddles an almost naked man, emaciated yes, but not really exhibiting any of the signs of the fatal contagion associated with Fr Damien. On his face there is only a look of distress and anxiety. Clearly European, his physiognomy is certainly not that of a Hawaiian Islander.

However, when I visited Sint-Pieterskerk, the fine Church in the centre of the city, I encountered another Joseph de Veuster who bore no resemblance to the clearly romantic sculptural composition at the Church of St James. Here was a painting of a bearded man with heavy peasant features, with a straw hat jammed on his head over glasses, with nothing aesthetically pleasing about him. Which is the real Fr Damien?

My search for the real Damien took me back to my own native city, Sydney, Australia, which, remember, is also deep in the Pacific, though on its western side. Consequently, even as a schoolboy in Sydney in the 1940s and 50s I already knew of the Saint of Molokai. We knew of his heroic decision to minister to the lepers and somehow I knew that he hadn’t been made a saint as yet, though we all believed he was one, because of his rather difficult nature and problems with authority. But Sydney, Australia, was the very place in 1890 in which the real Fr Damien was revealed and defended publicly for the first time, because shortly before he had been libelously defamed. A certain protestant minister of Honolulu, the Rev. Dr. Hyde—who strangely enough some years before had written in praise of Fr Damien—sent a defamatory letter to a colleague in Sydney, the Rev. H.B. Gage who proceeded to publish this libel in the Sydney press, a libel which was an inexplicable reaction to what it called ‘the extravagant newspaper laudations, as if he was a most saintly philanthropist.’ In his about face, Hyde claimed to have known the man and asserted that

He was a coarse, dirty man, headstrong and bigoted. He was not sent to Molokai, but went there without orders … he had no hand in the reforms and improvements…he was not a pure man in his relations with women, and the leprosy of which he died should be attributed to his vices and carelessness. (2 August, 1889)

In the case of Fr Damien’s besmirched reputation, divine providence was not slow to manifest itself. The agent of providence is a surprise, no less than the famous Scottish novelist, poet, essayist and travel writer, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), who happened to be in Sydney in 1890, and who came upon the ugly message from Hyde, written in his most comfortable house in Beretania Street,
Honolulu. Stevenson had visited the leper island of Molokai after Fr Damien’s death and stayed there for some eight days and seven nights. To understand Damien, we must understand Molokai. Stephenson’s experience reveals both. In his reply to the Rev Dr Hyde he wrote of this experience:

When I was pulled ashore there one early morning, there sat with me in the boat two sisters, bidding farewell (in humble imitation of Damien) to the lights and joys of human life. One of these wept silently; I could not withhold myself from joining her. Had you been there, it is my belief that nature would have triumphed even in you; and as the boat drew but a little nearer, and you beheld the stairs crowded with abominable deformations of our common manhood, and saw yourself landing in the midst of such a population as only now and then surrounds us in the horror of a nightmare—what a haggard eye you would have rolled over your reluctant shoulder towards the house on Beretania Street! Had you gone on; had you found every fourth face a blot upon the landscape; had you visited the hospital and seen the butt-ends of human beings lying there almost unrecognisable, but still breathing, still thinking, still remembering; you would have understood that life in the lazaretto is an ordeal from which the nerves of a man’s spirit shrink, even as his eye quails under the brightness of the sun; you would have felt it was (even today) a pitiful place to visit and a hell to dwell in. It is not the fear of possible infection. That seems a little thing when compared with the pain, the pity, and the disgust of the visitor’s surroundings, and the atmosphere of affliction, disease, and physical disgrace in which he breathes. I do not think I am a man more than usually timid; but I never recall the days and nights I spent upon that island promontory (eight days and seven nights), without heartfelt thankfulness that I am somewhere else. I find in my diary that I speak of my stay as a ‘grinding experience’. I have once jotted in the margin, ‘HARROWING is the word’; and when the MOKOL II bore me at last towards the outer world, I kept repeating to myself, with a new conception of their pregnancy, those simple words of the song—‘Tis the most distressful country that ever yet was seen’.

Stevenson was able to reveal the true Damien and to rescue him from his portrait, with its conventional halo and conventional features, the de Veuster of Sint-Jacobskerk. Well intentioned admirers did him no favour. Stephenson notes that it is ‘the least defect of such a method of portraiture that it makes the path easy for the devil’s advocate…For the truth that is suppressed by friends is the readiest weapon of the enemy.’

Hyde had claimed that Damien was ‘dirty, coarse, bigoted, headstrong and impure’. Stephenson is prepared to admit some truth in these criticisms, but observes that, like the Pharisees before him, Rev. Hyde has actually drawn a picture of his own heart. Admitting these faults in Damien is not at all painful to the ‘true lovers, patrons and servants of mankind’. They rescue us from ‘substituting once for all a credible likeness for wax abstraction’.

Calling Fr Damien ‘dirty, coarse, bigoted, headstrong and impure’ recalls the charges leveled at someone else who was called a mere carpenter’s son, who came from no-where Nazareth, a sinner, a drunkard, a blasphemer, and an associate of low-lifes. But the parallel with Jesus of Nazareth goes deeper still. In the portrayal of Jesus’ suffering and death, the Gospel writers grant Jesus a certain gravity, particularly when confronted by Pilate, but we must remember that the Lord had a true humanity with a psychology like to our own. Beneath that gravity the divine-man suffered a gut-churning fear as would we faced with the horror to come, yet as the Eucharistic Prayer of the Eastern Liturgy affirms, his sac-
rifice was free. ‘On the night on which he was betrayed, or rather, when he surrendered himself for the life of the world’. Jesus made himself outcast and criminal, subject to utter contempt, with no way out. Damien’s first night on Molokai recalls that same terrible, free sacrifice of Jesus. Stephenson takes us back to that first night, noting that

It was a different place when Damien came there and made this great renunciation, and slept that first night under a tree amidst his rotting brethren: alone with pestilence; and looking forward (with what courage, with what pitiful sinkings of dread, God only knows) to a lifetime of dressing sores and stumps…what daunts the onlooker is that monstrous sum of human suffering by which he stands surrounded. Lastly, no doctor or nurse is called upon to enter once for all the doors of that gehenna; they do not say farewell, they need not abandon hope, on its sad threshold; they but go for a time to their high calling, and can look forward as they go to relief, to recreation, and to rest. But Damien shut-to with his own hand the doors of his own sepulchre.

And when infection would come, as it surely would, he knew there was no way out.

The Rev. Hyde should recognise himself in those who mocked ‘let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him’. Stephenson, however, says ‘because he did what he did, I believe in him’. Let us hear the awful words of Stephenson again ‘but Damien shut-to with his own hand the doors of his own sepulchre’.

The wonderful thing about Fr Damien of Molokai is that he so powerfully demonstrates how our salvation is built on our humanity but restored in the divine humanity of Jesus. Like many of the ancient Fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Evagrius Ponticus, the holiness of Fr Damien warns us against perfectionism. Christianity is a religion of imperfection, and spiritual disaster awaits those pursuing a satanic perfectionism. This is what Jesus meant by the leaven of the Pharisees and the pride of Sadducees. In this Damien is truly our spiritual father and teacher. Like all true saints, his life throws up a challenge to the Church.

Damien in particular challenges the contemporary Church to embrace and love the outcasts. If the Church fails in this task, we become the Pharisee and Sadducee, preoccupied with rituals and structures, and with image, influence, and worldly status, being greeted obsequiously in the marketplace, and called Rabbi, ‘But all their works they do for to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments’ (Matt 23:5). Even recent scandals still have not disabused us from our preoccupation with protecting structures, image and influence.

In Mark 1:40, we read that a leper came to him, ‘imploring him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’. Jesus’ wonderful and spontaneous response was ‘of course I want to.’ Would that the response of our Church and the Christian community was always that of the Lord. While the Church is nothing if it’s not a mystery of inclusion, the sexually different and the divorced and remarried would tell us that, presently, exclusion seems to be what we do best. Somewhere here we hear Jesus’ denunciation that ‘My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.’ (Matt 21:13).

To be practical, where can I serve, however humbly, the mystery of inclusion revealed by our Saviour and his true disciple, St Damien of Molokai? Stephenson helps us here, noting that ‘We are not all expected to be Damiens; a man may conceive his duty more narrowly, he may love his comforts better; and none will cast a stone at him for that.’ Rather, we imitate him in the little circle of daily life, in our relationships with those that God puts in our way, beginning, of course, with the family and the little acts of love that it demands.

Stephenson’s final words to Hyde are both terrible and inspiring. He wrote

Well, the man who tried to do what Damien did, is my father…and the father of all who love goodness; and he was your father too, if God had given you grace to see it.

So let us make him our Father, but let it be the real Damien, icon of Christ, our Master.
WRESTLING WITH HOLINESS

Sharing in the Travail of Creation

HENRY L NOVELLO

The question of holiness is central to both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures. According to the Book of Leviticus, for example, the Lord God says to the people of Israel, ‘You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy’ (19:2). This command is repeated in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where his disciples are exhorted to ‘be holy as your heavenly Father is holy’ (Mt 5:48).

The Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, appealed to this Gospel text, amongst others, in order to underscore the call to holiness as central to Jesus’ preaching and what it means to be Church (LG n. 40). The will of God is our ‘sanctification’ (1 Thess 4:3), yet the Council makes abundantly clear that this is not attained through our own works but by God’s grace in Jesus Christ in whose person we are made ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4). To be truly sanctified is to receive the fruits of the Spirit who conforms us to Jesus Christ and empowers us to live the Christian life in this world as the perfection of love.

The truly Christian form of love as self-sacrifice, moreover, has to do with much more than the individual gaining entry into the glory of the heavenly life. As Donald Nicholl reminds us, ‘Holiness is not an optional extra to the process of creation but rather the whole point of it’ (Nicholl, 1981, 17). To be conformed to Jesus Christ is to place ourselves at the disposition of the whole of creation; we become one with the whole and ‘re-present’ the whole (Nicholl, 1981, 21).

Notwithstanding the foregoing statements, there exists a common tendency amongst Christians to reduce holiness to moral perfection. This is especially the case in some Protestant groups, although one does not have to look far to find this view well and truly alive amongst the Catholic faithful as well.

The purpose of this essay, which is a sequel of an earlier essay of mine titled ‘The New Creation and Doing the Truth’ (Novello, 2010), is to show that the idea of the holy contains a surplus of meaning above and beyond the meaning of moral goodness, and that an ontological view of holiness is required to acknowledge and safeguard this surplus of meaning. It will be argued that moral commands can be fulfilled only if we are united with the reality that commands them; that is, ‘Only if being precedes that which ought-to-be, can the ought-to-be be fulfilled’ (Tillich, 1959, 142).

The essay will begin by presenting Rudolf Otto’s idea of the holy as coming to awareness in the human subject through the ‘numinous’ experience of boundless awe and wonder, which has roots both in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The second part will then discuss Christian responsibility and self-sacrifice, and will highlight in particular Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the cost of discipleship. The final concluding section will assert the need to appreciate knowledge of holiness as ‘connatural,’ not natural, and will refute an Aristotelian view of morality and justice which is based upon the principle of proportionality.

The Surplus of Meaning in the Holy

In his celebrated book The Idea of the Holy, Rudolf Otto argues that the word ‘holy’ is not, as commonly thought, derived from ethics; rather, ethics is derived from the holy. The rational and moral is an essential part of the holy,
but it is not the whole of it.

In order to convey the non-rational (ineffable) surplus of meaning above and beyond the meaning of goodness, Otto adopts a word coined from the Latin nomen; he speaks of a unique ‘numinous’ category of value and of a ‘numinous’ state of mind which is sui generis and irreducible to any other (Otto, 1958, 6–7).

Otto speaks frequently of the ‘feeling’ of the numinous, but this must not be understood as equivalent to emotion; rather, it is intended to convey the sense of a form of awareness that is neither that of ordinary perceiving or ordinary conceiving. The numinous is emphasized as something in the objective realm that transcends the sphere of the ordinary, the usual, the familiar, and awaits our discovery by being ‘felt’ as objective and outside the self (Otto, 1958, 11).

Otto does set himself the task of describing the nature of the subjective feelings that characterize this form of awareness, but that is because it is only through them that it is possible to come to an apprehension of the objective reference of the numinous. Such an apprehension does not occur in the clear light of day, however, but requires interpretation and discernment on the part of the human subject, since the numinous can be named ‘spirit’ or ‘daemon’ or ‘deva,’ or be left without a name (Otto, 1958, 27).

The object to which the numinous consciousness is directed is named by Otto as the mysterium tremendum et fascinans. In this expression is contained the positive content (affective states) of the numinous experience, to which the mysterium or ‘wholly other’ (Otto, 1958, 26) stands as form. What the adjective tremendum conveys is the sense of ‘absolute unapproachability’ and ‘absolute over-poweringness’ or majestas of the mystery (Otto, 1958, 19), which produces in the creature the feeling of being but ‘dust and ashes’ and nothingness. This element of daunting awfulness and majesty is expressed biblically as the ‘fear’ or ‘wrath’ of God (Otto, 1958, 18).

But there is also another aspect in which the mystery shows itself as something uniquely attractive and ‘fascinating’ (Otto, 1958, 31), so that we feel an impulse to turn our gaze towards it and allow ourselves to be captivated and entranced by it. Otto says that on the rational side of the element of fascination are concepts such as ‘love, mercy, pity, comfort’ (Otto, 1958, 31), all of which belong to the natural psychical life of the human being, although here they are thought of as absolute and in completeness, so that there is always a surplus of meaning which is non-rational (ineffable). The mysterium is experienced in its positive character as something that bestows upon the human being ‘a beatitude beyond compare’ (Otto, 1958, 33). Because it is something bestowed by the wholly other, this bliss or beatitude is something qualitatively more than the natural feeling of the joy of love or of being comforted by a friend. To use a New Testament text, the ineffable beatitude in view consists in becoming ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4).

St. Paul has this element of fascination in view when he writes, quoting the prophet Isaiah: ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ (1 Cor 2:9). It is in the religious feeling of longing or desire to be elevated to union with God, as well as in the solemnity of public worship or private devotion, that the moment of fascination is recognized as a living factor. The special character of the mystery of the holy is some-
thing that can be experienced and thus felt, but this feeling is not derivable from any other feeling because it is qualitatively sui generis.

The ineffable and uncanny nature of the mysterium is the reason why the major religions of the world have separated holy places of worship; to enter the sanctuary is to enter the realm of the wholly other which is distinct from and beyond the world, yet at the same time immanently present to the world as its absolute origin and ultimate end.

Support for Otto’s reflections on the mystery of the holy is to be found, for example, in the Book of Genesis. In the story recounting Jacob’s dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10–17), when Jacob awakes from his dream he says: ‘How terrifying is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ To enter into the house of God is ‘terrifying,’ yet at the same time it is attractive and alluring inasmuch as it is the ‘gate of heaven.’ The Letter to the Hebrews also draws attention to the element of dread in the encounter with the holy when it declares, ‘It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God’ (10:31).

The encounter with the living God involves dread because it results in the turning of the tables. When we gaze into the eyes of holy people such as Jesus Christ or St. Francis of Assisi, ‘we soon find that their eyes are, in turn, gazing into ours, scrutinizing us, bringing out the impurities behind our motives for looking into their lives’ (Nicholl, 1981, 9–10). Yet there is also something intrinsically alluring and captivating about holiness, so much so that once we have encountered it there is simply no turning back and we begin a new journey of wrestling with the ineffable mystery of the holy.

To wrestle with the holy entails giving up the pursuit of a secure and comfortable existence, which is why worldly people accustomed to the habit of calculation and the pursuit of pleasure tend to give holy people a wide berth. It is significant that the name ‘Jacob’ which appears in the Hebrew Scriptures means ‘the supplanter,’ but after the experience of wrestling with the Holy One and having prevailed, Jacob’s name is changed to ‘Israel’ which means ‘the perseverer with God’ (cf. Gen 32:24–28). The people of Israel are those who strive or persevere with God and with human-kind, who wrestle with their call to holiness in the midst of the trials and ravages of history, knowing that there is no turning back the tide of God’s self-communication which has bound them to the mysterium tremendum et fascinans in covenant relationship.

Responsibility, Self-Sacrifice, and the Cost of Holiness

Responsibility arises out of ‘response’ and there can only be response if there is a call from the Holy One who created us for the very purpose of becoming holy by partaking of the divine nature. Holiness, as stated earlier, is the whole point of the process of creation.

Certainly a note is heard in the call to holiness which is daunting and terrifying because the responsibility is awesome and the cost of genuine response is simply beyond our calculation. Yet if we respond faithfully to the call we will discover that responsibility is also tremendously ‘bracing’ (Nicholl, 1981, 60).

Few, however, respond generously to the call to holiness, because we do not like initiative to be taken out of our own hands and we resist admitting that our calculated plans for attaining comfort and security amount to nought. ‘So long as our lives are in our own hands we will never give up the very thing we need above all to give up if we are to be changed, whether that thing is our money, our house, our good opinion of ourselves, our good name, our health or our very life’ (Nicholl, 1981, 134).

The heart, not the mind, is the organ for responding to the Holy One, for the heart grows by living out the risk of love and it sees a future that is beyond the reach of the mind and its plans; that is, a future that is essentially open-ended and undetermined. To re-
spond generously and faithfully to the call of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is an act of total responsibility whereby we take complete hold of ourselves and place ourselves at the disposition of the whole; we no longer live apart from the whole but become one with the whole through self-sacrificing love.

The cost of holiness is nowhere more highlighted than in Jesus’ command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Mt 5:44). A few verses later Jesus expresses this radical command in terms of holiness: ‘Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy’ (Mt 5:48).

This command to love our enemies indicates, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer so keenly stressed, that the Christian life is characterized by the quality of the ‘extraordinary,’ the ‘peculiar,’ that which is not ‘a matter of course’ (Bonhoeffer, 1959, 136). To love our enemies is no ordinary love, it is not a love which can be realized within the realm of natural possibilities, for it is the love of Jesus Christ himself which is the way of the cross, that is, of self-sacrificing love for the sake of the whole. The extraordinary quality of the Christian life is something which the disciples of Jesus Christ *do* inasmuch as it is a partaking in his redemptive passion, that is, a sharing in the victory of divine love over the powers of death in this world of ours.

Needless to say, the command to love our enemies goes against the grain of every natural instinct and desire for self-preservation and self-maintenance by the exercise of power, which is why those who passed by Jesus while he hung on the cross derided him: if he were truly the Son of God then he would come down from the cross; God would save him from his enemies and deliver him from his anguish (cf. Mk 15:29–32; Mt 27:39–44).

This Gospel text indicates how anthropocentric our understanding of divine power really is and why we find the proclamation of the Messiah ‘crucified in weakness’ (2 Cor 13:4) so scandalous and incredible. The God of the crucified Christ is a God whose power is exercised through the unfathomable depths of a compassionate love which disarms evil by drawing its sting, a love which requites evil with good (Bonhoeffer, 1959, 127).

The radical command of Jesus to love our enemies leads to another fundamental point concerning the Christian life, which was also emphatically stressed by Bonhoeffer. To be disciples of Jesus does not mean that we follow a universal law or adhere to a programme of ideals worth pursuing; rather, it means to be ‘summoned to an exclusive attachment to his person’ which affects our whole existence (Bonhoeffer, 1959, 49). Since it is Jesus himself who calls us and we follow him in faith, this implies that grace (the gift of his person) and commandment (obedience to the call) are to be thought of as forming an indissoluble unity.

Bonhoeffer formulated the following proposition to convey this fundamental unity: ‘only he who believes is obedient and only he who is obedient believes’ (Bonhoeffer, 1959, 54). This proposition intends to dispel any notion of a chronological distinction between faith and obedience to Jesus’ command, and insists instead that obedience is constitutive of faith, that faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience. Faith is inauthentic if it does not obey Jesus’ command to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, which effectually amounts to the obligation to pray and hope for the salvation of all (cf. 1 Tim 2:4).

The Christian life, as Paul emphasizes with great clarity, is none other than the way of the cross, yet this lack of ambiguity regarding the will of God terrifies us, hence we try to make the will of God something that can be defended by logical arguments so as to make it more palatable and easier to accept. For Paul, God mandates the following of Jesus who is defined by the cross. ‘We must exhibit the self-sacrificing, empowering love that Christ showed in his crucifixion. We must bear in our bodies the dying of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus may be manifested to the world’ (Murphy-O’Connor, 2000, 43).
Holiness, then, costs not less than everything; by the loving sacrifice of our lives we show that the grace of God in Jesus Christ is costly grace. The Christian, as von Balthasar sums up the matter, is ‘planted’ into the one and only form of life which is the crucified form of love, which means that to behold the ‘glory of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor 4:6) is to commit ourselves fully to the way of the cross, for *love alone is credible* in this world of ours (Balthasar, 1969, 110).

**Knowledge of Holiness as ‘Connatural’**

The Gospel of Christ contains an extremely important teaching in respect of knowledge of holiness; namely, conversion of heart and forgiveness of sins are portrayed as concomitant aspects of the Gospel message, rather than as cause and effect or condition and promise (cf. Lk 24:47; Rom 5:8).

From the vantage point of the life, death, and resurrection of the Holy and Just One (cf. Acts 3:14), there is simply no basis for the view that forgiveness is only for those who were sinners but have now become righteous through repentance and the fulfilment of the requirements of the law. The teaching that the sinner must take initiative and do penance in order to receive grace (cf. John the Baptist) has been turned upside down by the person of Jesus, for he brings the glad tidings that the sinner is accepted by God even before any act of repentance. First comes the grace of unmerited forgiveness, then the conversion of heart to love God above all else. What holds in the dawning of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus is the ‘law of grace’ which engenders a higher righteousness since to be granted unconditional pardon by God involves the granting of forgiveness to others (cf. Lord’s Prayer), even those who persecute us and put us to death.

Holiness should not, then, be reduced to a moral concept or identified with moral perfection, for it is an unfathomable ontological reality. The saint is the ‘divinized’ human person, that is, one who is conformed to the crucified Christ and shares in the very life of God who is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). To be in union with Him who is the New Creation in person is to be transformed into a new being (Tillich, 1956, 16). It is not simply by knowing God that we shall be transformed into the likeness of God, but rather by being united with God, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of holiness, in other words, is ‘connatural,’ not natural (Nicholl, 1981, 11). With connatural knowledge ‘to know’ and ‘to be’ cannot be separate, whereas in natural knowledge they can be separate, which means that transformation is integral to learning about holiness. The *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* breaks into ordinary reality with terrifying and fascinating power, shaking it and driving it beyond itself (the ontological element), yet at the same time the holy is the judgment over all-that-is, it illuminates what ought-to-be and commands what we should be (the moral element). Only, however, if the ‘holiness of being’ precedes the ‘holiness of what ought-to-be’ can the ought-to-be be fulfilled (Tillich, 1957, 56; Tillich, 1959, 142).

In such a perspective, the concept of justice formulated by Aristotle has no place; that is, everyone gets what they deserve according to quantitative measurements (this is the principle of proportionality). Instead, since justification by grace is the highest form of divine justice, which is grounded in divine love, ‘transforming justice has divine character’ (Tillich, 1959, 144). Love accepts that which is unacceptable and renews the old being so that it becomes a new being. Love is creative and creativity includes risk, and it is precisely this awesome character of the holy that ensures an open-ended and undetermined future full of promise. By wrestling with the dynamics of holiness, by placing ourselves at the disposition of the whole and representing the whole in self-sacrificing love, we bear in our bodies the life of the Crucified One for the sake of our world groaning for its salvation (cf. Rom 8:22).
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It is an old saying about any task you undertake that when you have done ninety-five percent of the work you are halfway there. The truth in this paradoxical saying will be acknowledged by anyone who has ever made a piece of furniture or marched thirty miles at a stretch: that last piece of precision work or that last mile feels to take more out of you than all the rest of your efforts put together. The same pattern seems to be repeated in the journey upon which the Holy One draws us: the nearer we get to the Holy One the more intense the demands made upon us if our course is to be sustained.

There is a sense of shock when we are struck by the intensity of the demands made upon us at this last stage, because up till now what we, for our part, have been doing has been mainly disciplinary. That is to say, we have acquired the discipline to begin the task, to assume the responsibility for our own being, learning how to stop, be silent and detached, how to use our daily life as a spiritual exercise and take our share in the community. When a person observes these disciplines steadily, year in and year out, he grows serene and balanced. He appears to an outside observer to be so securely centred that nothing could ever shake him. And then something happens. He is struck by a form of suffering so intense that it shakes the very fibres of his being. To him it feels as though he has no centre left - indeed as though he had never had a centre; and all his hardly won balance seems to have been shattered.

It is at this stage that the seeker is made to feel a complete beginner once more and to realize the truth of Thomas Merton’s dictum that no one can become holy without being plunged into the mystery of suffering, a mystery that is insoluble by analytical reasoning ... you are left with a terrible sense of impotence (Nicholl, 1981, 129-30).
BOOK REVIEW


Let me state up front and categorically: this is by any standard the best book on church renewal, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, and deserves to be referenced for many years to come. This judgement will be substantiated below. Pierre Hegy, who obtained his doctorate from the University of Paris with a thesis on authority in the Catholic Church after Vatican II in 1972, is professor emeritus of sociology at Adelphi University and the founder of a highly successful book review website. His earlier publications deal with post-Vatican II Catholicism and feminist thought. This volume is part of Hegy’s ongoing research on the contemporary Catholic Church.

The book’s provocative title refers of course to the Johannine account of the resurrection of Lazarus, but its immediate origin is due to the ‘Operation Lazarus’ started by the pastor Pete Chiara who in the early 1970s decided to revive his parish by declaring that ‘the Church is dead.’ ‘Operation Lazarus’ called for four evening discussions on what the parishioners themselves thought must be done to resurrect the church, and about 1200 people showed every evening. The Lazarus metaphor is particularly apt for the current state of the Roman Catholic Church in the West, including the American Catholic Church. Unless one is willfully blind, there is no denying that as a social institution it is moribund if not dead (more on this later). Unlike Mark Twain’s, its obituary is not premature. On the contrary, it is a bit too late. Like Lazarus however it can be revived. Unfortunately, not by a divine miracle and fiat, or ‘cheap grace,’ but only by means of a real, long-term and thoroughgoing church renewal—certainly not by restoration, or ‘the reform of the reform.’ But how to bring about this renewal in the Catholic Church? It is here that Hegy’s book makes an enormous and unique contribution.

Most current writings advocating church reforms remain at the abstract theological level, at times with pious invocations of the Holy Spirit as the agent of change. While ecclesiology and pneumatology still furnish the foundations for church renewal, they need to be informed by accurate and up-to-date social data. With vast expertise in what he calls ‘pastoral sociology,’ Hegy provides in the first three chapters the ‘inconvenient statistics’ (the title of chapter one) and the three main reasons why Christianity in general (chapter two) and the American Catholic Church in particular (chapter three) are experiencing a catastrophic decline. Surveys after surveys have documented beyond doubt the precipitous loss of membership in mainline churches and the rapid growth of conservative Evangelical churches. With regard to the American Catholic Church it bears recalling the following data: roughly ten percent of Americans are former Catholics; one third of Americans born Catholics have left the church; almost half of these former Catholics joined Protestant, mostly Evangelical, churches. The book is replete with tables and statistics, but readers should not be daunted by them. Hegy supplies lucid and helpful summaries of the findings, and persons with scant knowledge of sociology (like me) can easily understand them.

Of great importance are the factors that Hegy derives from sociological surveys to account for the spiritual decline of American Christianity in general and of the American Catholic Church in particular. These are not music to both conservative and liberal ears alike. Contributing to the decline of the former are the retreat of religion from the public square, omnipresent consumerism, and the failure in transmitting religious and moral values in cafeteria-style religion; and to that of the latter, church-centeredness rather than Christ-centeredness, a deficient sacramental
theology and practice (emphasis on the external elements, ritualism, decline of devotions, the Eucharist as sacrifice rather than as community celebration), and the lack of a Catholic subculture. If these are the reasons for the decline of the Catholic Church, then ‘renewal is much more than the reformation of church structures and changes in priestly ordinations.... To the extent that the post-Vatican II liberal agenda concentrated on these two items, it failed and has little future—which does not make the reform of church structures any less desirable. Clearly what is needed is spiritual (i.e., evangelical) renewal, not just structural reform’ (26). On the other hand, Hegy gives little comfort to conservatives since his prescriptions for church renewal are diametrically opposed to their restorationist agenda of ‘reform of the reform’ that insists on loyalty and obedience to the hierarchy, especially the pope, and total orthodoxy.

The next two chapters provide snapshots into two American flourishing Christian communities, one a non-denominational church, the other a Roman Catholic parish. The vitality of the first church is built on ‘neither doctrinal innovation nor charismatic communities... but on assiduous prayer and a sense of mission’ (3). The Catholic parish’s vibrancy derives from its structure as ‘a community of communities’ consisting of ‘scores of small Christian communities meeting weekly’ and as ‘a community of ministries’ (3).

On the basis of these sociological studies, Hegy proposes in chapters 6 and 7 a long-term plan for renewing the Catholic Church. Chapter 6 reviews various church reform programs, from the 1992 document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops titled Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States to the RENEW movement, Rick Warren ‘purpose-driven church,’ and the Willow Creek Community Church. From these reform initiatives Hegy lists six urgent tasks comprising his church renewal plan: end the exodus of young Catholics and the non-transmission of values; propose paths of spiritual growth rather ideological programs; devise concrete ways for the church to be in the world but not of the world such as new forms of renunciation, rejecting consumerism, and countercultural ways of life; act as a servant church rather than a power structure; support a moral culture rather than a moral theology; and develop a celebration of sacraments as moments of spiritual transformation of the individual and the community rather than rites of passage.

A tall order indeed! But how to achieve it? In the last and most important, challenging, and insightful chapter, titled ‘Renewal for Horizon 2013,’ Hegy lays out in great detail the three steps of his plan for church renewal: moving Sunday Mass attendees from passive to active participants, helping active attendees become involved members of the parish, and leading the involved members to totally committed discipleship. If you have no time to read the entire book, read at least pp. 231-275, every single one of them, slowly and meditatively, and let Hegy’s ideas and proposals sink into you. You need not of course agree with his every thought and proposal, but do take them extremely seriously; the very life of the Catholic Church may well depend on them. First, there are detailed proposals on how to make passive attendees at Sunday Mass (including the priest himself!) into active participants in the celebration of the Eucharist, from beginning to end, in every single part of the Mass. Next come proposals on how to transform the active attendees at Sunday Mass into involved members of the local church or parish through the four forms of ministry communities, i.e., worship, service, formation, and missions. Here Hegy offers extremely rich insights into the role of the choir (not performance but facilitating prayer), religious education (not information but community formation), devotions (not private piety but structured forms of discipleship), and Eucharistic spirituality. The final step is leading the involved members into totally committed disci-
pleship, especially through spiritual growth and missionary/evangelizing activities.

Hegy ends his book with ‘LAZARUS, WAKE UP! It happened in the past. It can happen again. Marana-tha!’ (275). Hope then runs through and enlivens its pages. Critical of both liberal and conservative bromides and agenda, but firmly built on social analysis, Hegy makes you think and question your cherished assumptions. Perusing this book made me experience again and again what Bernard Lonergan calls ‘intellectual conversion.’ I hope it is no arrogance to say that no seminarian should be allowed to be ordained without reading—critically—this work (at least the last chapter); and for those who are already ordained—even to the episcopacy—reading it will make them take a second, long look at what they have done and what they are supposed to do to save the dying church.

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These new circumstances in the Church’s mission make us realize that, in the end, the expression ‘new evangelization’ requires finding new approaches to evangelization so as ‘to be Church’ in today’s ever-changing social and cultural situations. [...] According to Pope John Paul II, the ‘new evangelization’ means to remake the Christian fabric of human society and the fabric of Christian communities themselves [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles laici (30 December 1988), 34] and to assist the Church to continue to be present ‘in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters’ [Ibid., 26] so as to animate their lives and guide them to the Kingdom to come.

[...] The time has also come for a new evangelization in the West, where many of those baptized lead totally non-Christian lives and more and more persons maintain some links to the faith but have little or a poor knowledge of it. Oftentimes, the faith is presented in caricature or publically treated by certain cultures with indifference, if not open hostility. Now is the time for a new evangelization in the West. ‘Whole countries and nations where religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and capable of fostering a viable and working community of faith, are now put to a hard test, and in some cases, are even undergoing a radical transformation, as a result of a constant spreading of an indifference to religion, of secularism and of atheism. This particularly concerns countries and nations of the so-called First World, in which economic well-being and consumerism, even if coexistent with a tragic situation of poverty and misery, inspires and sustains a life lived ‘as if God did not exist.’” [Ibid., 34]

Christian communities ought to know how to respond with responsibility and courage to this renewal required of the Church, because of cultural and social changes. They ought to learn how to devise and implement the long process of moving to newer models, while maintaining the mandate to evangelize as a reference-point.

PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY
OF THE WORD

October 2011—January 2012

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

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the readings for Sundays between October 2011 and January 2012, from the Twenty Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year A to the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year B. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The readings over this time are diverse for several reasons: We move towards the conclusion of readings for Year A, into the season of Advent and the beginning of Year B; we celebrate Christmas, with its associated feasts and the usual celebrations that occur over January, before we pick up the readings of Ordinary Time; we move from proclaiming Matthew’s gospel to reading Mark — the principal gospel for the remainder of the liturgical year, until Advent 2012; curiously in the year of Mark, John’s gospel makes an occasional appearance; we also read from various First Testament readings chosen with the theme of the particular gospel in mind.

All these make for a challenging liturgical time as we seek to highlight helpful themes that are linked to each other over the course of several celebrations, honour each of the readings with their unique historical and cultural contexts, and suggest how the readings might be celebrated.

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

The Final Sundays of Year A (October 2 to November 20) look toward God’s ultimate coming, however this may manifest itself. This will usually be in the death of those we love, our own ageing, and the struggle we have with health and concerns about our well-being. The need to contemplate God’s coming is no less important for us in a post-modern world, as it was for the first generation of Jesus followers who had a particularly sharpened sense of Jesus’ second coming (sometimes called the ‘Parousia’ or ‘eschaton’). The themes of the readings allow us to reflect on the necessity of wisdom and alertness to the realities of life that surround us. The final and climactic Sunday of the liturgical year A (the Universal
Kingship of Jesus) allows us to seriously contemplate how Jesus’ leadership is revealed in our church and amongst contemporary disciples and ministers. His spirit of leadership is evident in the ways faith communities respond to the socially disenfranchised. From the perspective of a critical economic and social analysis of our current Australia society, this final gospel reading from Mt could be particularly pertinent and powerful.

Advent ushers in the new liturgical year B, with its focus on Mk’s gospel. It also allows us to become steeped in the prophetic wisdom of the Jewish people with readings taken from Isaiah (Advent 1-3). These readings come from what scholars call Second (‘Deutero’) Isaiah and Third (‘Trito’) Isaiah, rather than from the actual prophet himself. The historical context of these readings locates Israel in exile in the 6th century BCE. God promises liberation and happiness to a disconsolate people. The themes of our selections from Isaiah are most relevant to today’s Christian community. The gospel selections from Mk continue (in Advent 1) where the previous liturgical year left off, with a consideration of God’s coming or ‘advent’ at the end of time and the necessity of today’s disciples to be ever sensitive and alert to this. The focus in the remaining weeks of Advent turns to the coming of Jesus and his birth. It is this birth which determines the gospel for Advent 4 from Luke and its explicit story of the annunciation of Jesus’ birth to Mary. Those of us from a Catholic tradition have always found this Lukan selection a wonderful affirmation of Mary’s role in the story of salvation. The focus of the passage is, however, principally on Jesus. What it says about him is what is celebrated in his birth in the Christmas gospel, again from Luke.

Christmas liturgy encourages the proclamation from Luke’s story of Jesus’ birth. Here, different from Mt’s birth story of Jesus, the continual emphasis on joy, redemption, liberation and celebration offer us with a rich tapestry of theological motifs to explore, eternally relevant, but particularly important for our church and nation at this time.

Sundays in January after New Years and Epiphany pick up the systematic reading of Mk’s gospel. The themes of each gospel selection shape the choice of the first reading. In OT 3, for example, Mk’s Jesus proclaims the necessity of repentance. It is this theme which attracted the compilers of the lectionary to the story of Jonah and his repentant invitation to the people of Nineveh; or in OT 4, Jesus brings release from one possessed. Jesus’ pastoral and healing care echoes the first reading from Deuteronomy.

Gospel of Year B: Mark: Finally, a reminder about the Gospel of Year B. Mk’s gospel is written for a struggling urban Roman community. The Roman followers of Jesus in the late first century around 70 CE seem divided. They experience loneliness in their discipleship. Political ill will and internal betrayal to the Roman authorities by some Christians of other Jesus followers does not make this an easy time of discipleship. Mark’s gospel is intended to address these serious, deep rooted and traumatic experiences: Jesus is portrayed as struggling, abandoned and misunderstood; the disciples as uncomprehending factionalists. The stories throughout the gospel become a snapshot of Mark’s own community in its effort to be faithful to Jesus. For 2012, this same gospel will be able to speak powerfully, encourage and challenge Australian Christians in their discipleship.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

October 2—Ordinary Time 27. Is 5:1-7. God’s people are like a cared-for vineyard, sometimes fruitless. Phil 4:6-9. Paul’s encourages the Philippians not to worry, and live faithfully and confidently in peace. Mt 21:33-43. The parable of what happens to the servants and son of a vineyard owner is an allegory of Mt’s gospel audience as they struggle and suffer. Theme—Suffering. Mt’s Israelite followers of Jesus see their own story reflected
in today’s Gospel. To live with integrity and authenticity is costly. Are their local and pertinent examples of this?

**October 9—Ordinary Time 28:** Is 25:6-10a. Isaiah presents Paradise and life with God as a mountain feast with choice foods and wines. *Phil 4:10-14, 19-20.* In all that happens to him, no matter his physical or financial resources, Paul’s ultimate focus is God. *Mt 22:1-14.* God’s lavish banquet is for all, ‘good and bad.’

**Theme—Eucharistic Inclusivity.** Our local Eucharistic celebration is a reflection of the Universal Church: How do we celebrate inclusivity in our faith communities in a world of cultural diversity?

**October 16—Ordinary Time 29.** Is 45:1, 4-6. An unexpected non-Israelite military emperor becomes God’s agent of salvation. *I Thes 1:1-5.* Paul addresses a community with faith and openness in God. *Mt 22:15-21.* Jesus avoids a trap set by the religious leaders. God is the true source of all life, even political.

**Theme—God and Politics.** Today’s readings offer an opportunity to reflect on the way God and religion have been co-opted into contemporary politics and military affairs. They offer an alternative focus: The heart of life and human community is God (First Reading and Gospel), not the human whim for power or the seduction of privilege.

**October 23—Ordinary Time 30.** Ex 22:21-27. God encourages the Israelites to attend to the poor and not oppress the resident alien. *I Thes 1:5-10.* Paul praises the Thessalonians for their hospitality and openness to God’s preached word. *Mt 22:34-40.* Jesus’ summary of the heart of ethical life: love of God and neighbour. **Theme—Hospitality to the Stranger.** The treatment of asylum seekers and the poor in our country is the touchstone of authentic religion. A number of positive examples from the local scene can illustrate the living out of authentic faith.

**October 30—Ordinary Time 31** *Malachi 1:14-2:8,10.* God critiques the infidelity of Israel’s religious leaders. *I Thes 2:7-9,13.* Paul offers himself as a model of care, commitment and fidelity. *Mt 23:1-12.* Status and privilege are not part of the life of the Christian community. **Theme—Authentic Leadership:** The readings (First Reading and Gospel) offer an opportunity to highlight the qualities of authentic political and religious leadership: integrity, humility and service of others.

**November 6—Ordinary Time 32:** Wis 6:12-16 God’s gift of wisdom seeks to make herself known among people. *1 Thes 4:13-18.* Paul addresses the sadness experienced by those who feel the deaths of others. *Mt 25:1-13.* Jesus encourages alertness always. **Theme—Wisdom:** Wisdom (first reading) is always a possibility to those in tune with God, alert to God’s presence (gospel) and sensitive to what is happening globally. It is a gift which God offers.

**November 13—Ordinary Time 33:** Prov 31:10f. An ancient summary of the good, industrious and wise wife. This reading requires careful explanation without reinforcing a conventional stereotype of women. *I Thes 5:1-6.* Paul encourages ongoing commitment to alertness from those who are ‘children of the light.’

**Theme—Alertness.** As the end of the liturgical year nears, the readings offer an opportunity to encourage spiritual and critical alertness to what is going on socially and ecclesiastically. The temptation to reflect on the ‘good wife’ (first reading) or encourage the use of one’s ‘talents’ (gospel) misses the point. The focus of the liturgy is about God and openness to God’s life in our world.

**November 20—Universal Kingship of Jesus:** Ez 34:11-12, 15-17. God promises to personally look after the Israelites, like a shepherd caring for sheep. *1 Cor 15:20-26, 28.* Paul celebrates the authority of the Risen Jesus who has power over all. *Mt 25:31-46.* This key parable in Mt’s gospel encourages disciples to care for the marginalised. **Theme—Care:** The final readings of this liturgical Year A encourage a spirit of tenderness and care, especially for those who are socially discounted.
or feel shepherd-less. These attitudes reveal the kind of true leadership needed today. The readings critique a political and economic pragmatism that promotes social blindness and stifles public debate or critique.

**November 27—Advent 1 (Year B begins):**
Is 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8. The prophet implores God to intervene and be revealed in the events of human history. God is like the potter. **1 Cor 1:3-9.** Paul affirms for the Corinthian Christian disciples the real and active presence of God revealed in Jesus. **Mk 13:31-37.** This is the first time that Mark’s gospel is proclaimed for this new liturgical Year B (See notes above about Mk). Jesus encourages discipleship openness and alertness to God’s presence. **Theme—God’s Presence:** Advent begins with a celebration of God’s presence in human history and an encouragement for the disciple to keep watchful of this presence in its many manifestations. Today becomes an opportunity to celebrate how God’s presence is evident locally.

**December 4—Advent 2:** Is 40:1-5, 9-11. The prophet affirms that God’s desire is to comfort a disconsolate people in Babylonian exile. This conviction is powerful and still relevant. **2 Pet 3:8-15.** The writer affirms that God is faithful and will come. Such a conviction requires real practical patience. **Mk 1:1-8.** John the Baptiser prepares the people for the coming of Jesus. Repentance, humility and openness to conversion are required. **Theme—A Comforting God:** Today’s readings reinforce the Advent assurance of God’s coming into the lives of human beings—a conviction in which many have lost confidence. We celebrate a comforting (not comfortable) God. Many today still seek to encounter this God. Are there experiences and stories where this encounter is tangibly expressed?

**December 11—Advent 3:** Is 61:1-2, 10-11. God’s servant, empowered by the Spirit, will bring solace and good news to the oppressed. **1 Thes 5:16-24.** Paul gives sage advice to struggling disciples of Jesus: rejoice, pray, be grateful and open to God’s spirit. **John 1:6-8, 19-28.** This is the first of a few readings from Jn’s gospel in the year of Mk. Here, John the Baptiser focuses our gaze on Jesus. He is the centre of life. **Theme—Hope:** The readings encourage hope-filled celebration to counter-act a prevailing negative and cynical attitude perpetuated by some, including political and religious leaders. Each of the readings provides ways in which this hope can be fostered in an Advent-graced and expectant people.

**December 18—Advent 4:** 2 Sam 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16. The writer plays on the image of ‘house.’ David seeks to provide God with a worship-house, but it is God who will build David a living house in his descendants. **Rom 16:25-27.** Paul’s hymn of praise to God’s wisdom and kindness celebrates Jesus, the focus of the hymn. **Lk 1:26-38.** We hear the familiar story of the annunciation to Mary of Jesus’ birth. The evangelist’s focus is Jesus: he will be great, God’s son, and rule forever. **Theme—God’s Kindness.** The image of God as essential kindness, and revealed to humanity through Jesus, can be celebrated in this final Advent Sunday. Many need to experience and capture a sense of God’s kindness towards them and creation, despite alternative messages that they get.

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

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

Nm 6:22-27. God’s blessing is poured out upon a priestly people. 

Gal 4:4-7. Paul affirms Jesus’ human birth through Mary and his subjugation to life’s limitations. Through Jesus we come to know that our relationship to God is the same as his. 

Lk 2:16-21. The shepherds come to see the child lying in a place of feeding. Theme—God’s Blessing. The blessing of the first reading could be the heart of our celebration at the beginning of this New Year. What is it that we seek from God? What is the blessing we would like God to pour upon us, our family, friend, church and world? 

January 8—Epiphany. 

Is 60:1-6. The people of God will be blest with God’s light and they will attract to themselves all the nations of the earth. 

Eph 3:2-5. God’s gift of solidarity with humanity (‘grace’) is now affirmed and revealed, even to the most unexpected of peoples (‘Gentiles’). 

Mt 2:1-12. The magi, kingly servants, seek out Jesus through their observance of the heavens and their consultation of the Jewish scriptures. Theme—The Search. Every person is on a search. The ultimate search is for God. Epiphany celebrates and affirms our ongoing search for God revealed in Jesus. The search becomes affirmed and clarified through meditating on our history, the cosmos, the heavens and Scripture: 

January 15—Ordinary Time 2. 

1 Sam 3:3-10. The young Samuel encounters God but needs wise counsel from an elder to truly hear God’s call. 

1 Cor 6:13-15. Paul affirms the importance and centrality of physical corporeality for religious life. We live not an angelic but human existence. 

Jn 1:35-42. This is the second reading from Jn’s Gospel in a year of Mk. Here, John the Baptiser’s disciples are directed to Jesus who invites them to come and stay with him. Theme—Encountering God. Friendship with God lies at the heart of life and discipleship. Samuel (first reading) hears God’s call but needs help to recognise it; John the Baptist’s disciples see Jesus but need help to follow him. They also need time to become his followers. The readings invite our encounter with a companionable God revealed in Jesus. We, like the Baptiser’s disciples, are invited to ‘come and stay’ with him. 

January 22—Ordinary Time 3. 

Jonah 3:1-5, 10. Jonah calls on the people of Nineveh to repent, and, to his surprise, they do! 

1 Cor 7:29-31. Paul reminds his listeners that there is a larger context by which life is lived—God. 

Mk 1:14-20. Jesus’ first words in Mk’s gospel encourage a change of attitude (‘repent’) and an openness to God’s call (‘believe in the gospel’) revealed in Jesus. These become the essential qualities of discipleship throughout the whole of Mk’s gospel. Theme—Openness. Both Jonah and Mark encourage a spirit of repentance. This is not the breast-beating attitude of one who should feel guilty or a sense of permanent moral corruption. Rather ‘repentance’ (metanoia, in Mk’s Greek) is an attitude of the person who is open to change, especially of the heart, so that God’s project (as expressed by Paul) can shape one’s life. 


Dt 18:15-20. God promises the people a prophet who will lead and instruct them about what is important and essential. 

1 Cor 7:17, 32-35. Paul wants his people to live happily without worry. This attitude, determined by God, shapes every relationship. 

Mk 1:21-28. Jesus exercises his authority of healing over an unclean spirit within a religious setting. Theme—Happiness. The second reading offers a way of confirming that God’s intention, as perceived by Paul, was to live without worry. The gospel offers a dramatic form of God’s intention of human liberation through Jesus’ act of exorcism. What would be the equivalent realities today that keep us locked into worry, and from which we need healing and liberation?

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