

# THE TIDE OF UNBELIEF

PUTTING *COMPASS* together is something that I do after my other duties are done. My day job, so to speak, is to be the parish priest of Erskineville, in inner-city Sydney. That is where the real challenges lie. The census of last August revealed that Darlington, the suburb next to us, is the least religious suburb in the whole of Australia, with 48.2% of respondents ticking the ‘No Religion’ box, while Eskineville is one of the top ten suburbs in the whole of Australia where ‘No Religion’ was ticked. It seems little, if anything, has changed since the previous census in which it was revealed, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, that Erskineville is ‘in the heartland of Sydney atheism’.

While being an outpost of Christianity in a sea of unbelief and agnosticism is all very stimulating for us Catholics, I feel sad for our ‘no religion’ neighbours. Their world, while grand in itself, is cramped and confined by comparison with the world of people who rejoice in the gift of faith. They may admire nature with all its wonders, but they do not see beyond the material reality of the natural world—for them there is nothing more to see. They do not see what they see as a vast array of signals of transcendence. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in his poem *God’s Grandeur*: ‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God’. But people with no belief in God cannot glimpse the infinite wonders that their world discloses.

They are like the people that Jesus criticised for not seeing his feeding of the multitude as a sign. The crowd in the Gospel story had no perception, no vision of what the lavish provision of food signified. It was not telling them something more—all they saw was the material fact of a plentiful supply of food and they came back looking for another feed.

The gift of faith enables us to see signs all around us—messages from God. The Eucha-

rist is the peak sign: we do not stop at the wafer of unleavened consecrated bread—it is the sacramental food that nourishes for eternal life, it is Christ himself, the bread come down from heaven to give life to the world.

There is a long tradition of spirituality summed up in the phrase ‘The sacrament of the present moment’ by Jean Pierre de Caussade SJ. This phrase invites us to realise that if we have faith enough we can discover the divine in every situation and circumstance, and respond.

St Ignatius gave us the letters AMDG (standing for ‘*ad majorem Dei gloriam*’—‘for the greater glory of God’), letters that our generation was instructed to place at the top of each page of our work books at school. This is another expression of that spirituality.

Evidently we need a high level of faith if we are to go through our days motivated by such messages, but the very fact that we can pray for an ever-deepening faith means that we are being led towards ever-broadening horizons.

Our faith is the source of great joy—in-describable joy—in the words of the first epistle of Peter:

You did not see him, yet you love him, and still without seeing him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe, and you are sure of the end to which your faith looks forward, that is, the salvation of your souls. (1Pet. 1:8-9)

The gift of faith, however, brings responsibility. The gift is not for ourselves alone, it is to be shared. We are to be bearers of grace to others. Hence it is not enough for us to feel sad for our ‘no religion’ neighbours—the very fact that there are so many of them stimulates us to celebrate all the more what we believe and to go out and tell the Good News in whatever way we can.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.

# THE NEW ATHEISM AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

NEIL BROWN

**M**ANY OF THE New Atheism best selling writers, for example, Christopher Hitchens<sup>1</sup>, AC Grayling<sup>2</sup> and Alain De Botton<sup>3</sup>, are more interested in demonstrating the evils of religion or finding an alternative worldview to replace it—the non-existence of God is their starting point not a conclusion. Little interest is shown in the traditional ‘proofs’ of God’s existence, and what interest there is tends to be more scientific than philosophical. Hence it is only the argument from design rather than any of the other traditional arguments that receives attention.

Can we see any indications of intelligent design in the world around us? New Atheism gives a loud ‘No’ to that question. Instead of ‘design’ what they see are ‘chance’, ‘improbabilities’, ‘random changes’ and ‘natural selection’. We need to consider these arguments at two levels: first, the evolution of life on earth; secondly, at the cosmological level of the origins of the universe.

Richard Dawkins, the best known proponent of these views, is on his own turf as an evolutionary biologist when he is talking about evolution. He holds that any appearance of design is only apparent: ‘The general case is the non-random survival of randomly varying hereditary equipment.’<sup>4</sup> As genes are shuffled over billions of years in response to the earth’s changing environment, DNA information is preserved, so that imperceptible changes and adaptations eventuate in the immense variety and complexity we see around us today. In sum:

There is no overall plan of development, no blueprint, no architect’s plan, no architect. The development of an embryo, and ultimately of the adult, is achieved by local rules, imple-

mented by cells, interacting with other cells on a local basis.<sup>5</sup>

What exists, he argues, could not have been otherwise. Our sun is the source of all we wonder at:

While never actually disobeying the laws of physics and chemistry... energy from the sun powers life, to coax and stretch the laws of physics and chemistry to evolve prodigious feats of complexity, diversity, beauty, and an uncanny illusion of statistical improbability and deliberate design.<sup>6</sup>

The downside of this improbable grandeur is that it leaves the end products of this process, beings who are conscious, reflective and able to make choices, as survivors marooned in an indifferent and pointless universe. This ‘fact’ seemingly is the price we must pay:

Unlike our hypothetically beneficent designer, natural selection is indifferent to the intensity of suffering - except in so far as it affects survival and reproduction.<sup>7</sup>

As human beings we are bound to ask ‘why are we here?’ and to wonder at our own improbable existence, even if we can’t find any answers. Such questioning invariably shifts the argument back to beginnings—the beginnings of life itself and the beginning of the universe. Can we detect intelligent design in those events? The pros and cons here, however, are decidedly more speculative than they seem to be with the theory of evolution.

Scientists seem agreed that we live in an expanding universe which began some 13.5 billion years ago with the Big Bang. From the fact that we exist, we know that the laws and numbers which govern our universe, such as electromagnetism, quantum mechanics and carbon synthesis conditions, were such that life

on a planet such as ours might be possible—if conditions had been ever so slightly different we would not be here. This is often called the anthropic principle or Goldilocks value.<sup>8</sup> Things become even more speculative when you ask how these laws and numbers were set; Were they fine-tuned? If chance is the answer, how probable or improbable was that setting?

Once life began, however improbable that event, the principle of natural selection, it is claimed, does the heavy work of explaining the appearance of ‘design’ we see around us. Cosmology has no such accepted theory. The Big Bang has captured popular imagination, and many believers have seen it as compatible with a Creator God, but many questions remain: What, if anything, preceded the Big Bang? Did the laws and numbers that make life possible pre-exist it or were they produced with it or by it? Will the universe expand/inflate forever? Or is it a multiverse, that is, is our universe one of a series of bounces as universes explode and implode to produce new universes? Is this possible series finite or infinite? If there is bouncing, how do we explain it? Is there some form of cosmological natural selection to explain the eventual setting of the Goldilocks value? Given the unlikelihood of any such principle being discovered, how can we explain the Goldilocks setting, made out of a hugely variable possible number of settings, which would produce vastly different possible universes? Such questions do not exhaust the issues, but they do suggest it may be somewhat premature to hang our believer’s hat on the Big Bang theory.

What then of design? Dawkins argues that while life on earth is hugely improbable, still given the immensity of the universe, it was able to happen:

The beauty of the anthropic principle is that it tells us, against all intuition, that a chemical model need only predict that life will arise on one planet in a billion billion to give us a good and satisfying explanation for the presence of life here.<sup>9</sup>

Dawkins calls his anti-design argument



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‘The Ultimate Boeing 747’. He uses an image from the astronomer Fred Hoyle: ‘Hoyle said that the probability of life originating on Earth is no greater than the chance that a hurricane, sweeping through a scrap yard, would have the luck to assemble a Boeing 747.’<sup>10</sup> His argument is that the ‘higher the improbability, the more implausible intelligent design becomes.’<sup>11</sup>

Is this a knockout blow to the argument from design? Dawkins thinks so, but he does concede that this improbability ‘makes heavier demands on luck... more luck than our limited human intuition is comfortable with.’<sup>12</sup> Perhaps we are uncomfortable because ‘improbability’ is such a tricky thing to draw conclusions from: By how much does improbability have to decrease to make ‘design’ more plausible? The argument is that a truly intelligent Creator wouldn’t employ ‘improbability’ at all. Hitchens, in fact, calls God a ‘fumbling fool’.<sup>13</sup> But that is a highly debatable conclusion, if design is the product of a *divine* mind: the end result of this whole cosmic process is the world as we know it, with its intelligibility, complexity, variety, beauty and wonder—do we yet understand the mechanisms so well that we can call it ‘fumbling’ or its improbability ‘unnecessary’. Does ‘improbability’ run off the scale or diminish in a multiverse? How could we ever know?

The debate does raise the issue of what we think ‘design’ consists in. The Boeing 747 seems to be Dawkins preferred model, a product of efficient human engineering intelligence. But is ‘design’ the same for Boeings as it is

for universes? Boeings, while complex in human terms, are assemblages of material and electrical components. Universes are cosmic laws and numbers, matter and energy, bangs and/or bounces, staggering improbabilities, and the storage of DNA information with the end result of conscious life. Whether we can detect design or not, it seems premature to decide what kind of ‘intelligence’ such design requires. It is not at all clear that ‘improbability’ rules intelligence automatically out of court.

The argument from design might seem precariously balanced given the complex riddles and theories surrounding the issue. Perhaps it collapses into the traditional argument from contingency (not considered by Dawkins): that the real wonder and fact to be explained is that anything exists at all: that the universe or multiverse exists at all; that the laws and numbers that give rise to universes exist at all; that we exist at all. Is a Creator God a possible explanation for such facts as these?

Dawkins exclusively scientific approach leads to one enormous misconception. He states at the outset of his enquiry:

The God hypothesis suggests that the reality we inhabit also contains a supernatural agent who designed the universe and—at least in many versions of the hypothesis—maintains it even intervenes in it with miracles, which are temporary violations of his otherwise grandly immutable laws.<sup>14</sup>

In another place, Dawkins complains ‘It would be so nice if those who oppose evolution would take a tiny bit of trouble to learn the merest rudiment of what they are opposing’.<sup>15</sup> Jewish, Christian and Islamic believers might also ask the same for their own beliefs because the God of Dawkins’ God hypothesis is totally unrecognisable as their God, who is, they believe, totally other than creation.

Because Dawkins is locked into a scientific approach and explanation only, he goes on to argue:

Who made God?...A designer cannot be used

to explain organised complexity because any God capable of designing anything would have to be complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation in his own right. God presents an infinite regress from which he cannot help us to escape. This argument...demonstrates that God, though not technically disprovable, is very very improbable indeed.<sup>16</sup>

As far as theists are concerned, Dawkins’ God is a straw god. We believe that God is not complex as are things within creation, but ‘simple’, that is, not composed of parts, and is more a *verb* than a noun. We can identify some ways God is like us, such as, that God knows, wills and acts, but such attributes are only windows on the Mystery of God which surpasses human understanding, for God *is* Act, *is* Wisdom, *is* Love—while these attributes mean different things for us, they do not signify different properties of God, but rather only point to the way God is.

For believers, God is the explanation of why there is anything at all: why there is intelligibility, why there is freedom. God is not a cause within creation, the end of a series of material causes, but rather a Cause totally other than creation, the One on whom all that exists depends. God’s causality is akin to our moral causality which has effects from within ourselves, and is radically different from physical causality.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam believe that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. For science ‘nothing’ often means something different from what it does for theism: in science ‘nothing’ signifies the absence of material particles, but is compatible with the existence of quantum laws and fields within a vacuum state that is, a state without any material particles; for theism, on the other hand, ‘nothing’ means the absence of absolutely everything—space, time, laws, quantum fields and vacuum states.<sup>17</sup> *Ex nihilo* means the total dependence of all that is on God as Creator. Believers therefore are not surprised that Dawkins’ God hypothesis is unproven on his own terms!

What if, as some suggest, what exists is eternal, whether as material particles, energy, quantum fields or bouncing universes? Again the answer lies in the radical Otherness of God. God's eternity is not measured in time: God is the Creator of space/time—God is eternal Now, totally beyond time. God creates in the Now, creates time, which may or may not be eternal—that is a question for science to speculate about, although we may never know the answer. Surprisingly, this was a question debated by ancient Greek philosophers and later by Islamic and Christian medieval thinkers.

Faith does need to stay in touch with such discussions. We come to believe, at least partly, because, within faith, reasons of all kinds converge, many of which are deep personal reasons to do with the heart, our rela-

tionships with others, and revelation, and some are about our understanding of the world around us, as in the previous discussion. Ultimately, however, faith is more than all such reasons: it is a handing of ourselves over to God in trust. At the very least, we need to be able to see that faith has at its disposal the means to respond to movements such as the New Atheism. More importantly, we need to see the meaning and value that faith offers for our personal lives and relationships. In place of New Atheism's cold and indifferent universe, faith is a vision of a universe that is a gift of a Creator God, that life as we know it is within God's plan of creation, and that we ourselves are able to find our purpose and value within God's eternal care for each and every one of us.

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*The dialogue between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy, is therefore required not only by faith but also by reason[...] It is necessary because a faith which rejects or is contemptuous of reason risks falling into superstition or fanaticism, while reason which deliberately closes itself to faith, though it may make great strides, fails to rise to the full heights of what can be known. This dialogue is possible because of the unity of truth in the variety of its aspects. The truths embraced in faith and the truths discovered by reason not only cannot ultimately contradict one another, since they proceed from the same source, the very truth of God, the creator of reason and the giver of faith, but in fact they support and enlighten one another: right reason demonstrates the grounds of faith, and, illumined by the latter's light, pursues the understanding of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold insights.*

—The International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, no. 64.

# FAITH AS *THE* BASIC HUMAN QUALITY

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THE CONCEPT of faith in our secularist society tends to be understood as a distinctly religious category. We commonly regard believers as persons who have faith and non-believers as those who have no faith. But this way of thinking displays a lack of appreciation for the fact that faith belongs universally to humankind. A number of recent studies have shown that all people embrace some type of faith to carry them forward and to enable them to realize meaning in their lives. R. Pannikar, for example, claims that faith is constitutive of the human person (Pannikar, 1979, 190); James Fowler asserts that faith is 'a feature of living, acting, and self-understanding, of all human beings whether or not they would claim to be 'religious' in any traditional way' (Fowler, 1980, 17); and David Tracy associates human authenticity with a position of faith understood as a fundamental commitment to the ultimate significance of human existence (Tracy, 1975, 8). It is in light of such recent studies on faith that Dermot Lane asserts, 'The real issue today about faith is not whether one has faith but rather what particular kind of faith one has' (Lane, 1981, 65). Lane conveniently refers to this type of faith as 'primordial faith' so as to distinguish it from the explicit form of faith which we call 'religious faith' (Lane, 1981, 64).

Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his analysis of faith as a universal phenomenon holds to a similar distinction to that made by Lane when he talks about a 'generic faith' (Hughes, 1986, 37–40) that operates in all the religions of the world. Many scholars have written on the issue of faith of late, but this essay cannot possibly delve into the many writings on this topic. Instead, it will focus on the thought of one

major contributor to the fundamental issue of faith, namely, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, as analysed by Edward J. Hughes in his *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Theology of the World*. Smith has formulated a very rich understanding of faith and the first part of this essay will critically discuss key aspects of Smith's comprehensive conception of faith. The second section will then highlight Smith's understanding of the opposites to faith and the ever-present danger of the perversion of faith. Of particular significance in the second part will be the helpful distinction that Smith makes between 'negative secularism' and 'positive secularism.'

## *Wilfred Cantwell Smith's Understanding of Faith*

The forces of science, economics, and communications are all working together today to produce a global civilization, but Smith believes that a global community cannot be arrived at without a programme that facilitates global religious inter-understanding. The value of a religious outlook on life is that it offers the possibility of overcoming tribal interest, individual self-centredness, and it has the capacity to survive disappointment in working towards a world-wide community (Hughes, 1986, 5). In order to achieve his task, Smith seeks to discover a unifying thread that runs through the manifold religions of the world. He does not find this thread in doctrine (what he refers to as 'belief' which is part of the 'cumulative tradition') for clearly doctrinal divergences amongst the religious communities are too large to provide any significant degree of unity, hence Smith pursues a unifying thread

in what he calls 'faith' (Hughes, 1986, 7).

It is important to appreciate the fundamental distinction that Smith makes between faith and belief. The former refers to the inner, existential, and experiential dimension of religion which serves as the foundation of a religious tradition, while the latter is a secondary conceptual expression of the primary experience of faith (Hughes, 1986, 10). This is very similar, note, to Karl Rahner's portrayal of knowledge of God as a 'transcendental' knowledge; that is, the view of the religious dimension of human existence as implicit in everyday human experience—there is an openness to the absolute in human existence and when this enters human consciousness the implicit becomes explicit and is conceptualized as knowledge of God (Rahner, 1978, 52–55). It could be said that God is immediately present to humankind in the order of being and mediately present in the order of knowing. Transcendental experience refers to that which is given antecedently, that which is already there ahead of us and is other than us, that which precedes the perceiving subject and is present in all ordinary or primary experience, and that towards which we are intentionally directed. Notwithstanding this similarity of thought between Smith and Rahner, in the writings of Smith we find a richer analysis of faith and how the many aspects of faith are interrelated to produce a complex phenomenon.

In the writings of Smith the primary experience of faith refers to a number of interrelated aspects of the religious life.

(1) First, faith as a capacity for ultimate meaning refers to our ability to orient our lives to a symbolic vision of reality that transcends mundane facts (Hughes, 1986, 7). Fundamental to the thought of Smith is the portrayal of the human as a self-transcending being who is referred beyond itself to ideals of value that make demands upon us. Reality is affirmed as having a symbolic character, which is to say that it 'works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define' (Dulles, 1983, 131).



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We humans do not come into this world ready-made but must put our lives together by interacting with the world around us. The experience of the human being is the experience of being still in the making, of having the capacity to rise above the given situation, of being open to a yet unknown future that beckons us, of being inspired by values that are considered worthy of being pursued because they render our lives meaningful and significant.

(2) Second, faith is a response to transcendence. The term 'transcendence' is Smith's term for ultimate reality, which includes values such as justice, beauty, and truth. For Smith, ideals such as justice, beauty, and truth have transcendent properties which are never fully comprehended or completely actualized, yet they lure us by their force of intrinsic attractiveness and through them we are opened for growth in the direction of infinity (Hughes, 1986, 14). Smith makes a helpful distinction in this regard between 'apprehension' and 'comprehension' (Hughes, 1986, 32) of the divine in the midst of the world. Even the most evolved saint or avatar can never comprehend the divine or contain the divine conceptually, but apprehension of the divine is certainly within their realm of capability. Since, moreover, persons of faith always fall short of their ideals, this means that faith is always more than a mere observer can observe in terms of external behaviour or explicit expression. It is really not possible to measure faith quantitatively on the basis of behaviour or expression. It is in the nature of ideals to resist formulation by presenting reality as open-ended and

thus in process of becoming something more than it presently is.

It is for this reason that Smith insists on the need to think of faith as an adjective and as a verb, not as a noun. What tends to happen when faith is thought of in substantive terms is that intellectual barriers are set up that lead to exclusivism (Hughes, 1986, 23). For example, if I say I am a Christian (noun) this implies that I am not a Muslim (noun), but if I say I am Christian (adjective), meaning I am committed to being Christ-like and bringing Christ's love to others, I need not think of non-Christians as spiritually inferior. The same applies to Islam. If I say I am Muslim (adjective) this refers to an internal attitude of submission to God's injunctions, while the statement I am a Muslim (noun) refers to my formal membership in a community. Faith as an ongoing response to transcendence goes hand in glove with a dynamic view of faith as an adjective. One who is faithful is one who is actively engaged with transcendence. The English language, unfortunately, does not have a verb such as 'faith-ing' to describe this activity, but the Greek of the New Testament does: the verb *pisteuo* conveys the sense of Christian existence as an active state of commitment to imitating Christ's love for humankind (Hughes, 1986, 25). In the English language we speak of 'having faith,' but this falls well short of effectively conveying the sense of faith as a verb.

In order to emphasize that we humans never actually attain to the ideals of justice, beauty, and truth, and that we experience the term of transcendence as elusive and beyond comprehension, Smith always uses the preposition 'through,' not 'in,' when speaking of the term of transcendence: faith is 'through' God or 'through' Christ, never faith 'in' God or 'in' Christ. The preposition 'through' serves to underscore a sense of direction or intentionality towards ultimate reality which never presumes to contain or comprehend the divine. This line of thought is designed to avoid any claims of superiority by one religion over other

religions, which would give rise to exclusivity and intolerance rather than inclusivity and respect for other traditions. Smith's argument here may seem strange and unnecessarily pedantic, yet it does have some value when properly understood and it does receive support, I think, from the traditional doctrine of the Trinity according to which all things are 'from' God the Father, redeemed 'through' Christ the Son, and perfected 'in' the Holy Spirit. It is through the Father's sending of the Son and the Spirit into the world that we come to know the Father, and through the revelation of the Father in the persons of the Son and the Spirit we become faithful people committed to actualizing the ideals of the kingdom of God in the midst of our world, for the sake of the world's salvation. The proposition of Smith is not as unreasonable as it may seem to us at first sight, and it does assist us in conceiving of how persons who profess to have no faith 'in' God can nonetheless have a particular type of faith that comes into being 'through' God who is the source and term of all transcendent values such as justice, truth, and beauty.

It is also of importance to draw attention to the fact that faith as openness to transcendence leads to a recognition of a plurality of ways of being open, although Smith is at pains not to speak of many faiths but rather many forms of faith (Hughes, 1986, 31 & 43). Faith is always spoken of in the singular so that it may serve as a unifying thread in his task of formulating a programme that will facilitate the creation of a global community of peace, good will, perseverance, and mutual respect amongst all. Care must be taken not to interpret the singular usage of faith as meaning that faith is everywhere the same (Hughes, 1986, 47). All humans are open to transcendence, yet given the boundaries of the historical realm interpretation is always necessary to arrive at some understanding of the divine. There is no such thing as an unmediated experience of the divine that is able to capture or contain it. All our inherited conceptualities of the divine are limited, and when we accept and appreciate

this basic point we will be able to effectively avoid the pitfalls of exclusivity, fundamentalism, and intolerance among the religions of the world.

(3) Third, faith is spoken of as a quality of human beings. Faith as openness to transcendence and as a capacity for meaning are illustrations of this quality. But for Smith faith is not merely a human quality but *the* essential human quality, since human uniqueness is indicated by our capacity to embrace a vision that transcends the mundane world (Hughes, 1986, 25). As the essential human quality, faith is necessary for psychological integration and vitality; it is not merely one element alongside other elements that make up our lives, but the value that all aspects of human life take on (Hughes, 1986, 17). Understood in this fashion, faith as a human quality assumes a 'salvific' character insofar as it refers to a human ability for transformation. By 'saved' Smith means, '... saved from nihilism, alienation, anomie, despair, from the bleak despondency of meaninglessness. Saved from unfreedom; from being the victim of one's own whims within, or of pressures without; saved from being merely an organism reacting to its environment' (Hughes, 26). It is apparent that as the essential quality of human beings, faith takes on a transformative character that derives from its response to transcendence.

Talk of faith as the essential human quality might suggest an overly anthropocentric view of faith where its gratuity as a gift of God is denied or overlooked. But this is not Smith's intention. He explicitly affirms the notion of faith as sheer gift of God (Smith, 1981, 169; Hughes, 1986, 34). His formulation of the issue is solidly theocentric, for faith is a universal quality of humankind precisely because God is present everywhere and at all times active in offering the gift of faith. Perhaps the thought of Thomas Aquinas can be of help here. Aquinas taught that nothing is more deeply interior to an entity than its existence, hence God is present to created things at this most interior level, enabling them to exist and

to act according to the order of secondary causes. Furthermore, Aquinas asserted that real relations obtain between God, the human mind, and the world of finite things, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of reality. In this Thomistic perspective, we can understand why Smith's portrayal of faith as the essential human quality is not excessively anthropocentric but genuinely theocentric.

(4) Fourth, faith as an organizing pattern of meaning refers to a total way of seeing the world. When we respond to transcendence and actualize meaning so that faith becomes a realized quality in our lives, we experience the need to organize life around the values that arise from that response. The cumulative tradition of a particular form of religious faith, which refers to 'the entire mass of overt objective data that constitutes the historical deposit' (Hughes, 1986, 10), is an elaborate and total system of perceiving reality, which includes liturgical practices, doctrinal systems, moral codes, legal and social institutions, conventions, myths, and so on. While the cumulative tradition is passed on from generation to generation, Smith is keen to repudiate any notion of an essence or unchanging core of a tradition (Hughes, 1986, 11).

This is not to say that there are no central themes or ideas that have persisted throughout the history of a tradition, but these central themes are seen by Smith as always open to future redefinition given that we are historical beings. With the rise of historical consciousness has come the recognition that new conditions require new expressions of faith. The Christ of the Greek Christianity of the early centuries, the Christ-Son of Luther's severe Father-God, and the Christ of nineteenth liberalism, for example, all have the figure of Christ at the centre of their systems, yet the meaning of Christ for the faithful is different in each of these historical contexts. On the Christian view, Christ is the unsurpassable, absolute revelation of God, yet we must not think that the Christian possesses full knowledge of God or how God is working in the

world to direct all things to a final end. The Christian holds that salvation comes through Christ who is the Saviour of the world, but what salvation means has never been defined definitively in the history of Christianity. No one concept, image, or metaphor of salvation can ever fully fathom the mystery of salvation in Christ. Salvation as freedom from eternal damnation (Luther, Calvin), as the conquering of mortality and corruptibility (Irenaeus), as deification (Athanasius), and as satisfying the honour of God (Anselm), have all featured prominently in the Christian tradition, yet no one model is considered definitive. Smith's point, then, is largely confirmed by the history of Christian thought.

### *Positive Secularism and Negative Secularism*

The aforementioned aspects of the phenomenon of faith are not restricted to the sphere of religion but can be extended to include the realm of the secular world, thereby making faith a truly universal phenomenon. Smith is keen to emphasize that faith is not rare and confined to religious persons; rather, persons have always lived by faith, for most have held to values that inspired them and made claims upon them. Hence Smith writes in provocative fashion: '...the only true atheist is he who loves no one and whom no one loves; who does not care for truth, sees no beauty, strives for no justice; who knows no courage or no joy, finds no meaning, and has lost all hope' (Hughes, 1986, 15). The true atheist, in other words, is one who denies the ideal values of justice, beauty, and truth, who is not concerned with the fundamental questions of the why, whence, and whither of existence in the world, and is devoid of vitality because gravely lacking in psychological integration. Smith therefore speaks of a 'negative secularism' which espouses no kind of faith, and he equates this type of secularism with modern nihilism which he sees as the primary disorder today in the West (Hughes, 1986, 27).

Nihilism and disintegration are highlighted as the opposites to faith, while fanaticism is presented as the perversion of faith. Every religion has produced fanatics as well as saints or avatars. Secular forms of faith, it should be added, are not immune from fanaticism either, as evidenced by militant forms of atheism that seek to discredit religion altogether (by coming up with vulgar caricatures of religious faith) in the presumed interests of apprehending truth and securing human progress (cf. Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens), and by violent social revolutions informed by a Marxist philosophy of a classless and uniform society where all are equal (cf. Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung). In themselves the use of reason and equality for all are good, but when they are pursued in exclusion of other values they become distorted and lead to a type of fanaticism that represents a perversion of faith as openness to transcendence.

In contrast to negative secularism, Smith upholds the notion of 'positive secularism' which he sees as rooted in the Greek humanist tradition. This is regarded as a form of faith inasmuch as it consists in the surrender to the ideal of reason (Hughes, 1986, 48). The search for rational structure and truth in things constitutes an ongoing stance towards the world, which is normally associated with the modern concern for freedom (from religious authorities), trust in human dignity, and belief in human progress and perfectibility. It is apparent that Smith is quite happy to concede that there have been positive achievements of modernity, and in many respects his views on modernity reflect the positive attitude taken by the Second Vatican Council on the issue of culture. The Council expressed the hope that the 'more universal form of culture' that has emerged from the advances in the sciences, technology, and media, will promote the 'unity' of humankind, and it spoke quite confidently about the 'birth of a new humanism' (*Gaudium et spes*, 53–56). At the same time, the Council tempered its optimism about the emergence of new mass-cultures by acknowledging difficulties in

the present situation: How do we prevent new cultural forms from overthrowing traditional wisdom? How do we prevent the autonomy of culture from becoming narrowly secularist and hostile to religion?

It could be argued that the postmodern age, which offers a critique of the ideals of modernity, is more open to religious horizons than modernity (Gallagher, 1997, ch. 8). Smith, however, is not prepared to jettison the ideal of progress, and what is distinct about his position is that he maintains that the religions of the world have an indispensable and necessary part to play in the creation of a global community. The value of a religious outlook on life, as stated earlier, is that it offers the possibility of overcoming tribal interest, individual self-centredness, and it has the capacity to survive disappointment in working towards a world-wide community. The unity of humankind cannot be achieved without inter-religious understanding and ongoing ecumenical commitment. What is more, since the facts of history show that human progress in forming a global community is fraught with seemingly insurmountable difficulties and obstacles, the religions of the world should serve as invaluable wit-

nesses to the nature of humankind as essentially open to transcendence and capable of moving beyond the present situation so as to realize the ideals of justice, truth, and beauty. Integral to religious faith is the experience of being 'saved' from alienation, despair, anomie, and meaninglessness, which is to say that a religious outlook on life engenders hope, even a hope against hope, which a narrowly secularist form of faith struggles to provide.

The thought of Smith on the universal phenomenon of faith, to conclude, represents a rich source of material for reflection on (a) faith as *the* essential human quality without which life loses its vitality and nihilism rears its head, (b) the primary role that the religions of the world have to play in the creation of a global community, (c) and how to develop more positive attitudes towards secularists, atheists, and humanists who are committed to the ideals of truth, justice, and beauty. There are, no doubt, problematic and provocative elements in Smith's writings, yet there is certainly much of value that can lead to more constructive dialogue and interaction between the religions as well as between the religious world and the secular world.

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# CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

## *Insights from a Neglected Russian Theologian*

LAWRENCE CROSS

**A**LTHOUGH THE terms used in traditional Christian eschatology are known in all the languages of the West, terms such as Second Coming, Resurrection of the Dead, Judgment, Heaven and Hell, and the Consummation of All Things, their meaning may be so diluted as to be almost meaningless on a popular level when placed against the fact that 25% of Catholics in the United States believe in reincarnation. What the figures might be for other first world Christians is a matter for guess work; they may be higher still.

Eschatological consciousness also shows weakness amongst many who have been exposed partially to the biblical idea of prophecy. However, their interpretation of revelation and prophetic utterance is largely made from a contemporary technological and media-driven perspective rather than anything biblical. Without proper theological formation in the Church, they will cite certain events like the turmoil in the middle-east, the widespread use of credit cards and computers, and the creation of the internet as signs that the coming of Jesus Christ is near. Simultaneously, this same person may also be infected with other superstitions. Subtly, and not so subtly, a substitute cosmology, and with it a corresponding anthropology, is being offered. With a vague awe, often inspired with the aid of the cinema, science and the media, there is a turning towards an impersonal, unchangeable cosmic monism, which teaches that all are but parts of one stupendous whole, whose body is nature, and God the soul. Consequently whatever 'is' only conforms to the cosmic laws of the universal 'all'.

The Church in the West is painfully aware of this religious-cultural situation and of its

consequences. Vatican II had affirmed that man is a question to himself and only God can give him the full and ultimate answer (cf. *GS* 21). John Paul II noted the connection between the constant growth of an ideology in the wealthy nations characterized by pride in technical advances and a certain immanentism that lead to the idolatry of material goods, the so-called consumerism. He declared the consequences to be ominous because

Immanentism is a reduction of the integral vision of the person, a reduction which leads not to true liberation but to a new idolatry, to the slavery of ideologies, to life in constraining and often oppressive structures of this world. (Address to the Roman Rota)

This was an echo of the concerns of the 1985 Synod of Bishops which endorsed Vatican II's affirmation of the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities in which a correctly understood secularization must be admitted, but went on to say that it was speaking of something totally different from the secularism that consists of an autonomist vision of man and the world, one which leaves aside the dimension of mystery, indeed neglects and denies it. Citing John Paul II's, *Redemptor Hominis*, the Italian commentator, Giovanni Manastra, completes the picture, declaring that:

Only a new culture, a culture that is religious in a profound sense, will be able to lift the veil of ignorance and of arrogance that, by altering the perception of the phenomenological world to the eyes of our secularized society, has generated a menacing ghost and destroyed our capacity to discern the true essence of creation.

Clearly there has been a growing and continuing undercurrent of *monism* in the modern

spiritual and philosophical climate for almost one hundred and fifty years, evidenced by increasing Western fascination with Hinduism (including Vedanta and Yoga) Taoism, Buddhism, Pantheism, Theosophy and Anthroposophy, Surat Shabda Yoga, Zen, and similar systems of thought, including the Occult, which explore the mystical and spiritual elements of a monistic philosophy, which in its pantheistic form identifies God with the universe and all that is in it. In short, 'All is One, One is All, All is God'. The implications for Christian eschatology are clear. For the last things to have any meaning at all, there needs must be a certain tension between God and creation, between the uncreated and created, between God and his human creature. Monism dissolves all these tensions and makes an eschatological view impossible. If reality is a unified whole and all existing things can be ascribed to, or described by, a single concept or system, the necessary tension between created and uncreated has been cut. The doctrine that mind and matter are reducible to the same ultimate substance or principle of being cannot admit the tension necessary for even the glimmer of anything like the Christian eschatological vision. Monism ignores all that is supernatural, the dualism of mind and matter, God and creation, and there can be no opposition between God and the world, as unity cannot be in opposition to itself. There can be no *eschaton* because,

'The divine mystery and greatness of the world has always been a temptation for mankind.' Mankind has perpetually abandoned God for idols, the cosmos for a profaned and secular world and the truth about mankind for its idolization. The constant temptation is to 'immanentism' a phenomenon which can assume surprising and 'unexpected forms, such as naturalism and magic, humanism and rationalism, nationalism and economism, state-worship and technology, in short every kind of idolatry'<sup>1</sup>

However, the Christian myth of the *eschaton* is not necessarily dead. Indeed, it can appear in the most surprising contexts, possibly demonstrating a growing protest against



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the prevailing claustrophobic monism. From 1999, Hollywood launched a series of futuristic science fiction movies in a series known as 'The Matrix', a series which has achieved great popularity amongst the young. In fact, to understand all of its nuances one should probably be under twenty five. This film portrays a fantastic world in which the human race, besieged in a city named Jerusalem, faces annihilation from a hostile, alternative, demonic and robotic cyber world. Doubtless full of theological lacunae, understandably, since this is the work of movie directors and screen writers, not theologians, it nevertheless possesses a cosmological vision consonant with a Judeo-Christian view of the world and of mankind. Whatever their sins and weaknesses, the unique value of human beings emerges precisely as they are threatened with extinction from hostile forces erupting from within the cosmos, forces which have only an appearance of authentic personality. Consciously or unconsciously, it is a protest against a de-personalised cosmos and an assertion of the unique value of the human being, a protest against the evil infinity of a monistic universe.

However, before turning to the thought of Evgeny Lampert, the neglected and little known Russian theologian to whose ideas we will soon turn our attention, we should at least provide a sketch of the kind of monism and the consequences contained in what is generally known as the New Age movement. In the modern era which has lost its faith, in which dogmatic truth has been exchanged for religion as a subjective matter of taste, a situation predicted by John Henry Newman in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the intellectual attraction of an

uncompromising monistic theory of the universe exercises a particular attraction. Is it too severe to observe that the cryptic comment of the 14<sup>th</sup> century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* applies here, that ‘even hell has its mystics’?

Indeed, spiritualistic monism, when it is consistent with itself, will always lean to semi-pantheistic mysticism which exhibits only the most febrile and relative morality. As *Lifespring*, a New Age training seminar based on the monistic philosophy explains, ‘The Absolute within transcends all dualities, including good and evil.’ Swami Adbhutananda, a contemporary guru, declares that ‘good and evil have no absolute reality.’ He is supported by the best selling author, Deepak Chopra, in his *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. For Chopra, the idea that ‘all is one’ really undermines any philanthropy. If all is one flow, there are no givers or receivers. Nothing can ever be wrong since everything is equally part of the divine intelligence. The basis for morality has been dissolved. No one knows that better than Charles Manson, who asked, with a grotesque authority, ‘If God is One, what is bad?’ Meanwhile the new gnostics chatter on. Silva Mind Control, an influential spiritualistic self-help seminar declares that:

Everything is in some respect the universal mind and the creation of that mind... Each one of us is an idea in the universal mind. Man chooses to think of himself as a separate being... but actually we participate in this mind as an atom of water participates in the substance of the ocean.

Karl Barth was right to think that the immanentism he saw developing increasingly guarantees and completes the secular world picture. With radical immanentism not only does any necessary dualism disappear, but also all notions of difference, of alterity, of otherness are abolished, along with transcendence. ‘Atheism is lurking somewhere at the doors’ of modernity, declared Barth. Dualism enabled modernity to constitute a world as separate from the sovereignty of God as its creator. This way dualism is the root of secularism in modernity,

one of the most influential factors for the secularization of western culture. Cartesian dualism became the seed of atheism in the west, but like the lost souls in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, who flee continually from fire to ice, and from ice to fire, the continual flight is from the claustrophobia of immanent monism to the vertigo of radical dualism, each producing the other in a doomed cycle.

Evgeny Lampert published *The Divine Realm* in 1943, an extract from his doctoral thesis for the University of Oxford. Its subtitle is ‘Towards a theology of the Sacraments’. Its opening chapter, ‘Monism’, makes a clear connection with those concerns which had occupied the great Russian theologians and commentators of the modern era, particularly Fr Serge Bulgakov. Lampert wrote that:

Monism is always the denial of this transcendent-immanent mystery and dialectic of being, its dialogical character as two-in-one, *i.e.* what in Christian language is called *God-manhood*.<sup>2</sup>

Lampert acknowledges his debt to Russian sophiology and his connection to thinkers such as Nicholas Berdyaev, but he is no mere imitator. This is not a western style sacrament-by-sacrament manual of the 1940’s and we should also note that this was written in the midst of the Second World War, well predating the revival of Orthodox sacramental theology in the work of theologians such as Fr Alexander Schememann. Why it suffered such neglect is a mystery. Evgeny Lampert also had the gift of being able to recognize the pearls of truth embedded in quite erroneous and distorted systems, and of being able to harvest them for use in the construction of a new Orthodox way of seeing and of asking the fundamental question, is the world created by God, or has it its own independent, self-sufficient being? Concerning the doomed cycle of dualism and atheistic or cosmic monism he wrote,

There is no intellectual issue out of this dilemma. This can only be found by taking the whole question on to another level (μεταβασις εις αλλο γενοϋς) from the static to the dynamic, from the abstract to the concrete. The world is related to God not as His objectified equal, as a

form of being as its own co-ordinated with Him, but as His living self-revelation, as His 'other one' (qateron). It is *created* by God., it is God's creation. Its existence is a witness to the divine-human, theandric nature of divine being.<sup>3</sup>

His answer has profound implications for eschatology, which will hopefully become clear. The world is created out of the void; this means that it exists in God, and only in Him, and has no foundation of its own. It is hung over the abyss, and this abyss is 'nothingness.' He declares that, 'the knowledge of 'nothingness' is one of the deepest intuitions of the creature about its creaturehood'.<sup>4</sup> This creates the tension necessary for a meaningful eschatology, as well as affirming the intimate connection between God and the world and mankind.

Lampert found that the ancient philosophical systems are inadequate for appreciating this vision of creation, whether they are those of Plato and Aristotle or their continuators.

They are unable to achieve a true (μεταβασις εις αλλο γενοϋς) in which the positive unity and correlation between God and the world, as well as their ontological distinction and 'otherness' are maintained. The idea is not that of cause or movement, but of creation and creaturehood. God is not the cause of the world but its *Creator*, and the world is God's *creation*. Philosophical and theological language does not usually even notice the immense and fundamental difference between these terms. On the contrary, it is maintained that creation is but a special form of causation. Yet there is such a difference as to be virtually a contradiction.<sup>5</sup>

There is no argument with his statement that 'we cannot penetrate into the depths of the life of God', nor with the statement that 'man is enabled to become aware of what is revealed by God himself about God's own reality'. But Lambert then takes his reader to the edge of the precipice saying that '*To this reality belongs the creation of the world*'. Suddenly we are over the edge. He declares that the Word of God, which sounds in the Heavens, sounds also in the universe,

What is  $\alpha\nu\alpha$  is equally  $\kappa\alpha\tau\omega$ . The eternal image of man and of the world in man, the micro-

cosm and the macrocosm, abides in the very heart of the hidden, triune life of God, and his inner life is revealed in the eternal image of the world and man. Such is the mystery of eternal *God-manhood*, the divine-human, theandric mystery of being.<sup>6</sup>

Lambert takes us to a new understanding of the sacredness of creation and establishes the creation itself as the foundation for renewed sacramental understanding. We have not the time to give the details of his exposition, but much turns on the statement that 'Created life cannot be regarded as 'caused', as a thing made- a mere product of its maker. It is not a 'thing' at all, but precisely life'.<sup>7</sup> Lampert rejects the idea of 'efficient cause' and the concept of God as 'producer'. These apply to things. If used of God and the world, God's relationship will be to extrinsic and extraneous objects. The world cannot be a sacrament of God, or a possible foundation for sacramental life, nor can man achieve an experience of God through the sacraments, if there is no living relationship between God and the other, his creation.<sup>8</sup>

When we say that the heavens proclaim the glory of God, this must not be understood in a trivial way as self-glorification or display on the part of God. The cosmos is not the theatre screen showing a movie of the divine. Rather, God 'releases, 'sets free' His divine life, His divine world from out of the depths of His transcendent hypostatic being into 'otherness' and self-existence'. Lambert dares to say that when we say that God creates the world '*ex nihilo*', it means 'out of Himself, out of His own divine eternal being.'<sup>9</sup> Here he is entirely at one with Fr Pavel Florensky for whom the whole axis of creation and redemption turned upon the mystery of Golgotha, the self-offering of the God-man, Jesus. In Lampert's words,

Golgotha was fore-ordained at the creation of the world not merely as an event in time; it also constitutes the metaphysical foundation of creation. '*It is finished*', spoken by the God-man from the Cross on Golgotha embraces all being and is written across the face of the created universe....the Golgotha of God is the mysteri-

ous ground of all creation...<sup>10</sup>

It becomes clear that God's divine existence has a twofold mode of revelation: in himself and in other being, which is to say in creation. 'The first exists in eternity, in a single integral act; the second is plunged in time, in becoming, in nothingness, which constitutes its self-existence'. Opposed to this is the claustrophobic philosophy of monism, 'which assumes the One is a self-enclosed and self-sufficient substance.... For this philosophy nothing is born to be, and the all-consuming Chronos eternally devours his children...'<sup>11</sup>

Contrary to dualism or reductionist monism, Lampert argues for the spiritual quality of matter, something ever so dimly perceived by Marxist philosophy, but lost in its atheism. It is precisely because it is already spiritual, that matter, so often called dead or mere matter, can be the foundational element of a transcendent sacramental reality, which is to say, the vehicle and revelation of the Holy Spirit. This also allows other problematic areas of human existence to be understood in a new and transfigured way, areas such as economics, sex and art. We have space for a brief comment on the first two areas, economics and sex.

On the question of economics, and in terms which that will later emerge in John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*, Lampert revisits the work of N.F. Feodorov, whom he describes as that strange and most penetrating Russian thinker, and translates Feodorov in an eschatological light.<sup>12</sup> The economism which Feodorov opposed is seen as another form of deadly monism. Despite the faults in his system, Feodorov's work postulates man becoming aware of the transcendent power of his body in economic labour. He connects human economics with God's own creative action and Lampert concludes that 'even as economic master, man preserves the halo of Adam's royal glory'.<sup>13</sup>

On the question of the meaning and experience of sex, Lampert decries the tendency that appeared early in Christian writings to see sex as a kind of split in the creation, as an inevitable consequence of man's mixed nature

of flesh and spirit. This Neo-platonist and Gnostic view infiltrated the thought of some of the greatest Church Fathers and colluded with 'hatred of sex and of women, to cast out love from the world, portraying it as enticing lust, alluring falsehood, sweet poison or simply as 'paganism'.<sup>14</sup> This infiltration has had disastrous consequences, because it:

...killed the great religious dream of the holiness of sex and of love, and of life as the feast of love. Sex was driven into the prison of bourgeois family existence and domesticity, where it was 'tolerated'; or else it was or is dragging on an irreligious life in night-clubs and similar institutions—a fatal counterpoise of marriage and the family conceived as mere matrimonial transactions. Sexual love found itself outside religion, unsanctified, abandoned to the whims of fate or...of the devil.<sup>15</sup>

In the face of this Lampert claims that the creation of woman is the very acknowledgement of the reality of sex as the fulfillment of creation; that sex is a transcendent reality, and that sexual life has a transcendent significance, while 'the union of the sexes in love is a witness to the fullness of being and life eternal.' It is a true tragedy that the holiness of sexual love has been so blasphemed: on the one hand by cold dualism, detesting the flesh as a source of defilement, and on the other, by an amoral monism which sees the flesh as the theatre of mere animal activity. Both are blind to 'the mystery and sacrament of holy flesh', as the 'way of ascent into the heavens and the grace of the Holy Spirit descending on it'.<sup>16</sup>

The coda to Lambert's *The Divine Realm* comes in four short sections entitled *The Symbol*, *The Sacramental Principle*, *Metabolism* and *Epiklesis*. In his conclusion, entitled *The Ultimacy of the Sacrament*, the sacraments are affirmed as essentially realized eschatological events.

In his treatment of the symbol, Lambert takes us to what is now familiar theological territory, but it was not so in 1943. He demonstrates that the symbol is a divine-human reality in which both God and his creature are operative and that far from being a mere semi-

otic convention, the meeting that occurs in a symbol is essentially a relationship of life, not of static contact, but 'living interpenetration and co-inherence.' The symbolic power of nature is the very foundation of the sacraments and without this power there is no sacrament. However, God's sacramental presence is inconceivable without it. But nature cannot create the sacrament. Rent asunder through sin, nature and the whole of creation, though created holy and theandric, await God's redemptive power in Christ. Again, for Lambert, as for Florensky, all turns on Golgotha and the empty tomb. Let Lambert say it for himself:

With the coming of the God-man and Saviour Jesus Christ, with his death on Golgotha there took place a shattering and mighty exorcism of the cosmos and Nature from within: 'Great Pan has died', the demonic possession of Nature is forthwith broken, the Prince of this world is driven out, and Nature awaits her final transformation in the eschatological fulfillment....Christ could not have fulfilled his cosmic exorcism, if Nature were not herself an ever-living witness to the Holy Spirit, whereby she cries in man and through man: 'Abba, Father!'<sup>17</sup>

In the section entitled *Metabolism* Lambert takes us past and beyond the philosophical constraints which have operated upon and largely distorted Christian sacramental understanding over the past millennium. The revival of the patristic concept of μεταβολη takes us past the blunt instruments of Aristotelian physics, past 'substance' and 'accidents' and crudely understood 'transubstantiation'. This ancient patristic concept is also more accessible to contemporary understanding before which the old scholastic language makes little or no sense. There is an unquestionable change that takes place in the sacraments, and not just in the elements of the eucharist alone. But to understand the orthodoxy of μεταβολη a sharp eschatological consciousness is essential.

Μεταβολη means that 'the elements of this world are translated from here to the world of the 'age to come', where God is all in all.' The elements of Nature are 'invisibly trans-

figured, and while remaining ontologically themselves, become truly Spirit-bearing and are deified'.<sup>18</sup> This is but a taste of Lambert's treatment of the mystery of translation that occurs in the sacraments, a meeting and union of two worlds, of two distinct spheres of being. This approach still has the power today to startle Christian believers in their understanding of sacraments.

Immanent monism encloses human beings in a claustrophobic cosmos. Dualism, before it collapses upon itself in what Lambert calls 'the powerless convulsions of Prometheus', creates an unbridgeable gulf between earth and heaven, radically dividing God and the world. In 'Epiklesis', Lambert's penultimate section, the Holy Spirit of God is described as:

...that supreme Christian 'symbol', which breaks the fixed extrinsic limits and the estrangement of an objectivized world, and gives to the whole of sacramental life the quality of a dynamic all-pervading reality...to live in the Holy Spirit is to overcome the impenetrable barriers of unilluminated, hardened, lifeless existence.<sup>19</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the one who allows mankind once again to breathe the clear air of restored nature, of the world that is coming, and particularly in the sacraments. The sanctification of the world, its glorification and deification in Christ's redeeming sacrifice, is only real in the coming and action of the Holy Spirit. As it is in the world, so it is in the sacraments of the Church.

Lambert's conclusion reverberates upon a deep note, an apocalyptic diapason. Written in the midst of war he wonders whether 'beneath the thunder of war and world-catastrophes, unknown to many, there is taking place something more definite, decisive and essential for the world than the war itself and all the earthquakes overtaking European civilization'.<sup>20</sup> Whatever this something may be, it is taking place in the depth of creaturely existence, between God and man, between God and the world. It is at this point that he is most explicitly eschatological. The apocalypse of history, in which it must have seemed he was in-

deed standing, cannot annul eschatology, nor can eschatology annul history. Both are intimately related and cannot be divided. While the *Parousia* is the very limit-point of history, it also belongs to the apocalypse and to eschatology. History, while often tragic and brutal, is deeply meaningful. It is in history that 'God's creative and providential will is being realized, where God speaks to man, and man speaks to God.'<sup>21</sup>

Sacrament and *Eschaton* come together in his concluding reflection that:

...while sacraments and their power arise within the human and cosmic world of untransfigured nature, they transcend the limits of this age and reach out to the world to come. That ray of transfiguration, that light of Mount Tabor, is not extinguished, but shines

mysteriously in Christ's sacraments; and all creation seeks and longs for it. The sacrament, while it arises and is realized within this world, also reaches out to the beyond. It is a prophecy and anticipation, and thence the realization of God as 'all in all', in whom the whole cosmos is destined to become a sacrament, and man's creative, divine-human calling to be fulfilled.<sup>22</sup>

Lampert concludes with a beautiful passage, written in the midst of the cataclysm of the Second World War, but its vision can be addressed to this and to any age of the world:

Into the midst of darkness gathering in a world weighed down by the burden of sin and suffering is borne a faint yet unmistakable whisper, a call to the wedding feast of the Apocalyptic Lamb. And the parched and cracked lips of all creation cry: 'Come Lord Jesus!'<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

1 Evgeny Lampert, *The Divine Realm: Towards a theology of the Sacraments* (London: 1943, Faber and Faber Ltd) Foreward, p 5. Hereafter, *Divine Realm*.

2 *Divine Realm*, 12.

3 *Divine Realm*, 15.

4 *Ibid*.

5 *Divine Realm*, 44.

6 *Divine Realm*, 49.

7 *Divine Realm*, 50-51.

8 'The first sign of this divine charity must be sought in creation...the heavens, the earth, the waters, the sun, the moon and the stars... Even before discovering the God who reveals himself in the history of a people, there is a cosmic revelation, open to all, offered to the whole of humanity by the Creator... There is, therefore, a divine message secretly inscribed in creation,... a sign of the loving faithfulness of God who gives his creatures being and life, water and food, light and time...From created works one ascends ... to the greatness of God, to his loving mercy.' (Benedict XVI, *Commentary on Psalm 135 (136)*, 9 November 2005.)

9 *Divine Realm*, 51.

10 *Divine Realm*, 53.

11 *Divine Realm*, 61.

12 *Laborem Exercens*, John Paul II, 14 September 1981. 'The word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that *man*, created in the image of God, *shares by his work in the activity of the Creator* and that, within the limits of

his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation. Cf. Gn. 2:2; Ex. 20:8, 11; Dt. 5:12-14.

'The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, and its orientation to the praise of God. Even by their secular activity they must assist one another to live holier lives. In this way the world will be permeated by the spirit of Christ and more effectively achieve its purpose in justice, charity and peace...Therefore, by their competence in secular fields and by their personal activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them work vigorously so that by human labor, technical skill and civil culture, created goods may be perfected according to the design of the Creator and the light of his word.' Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 36.

13 *Divine Realm*, 103.

14 *Divine Realm*, 93.

15 *Divine Realm*, 94.

16 *Divine Realm*, 97.

17 *Divine Realm*, 116.

18 *Divine Realm*, 125.

19 *Divine Realm*, 130-131.

20 *Divine Realm*, 137.

21 *Divine Realm*, 138.

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# CHRIST-FIGURES IN CINEMA, IN RELIGION, IN THEOLOGY

PETER MALONE MSC

FILM AS A *locus theologicus*, moral and pastoral if not always systematic? Theology needs to acknowledge films as analogies for theological understanding—sometimes it raises its eyebrows exponentially the more the public asserts its enjoyment and contradicts highbrow critical pronouncements. Could it be that there are lowbrow—down-to-earth, ordinary—*loci theologici*?

Jesus preached, taught and performed prophetic symbolic actions. He was a story teller, giving leads for his disciples to work on systematic, moral and pastoral formulations: mustard seeds, leaven, pearls (moving up market for his images). ‘The kingdom of heaven is like...’ and Jesus’ mundane analogies and classic ecclesiastical texts.

Jesus also appealed to the ‘multiplex crowd’ of his day who queued up eagerly to get the front stalls. He told of a mugging on the Jericho road, of a wastrel whose escapades offended the official religious sensibility (he, hungry, wanted to eat pigs’ slop) and added a pre-Freud touch with the older brother’s envy of his sibling’s lewd activities, of lazy bridesmaids, of vigilante vineyard owners, of a capricious king who could execute reluctant wedding invitees. And, for his commonplace stories of lost sheep and its domestic counterpart in lost money as well as his masterpiece about the two lost sons, he had an eager audience of apostles, financial crooks and sex-workers.

Jesus knew that stories made for interesting, provocative and challenging theological reflection on God’s covenant of justice, fidelity and loving-kindness. In playing to the gallery (and to the stalls, so to speak), Jesus was using a method we might call ‘Lights... Camera... Faith’.

## *The Question*

It is not the usual question: can cinema be a ‘*locus theologicus*’? And, could an exploration of the answer, ‘yes’, provide some insight into how religious issues, religious sensibilities, whether they be in connection with, or affiliation to, organised faiths or the looser religious experience called ‘spirituality’ (or both), contribute to Australian society and culture and could continue to do so in the aftermath of the western secularisation of Judaeo-Christianity and the wider diffusion of the tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam?

I would like to enter into an answer via the Christ-figure and, eventually, some Christ-figures in Australian films. Christ-figures in general and, in our case, in cinema, have a more than respectable lineage. Jesus himself was interpreted in his person and in his mission by the Gospel writers, by St Paul and in the first letter of Peter, as the fulfilment of the servant-figure in the book of Isaiah. Then Stephen, in the Acts of the Apostles, was presented as following the pattern of Jesus in his death and the forgiveness of his killers. He was presented as a Christ-figure. So were the martyrs of the early Christian centuries... and right throughout the history of the Church, those who resembled Jesus in their lives, their love and their heroism were seen as Christ-figures.

The term Christ-figure is used advisedly, following a terminology suggested by Malachi Martin (1): any representation of Jesus is a Jesus-figure; any representation of someone who resembles Jesus, significantly and substantially, can be called a Christ-figure, from his title rather than his personal name. They do not have to be Christian persons nor be in-

terpreted by a Christian artist. The Gospel stories and metaphors have become classics in world culture and can be drawn on, and have been drawn on, by a range of writers, artists and film-makers, believers and non-believers. I would suggest looking at the use of the cross and the crucifix in Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997) as well as his *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and the explicit use of this iconography by an American Jewish director.

David Tracey, some decades ago, reminded us of the value of the 'Analogical Imagination' (2), that it is one of humanity's greatest assets. He wrote of classics which have inspired in their times and have been awarded pride of place in worldwide culture. While some thought that this sounded somewhat highfalutin', Tracey alerted his readers to the different ways in which classics communicated by noting the different 'publics' that classics can address. This means that we acknowledge the profound classics but we do not neglect the general public, what we might call the Multiplex, DVD-BlueRay, YouTube public and the classics of popular culture. Of course, there are cinema classics from directors like Bergman, Kurosawa, Tarkovsky. But Shakespeare wrote classics for the pit as well as his timeless tragedies and histories. Cinema, at all levels, can provide classics – and does. As Michael Paul Gallagher noted, doing theology without this reference to the public and cinema is like doing theology in a bell jar (3)

. Since practice should reflect preaching, it is important to look at some movie examples.

One of the earliest examples for me in writing on movie Christ-figures was the work of Clint Eastwood in *High Plains Drifter* (1972) and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976). Archbishop Frank Little of Melbourne was wont to ask whether Clint Eastwood had directed another 'soteriological western'. He did not live to see Clint Eastwood's apotheosis as a sacrificial victim in *Gran Torino* (2008), perhaps atoning for his violent years as Detective Dirty Harry Callahan.



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The opening of *The Outlaw Josey Wales* is quite significant but, surprisingly, many audiences in the mid-1970s did not register the clues, especially the words from the book of Job, 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust, the Lord he gives, the Lord he takes away' and the stick cross falling on Josey Wales' shoulders at the grave of his wife and son.

It needs to be noted, especially for those brought up in a word and print culture, that the indications for cinema Christ-figures are more frequently to be seen rather than heard or read. We can be very literate but often we are not, to coin a word, 'visuate', able to see and appreciate the meaning of the visuals. We need to be aware not only of the text of a film but also of what we might call the 'texture' of the film: images, moving images, sound effects, music... (4).

### *Australian Cinema Heritage*

One of the great resources available to us for reflection on the future of religion in Australia is the cinema heritage. Australia began its film career, so to speak, with the blend of the secular and the religious. Pathe Brothers company filmed the Melbourne Cup of 1896 within a year of the first public exhibition of films by the Lumiere Brothers in Paris on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1895. That is symbolic of the Australian spirit. One hopes that the next example of film-making, a combination of lecture, slides and film clips in the Melbourne Town Hall in 1899 is also symbolic. It was a program called *Soldiers of the Cross* and was produced by the

Salvation Army which sponsored a film company for the following ten years (5).

During the ensuing decades, Australia was quite prolific in its making of feature films as well as providing documentary material but suffered the inroads from vast American production and publicity know-how between the wars. Ken G. Hall, who was to go on to establish Cinesound News (remembered and celebrated in the 1978 *Newsfront*) was the key film-maker in the 1930s. His perspective was national/commercial rather than particularly religious but his heritage is available. There was spasmodic production during and after World War II. It was only with government, both federal and state, support for the so-called renaissance in Australian cinema that began in 1972, that the cinema resource came into its own (and made an impact on world screens). This has continued to the present with 2009 being a particularly strong year for films of quality and films which explored values.

And there is the connection between cinema and religion: the dramatising of values. This is broadly religious, values being presented rather than religion of church practice. It means that religion is to be found in our film heritage implicitly rather than explicitly, although Australian cinema has a record of quite a number of explicit presentations of religion and church, *The Devil's Playground* (1976), *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), *Evil Angels* (1988), as well as some fine television drama like *Brides of Christ* (1991) (6). And one of the ways of making the connection and moving the dialogue into more explicitly religious language is the use of the Christ-figure.

### *Theology, Stories and Metaphors*

It is not fanciful to link films, even commercial Hollywood movies, to Christology or to be using them as a source for theological understanding. A short statement made by the bishops present at the First Vatican Council, 1869-70, highlights this (though a more modern translation is desirable): 'Reason, indeed, enlightened by faith, when it seeks earnestly,

piously, and calmly, attains by a gift from God some understanding, and that very fruitful of mysteries; partly from the analogy of those things which it naturally knows...' (7). The other ways for fruitful insight are from the relations the mysteries of faith bear to one another and to our final destiny. Our stories relate and dramatise 'analogies' (metaphors, images, symbols) of those things which reason naturally knows.

This means that we are in the realm of story and the importance of story for theological reflection. Since the Jesus of the Gospels is a storyteller *par excellence*, we are to be listeners to and watchers of stories. Jesus had the advantage of being able to offer us challenging 'answer-parables' while the film-makers, no matter what their ambitions, offer us 'question-parables'. Jesus himself is, of course, a story. Many decades ago Tony Kelly reflected on this reality (in the inevitably exclusive usages of the time):

As expressed in his human existence, the Word has a history. Jesus is born, lives, suffers, dies, rises. As he enters into the heart and mind of man, the Word becomes a story. As projected into the history of all men, in all times, in all cultures, the Word becomes a story told and retold. The occasions for such retellings are as frequent as the number of the life-stories of men and women who hope that their story is a good story. The Word becomes the way of telling our story, the way of accounting for how we belong together, from the beginning unto the end

The Word becomes the story, the Gospel. He does not become first of all doctrine or dogma or theology. Each of these is only part of his story. And so, it is essential to note the narrative of how the Word lives amongst us and invites us to listen (8).

Because the cinema stories are in moving images, this may lead to difficulties for those who are accustomed to or prefer sources for theological reflection in words with their clarity and definitions. Suggestions for a method for theology that appeals in this regard is that of Monica Hellwig in her booklet, *Theology as a Fine Art* (9).

She states that theology, say Christology, can begin with contemplation. By this, she means that, for instance in a group, each member offers something that is important to them, to their experience of Jesus. It could be a Gospel text, a classical painting or statue of Jesus, a hymn, or a film like Zefferelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* or Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, a particular scene like Jesus' encounter with the woman of the city (from Luke 7:35-50) as well as a credal statement of a text from the magisterium. Anything is valid at this stage, theology beginning from experience.

Her second step is one of sharing but in the sense of explaining and clarifying the point of contemplation. It is a means of bridging between the members of the group, that they appreciate the different ways in which the reflection has begun, some empathy within the group. It is not a discussion, but a deepening of the contemplation. It is in the third step that the co-ordinator of the group, of the class, the teacher or the tutor, offers a background from the theological tradition that enables the group to articulate their experience of Jesus in relation to the tradition and to dialogue with that so that fresh and/or deeper understanding is reached.

This can be used for reflection on Christ-figures.

To move to a specifically Australian film to indicate how this might be done, *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), directed by Peter Weir. The Christ-figure is quite explicit in Christopher Koch's novel and in the screenplay by David Williamson.

The film focuses on Indonesia in 1965, president Soekarno's year of living dangerously. It is in the genre of the reporter who goes into an unknown situation, observes it and is changed. The film creates the atmosphere of Jakarta most effectively. The film also uses the Wayang, the Indonesian shadow-play with puppets indicating the balance between Right and Left—forever in motion. But a chief focus is on Linda Hunt as Billy Kwan—a Chi-

nese-Australian dwarf who plays God in a good sense, who understands people's lives, is full of ideals, becomes disillusioned and is finally a Christ figure—a symbolic gesture in death for the people of Indonesia? Billy Kwan quotes the Gospel of Luke 3:10, 'what then must we do?', the words of John the Baptist to the crowds who asked him what they must do to repent. Billy Kwan serves as the eyes of the journalist played by Mel Gibson, enabling him to see the poverty of Asia, confronting him about his response. He is mocked by other journalists with reference to the crucifixion and eventually dies, something of a martyr, to bring the plight of the people to the attention of the president.

In contemplating Billy Kwan, we are drawn to the parallels between Billy and Jesus in terms of concern for the poor and his inviting others to react to this vast poverty of Asia. Even the non-religious journalists in Jakarta recognise these parallels, their mockery of his zeal and dedication foreshadowing his death, his disappointment in Guy's seeming betrayal and the failure of Soekarno to respond to the people's needs. The character of Billy Kwan can be further explored so that the cinema experience (as of the novel for those who have read it) can be shared.

With some Gospel references already in place, the next step of articulating theological perceptions can take place.

### ***Jesus, Redeemer, Saviour and Liberator***

A helpful insight for understanding Christ-figures comes from Frederick Dillistone (9). He studies the person of Jesus as Redeemer and Saviour. These are categories for Christ-figures. Later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century indicated that, perhaps a combination of redeemer and saviour, Jesus could be seen as a Liberator.

There is a long tradition in the Jewish scriptures of redeemers, those who suffer and die on behalf of others. The most impressive and profound example of this tradition is the pro-

phetic servant of the Second Isaiah,

...he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins.

On him lies a punishment that brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed. (53:5)

The Gospel passion narratives rely on familiarity with the servant songs of Second Isaiah, often using detail from the songs as 'short-hand' for describing Jesus' suffering. In Isaiah 50:6, the servant is struck on the face, spat on, his beard pulled and his back beaten. In this same way, Jesus' torture is described in the Gospels (Mark 15: 16-20). The First Letter of Peter, 2:21-4, quotes Isaiah 53 explicitly. In fact, the author uses the language of Christ-figure to exhort readers to be Christ-figures themselves: after speaking of suffering (in a passage about slaves being punished justly and unjustly), he states that 'Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow the way he took' (v.21).

The other tradition from the Jewish scriptures is that of saviours, those who transform others' lives or lead them into a new life. They range from Abraham, the patriarch migrating with his clan, to Moses leading the descendants of Abraham into the promised land. The climax is the vision in Daniel 7, where the Son of Man, representing the faithful people of Israel, comes on the clouds of heaven to receive the reward for those who had remained faithful to God's promises to Abraham, those who were faithful to the covenant between God and his people. This, of course, is Jesus' reference to Caiphas when Caiphas asks Jesus who he really is (Mt. 26:63-6). Jesus is the Son of Man who, after suffering like the servant, will be glorified by God and lead his faithful into the new, heavenly, risen life. Saviours empower others to a rising to new life.

Jesus is also presented as King, Priest and Prophet. He can be described as a 'Holy Fool', remembering Paul's comments in I Corinthians. Billy Kwan can be seen as a redeemer Christ-figure as well as a holy fool.

Some more examples from the Australian cinema heritage can be considered, Christ-fig-

ures who are not presented so explicitly as such but whose Christ-figure characteristics are more implicit.

### ***Gallipoli (1981): Redeemer Figure***

Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* is a fine war movie, with a screenplay by David Williamson. While it shows the reality of battle, it also highlights the futility of war and the loss of lives. It is the story of the Australian landing on the Turkish Coast at Gallipoli and the troops digging. This event quickly became the national 'myth' of the heroes of the Dardanelles, the ANZACS (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). It is a myth of self-sacrifice and defeat which became a defining moment in Australian and New Zealand history: glory and honour from self-sacrifice. Anzac Day is the Australian public holiday.

Weir was moved during a visit, in 1977, to the site of the landing where he found relics of the veterans still lying in the sand on the beach. He says he sensed the spirit of the men and their presence. His movie is a tribute, a recreation of war and a powerful and emotional criticism of the waging of war and errors of human judgment in strategy and tactics. The score combines the classic with the modern, Albinone and Jean-Michael Jarre. It adds to the urgency and the poignancy, especially of the freeze-frame of Archie's dying.

Archie (Mark Lee) is an earnest and naive young man who volunteers to go to World War I. At the end of the film, as the troops stand in readiness to go over the top, Archie's friend, Frank (Mel Gibson) rushes from the officers with a message to stay. In the meantime, the men have prepared (with the religious element introduced of their reciting the Lord's Prayer). But, Frank is too late and the sacrificial slaughter begins.

The analogy of the redeemer figure is in Jesus' sacrificing life and suffering for others.

### ***Tom White (2004): Saviour Figure***

Perhaps Alkinos Tsilimidis' *Tom White* was too sombre a film for many tastes. After all,

the story of a man in midlife crisis, finally standing at the crossroads of his future is not your cheery night out. Nevertheless, it was well worth seeing - not only for its portrait of this middle-aged man but for the symbolism of what he represented in Australian urban society. Tom White (played by Colin Friels) is a symbol of Australian business success, with all its prestige, conveniences and trappings, which is ultimately found wanting. Tom White's symbolic journey amongst the less successful people in Melbourne society, those who find themselves or choose to be at the margins, is a challenge to audiences to discover where their social and human values lie.

What Tom White does is walk away from his life. His marriage has become brittle. He has failed at work and is on the way out - and walks out. His poise and acumen are gone. After an alcoholic binge, he literally disappears from his taken-for-granted safe world. His accustomed world no longer matters to him.

Tom's journey through the underside of Melbourne is not quite a pilgrimage through an *Inferno*. Rather, it serves as a journey through a kind of *Purgatorio*. The people that he encounters represent the inhabitants of an urban purgatory which could eventually lead them to their hell. Tom moves in with a rent boy, has an affair with a drug addict and experiences the brutality of her supplier, stays with an old man who has not quite opted out of life but has bypassed it and observes it with a wry wisdom, but still finds a woman to relate to, and a boy who has run away from a middle-class home. What effect does this St Kilda experience have on Tom?

He moves out of an isolated introversion. He is not dependent on his now fragile inner world for support - which it was failing to supply. He goes out and discovers that he can relate to men and women that he previously would not have encountered or would have avoided. In fact, he discovers that he is 'energised' by his friendship and contact with them. He is saved. And, this motivates him in his attempts to save those troubled people he en-

counters.

*Tom White* is a portrait of contemporary life in the margins of an Australian city. It is a picture of people imprisoned by circumstances and choices. Some, like the old man, choose not to get out. The rent boy still has a choice. The addict is killed. The boy has his life before him and needs reconciliation with his family. This is what Tom discovers about people, about life and about himself. The open ending means that we continue to wonder how much he has absorbed and how much it will influence the next phase of his life.

### ***Rabbit-Proof Fence (2002): Liberator Figure***

Philip Noyce's *Rabbit Proof Fence* is based on a true story of the Stolen Generation. In 1930, three young girls (two of whom, by now in their 80s, appear at the end of the film to add some heart-rending detail of how their story happened all over again with the next generation) escaped from a settlement presided over by a government official who had 'protective' rights over all aborigines in Western Australia. They returned home in a months' long trek along the fence erected to keep out rabbits.

For the girls, the shock of their being abducted from their desert home, separated from their mothers and their families, highlights the cultural world in which they live. It is a world of love and relationships that can make no sense of their being taken to the custody of the institution, let alone the minutiae of the rubrics for orderly living there. Their language is referred to by the nurses as 'That Jabber'. The only reality for them is HOME. This is the reality expressed in the voiceover comments and in the statements by the two surviving sisters at the end of the film.

Their journey, using the rabbit-proof fence as their guide, is one of liberation, a journey that did not lead to immediate liberation for aboriginal people but a story that played its part in the consciousness of the people—and

led to a film that jolted and reminded the wider Australian audience of oppression and the need for liberation. Exodus parallels in the desert come to mind. The girls' senses of seeing and hearing are acute. They are able to elude the aboriginal tracker pursuing them by moving into the water, by disguising their tracks. Their sense of traditional lore helps them to food, to follow the sun, to work out where the rabbit proof fence might be so that they can follow it home.

At the time of its release, *Rabbit Proof Fence* was seen by large audiences, even around the world, though it proved a sign of contradiction for some Australians and parliamentarians, something which liberators are prone to be.

### *Signals of Transcendence*

For dialogue between people of faith and people of doubt or no faith, the common denominator is the realm of values. That category is very broad but it takes in ethical philosophies and practice, moral perspectives and a basic sense of what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong. This language of values has been the standby for the Catholic Church's juries at film festivals around the world, including Cannes, Berlin and Venice (some of which are Ecumenical) as well as Tehran, Dakha and Brisbane (which are Interfaith, the former especially with Muslim jurors). This leads to creative conversations and insights through shared responses to stories and the particular value systems, faith tenets, searches that those involved in dialogue bring to the table. The sharing of values, whatever the perspective, is one way of keeping alive a broadly religious dimension in Australian society.

It can be noted that not all the characters in the movies are saints, stating the obvious. However, one of the facets of dialogue, especially with films that are tragic or grim, is the dimension named by Psalm 130, '*De Profundis*'. As Oscar Wilde found in prison when he penned his own *De Profundis*, human beings are often lost, stuck in dead ends, wandering byways but longing for something to save them. The *De Profundis* films (like those of Martin Scorsese, Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant* or the Australian *Bad Boy Bubby* from Rolf de Heer) often probe the values and the search for values most fruitfully.

Sometimes the situations of the films are not so deep but there is still that sense of being lost, of the need for some salvation. They might be called 'Out of the Shallows' films, the kind of entertainment stories that go to the multiplexes or are TV movies. In recent years, there have been a number of quite nihilistic sensibility films. In 2009, Gaspar Noe made one of these films and named it, significantly, *Enter the Void*. His characters did not get out, perhaps as with Sartre's *No Exit*. It is one of the current challenges to people of faith and of values to dialogue with the out of the void films. (11)

I have always been impressed by the insight of Joseph Marechal SJ of Leuven that in each finite experience we can be aware of our capacity for 'more' (for the infinite where the sky is not the limit) and how this can be both of what is beyond us (transcendent) and what is the divine spark within us (immanent). Later, sociologist Peter Berger, reflecting on our finite experiences suggested that there were rumours of angels and signals of transcendence (12).

It can be both fascinating and fruitful to engage in cinema Christ-figure dialogue.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Yves Congar OP, *My Journal of the Council*, ATF Press, Adelaide, 2012. ISBN 978-192181744-1, \$60.00.**

Yves Congar OP was a theological expert (*peritus*) at the Second Vatican Council. Knowing that he was participating in an historic event, and knowing how important it would be for historians to have a detailed record of the events as they unfolded, he kept this diary in which he recorded his insightful, candid and sometimes emotional and acerbic comments on events and personalities. Indeed, his comments are often so candid that he embargoed publication until after the year 2000. The French edition (Editions du Cerf) appeared in 2002, and now we have an English translation published in 2012 by ATF Press. ATF Press have done us a great service – Congar's diary is an invaluable record of the most important events for the Church in the twentieth century.

Congar was a consultant to the Preparatory Theological Commission. In the course of the

Council he worked on the preparation of many council documents, especially on documents on the Mystery of the Church, on Revelation, on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), on Ecumenism, on relations with the Jews, on non-Christian religions, on the ministry of priests, on missionary activity, and on religious freedom.

The Council was an exciting time, especially for those of us who were fortunate enough to witness it close at hand (I was a student in Rome during the second third and fourth sessions) and Congar's Journal provides insights and captures the excitement and drama of the events.

Congar's own personal history was dramatic. He was earlier silenced because of his theological views, eventually reinstated, then called to participate in the Council, and made a Cardinal in 1994 by Pope John-Paul II.

This publication is a 'must-have' for every theological library.

—Barry Brundell MSC

*Fr Yves Congar was the most important and influential theologian at the Second Vatican Council. The journal that he wrote on the spot nearly every day provides entry not only to his ideas and feelings but to the dynamics at work as the Council accomplished a work of renewal and reform for which he had himself worked and suffered for decades before. This is indispensable reading for anyone who wishes to understand the texts, and the drama, of Vatican II.*

—Joseph A. Komonchak

# ‘OUR PATTERN OF FAITH’

## *The Virgin Mary in John Henry Newman’s Theory of Religious Development*

ROBERT ANDREWS

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN’S (1801-1890) conversion to Catholicism in 1845 was much more than the adoption of the Catholic faith by one of the Church of England’s most influential theologians; rather, Newman’s journey into full-communion with the See of Rome was accompanied by a depth of theological reflection and argument that remains part of Newman’s immense contribution to nineteenth-century Catholic theology. His theory of religious development—begun whilst he was an Anglican clergyman and completed just prior to his conversion—not only convinced Newman of the theological and historic truth of Catholicism, the theory bequeathed to Catholicism an argument about the development of Catholic doctrine that remains one of the most significant apologetic statements about the historic origins and evolution of Catholicism as a religious system. This paper takes one important aspect of Newman’s theory of development—the role of the Virgin Mary and the rise of the Marian cult—and discusses how Newman came to accept Catholic Mariology, so often a stumbling block to non-Catholics—as it was initially for Newman. Already seen by recent scholarship as having been an influential Marian theologian in his own right, Newman is shown in this article to have added his own unique contribution to how Catholics understand the prominent place of the Virgin Mary in the historic development of the faith that Catholics profess.

### *1. Anglican Background*

In 1828 the young and talented Anglican clergyman, John Henry Newman—aged twenty-seven—became the Vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford. Though by the late 1820s Newman had turned from his earlier Evangelicalism to a more High Church form of

Anglicanism, he nonetheless continued to harbour some strong anti-Catholic positions. This was not at all untypical of traditional Anglican High Churchmanship—which, despite its catholic and sacramental leanings, was still a broadly Protestant tradition (see Nockles 1994). Newman’s early anti-Catholicism was especially evident in his theology of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thus on the one hand there was a typical Protestant fear of idolatry. For instance, in one section of the *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, Newman observed that he ‘could not go to Rome, while she suffered honours to be paid to the Virgin Mary and the Saints which I thought incompatible with the Supreme, Incommunicable Glory of the One Infinite and Eternal’ (Newman 1913, 246). Elsewhere in the *Apologia* Newman described his aversion to the ‘devotional manifestations’ made by Catholics towards the Virgin Mary as his ‘great *crux* as regards Catholicism’ (Newman 1913, 287). Such reactions were typical of a traditionally Protestant attitude to the cult of the Virgin Mary, which believed that the Catholic Church idolatrously worshipped ‘the Virgin as a Goddess’ (Newman 1881, 176)—a claim that Newman would have to counter in later life as a Catholic.

Yet despite this, Newman was already showing remarkable and articulate signs of being the Catholic—and Marian—theologian he is now venerated as (see Friedel 1928; Boyce 2001; Gregoris 2003). The most striking example can be seen in a sermon preached on the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March) in 1832, where Newman made what can only be described as a reference to the Immaculate Conception (Govaert 1991, 23).

Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her, who was chosen to be the Mother of Christ[.] ...[W]hat must have been the transcendent purity of her, whom the Creator Spirit condescended

to overshadow with His miraculous presence? ... This contemplation runs to a higher subject, did we dare follow it; for what, think you, was the sanctified state of that human nature, of which God formed His sinless Son; knowing as we do, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh,' and that 'none can bring forth a clean thing out of an unclean?' (Newman 1839, 131-132)

Elsewhere in the sermon Newman would make an allusion to the Virgin Mary as 'the Second Eve', a comparison that represents one of the earliest Patristic reflections regarding the Virgin Mary and one that would remain central to Newman's Mariology throughout his life.

## 2. *The Theory of Religious Development*

Newman's time at St Mary's would see him become one of the most famous and influential Anglican churchmen of the nineteenth century, his role as a leader of the Oxford Movement adding to his fame as a preacher and theologian. However, as history has shown, Newman's days as an Anglican were numbered. By the early 1840s, particularly following the release of the controversial *Tract 90* in 1841, Newman's confidence in Anglicanism as a viable ecclesiological system (something Newman had attempted to champion through his theory of the *Via Media*) began to steadily decline. Thus on 7 September 1843 Newman was forced by his conscience to resign as Vicar of St Mary's, retiring to Littlemore, just outside of Oxford, to pray and contemplate his future. Not yet ready to leave the Church of his baptism (Gilley 1991, 220), Newman still possessed intellectual difficulties that—in his mind—needed resolution, one of which the role the Blessed Virgin Mary played in the theological and devotional life of the Catholic Church. It thus is not surprising that Marian themes feature prominently in Newman's classic treatise, *The Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845). Written at Littlemore from March 1844 to September 1845 and revised in 1878 with relatively few changes (Chadwick 1987, 160), *The Essay on Development* was a work that helped to finally convince Newman to become a Catholic.



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One commentator has gone so far as to say that *The Essay on Development* 'stands or falls' on Newman's ability to justify the place of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism (see Perrott 1997, 9). Though this may be a slight exaggeration (Newman's treatment of Marian themes is only one amongst many that *The Essay on Development* deals with), it nonetheless is true by default, for Catholic Mariology must have, as Newman's thesis demanded, fitted the criteria of what constituted a legitimate doctrinal development, otherwise his thesis would have failed to establish as apostolic what was seen by non-Catholics as one of Catholicism's most distinctive and troublesome features. There is no question that for Newman the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Catholicism, as well as her general theological significance to Christianity, plays an important role in the theory he devised to account for the historical development of Catholic theology.

This is seen in one of Newman's earliest expressions of the theory of development—a sermon preached on the Feast of the Purification on 2 February 1843, entitled: 'The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine'. Later published, the sermon was an exposition of the theory that creeds or doctrines within Christianity were the expression of ideas or impressions that had long been present in the hearts and minds of Christians, even if there had been no formal expression of those ideas at the time (Gilley 1991, 214). Newman took as his text the words found in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, where the Virgin Mary, after having given birth to Christ, 'kept all these things, and pondered

them in her heart’ (Luke 2:19). Because of this, the Virgin Mary, according to Newman,

...is our pattern of Faith, both in the reception and in the study of Divine Truth. She does not think it enough to accept, she dwells upon it; not enough to possess, she uses it; not enough to assent, she develops it... And thus she symbolizes to us, not only the faith of the unlearned, but of the doctors of the Church also, who have to investigate, and weigh, and define, as well as to profess the Gospel; to draw the line between truth and heresy; to anticipate or remedy the various aberrations of wrong reason. (Newman 1880, 313-314)

The process of investigating, weighing and defining, first displayed by Our Lady, was the process of the development of doctrine. When the Virgin Mary ‘pondered’ and ‘developed’ her impressions of what had occurred in bearing and giving birth to the incarnate Christ, she was exhibiting the same process the Church goes through in formulating its doctrines. Thus, though ‘the Virgin Mary herself may not have been able to pass a test on the Christological decrees of the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon’ (Gilley 1991, 214) this does not mean that the development of Chalcedonian orthodoxy was not a part of the original deposit of divine truth (which was the whole mystery of the Incarnation) that God had given to her. The Church, through reason, contemplation and deliberation, had explained in a more defined and detailed way, the same idea that had been initially impressed upon the mind of a young Jewish woman named Mary. The process was the same with the Apostles and with the whole development of Catholic orthodoxy. Christianity in the nineteenth century was, for Newman, nothing but the development or expansion ‘of a few words, uttered, as if casually, by the fishermen of Galilee’ (Newman 1880, 317). The original deposit of faith that was given to the Apostles and that they, in turn, preached to the ends of the earth, was not in any way a complete and exhaustive summary of the faith, yet it nonetheless contained the seeds of further development within it—as the subsequent centuries of the Christian era would demonstrate (Newman 1880, 317-318).

*The Essay on Development* took as its main thesis the theory that Newman had put forward

in his 1843 sermon: that the development of ideas over time is a real and legitimate process in life (Chadwick 1987, 149-153). Christianity, for Newman, is a real and living idea (Dulles 2002, 70) and though as an idea it encompasses many aspects, it can be said to have one ‘central aspect’, that being the Incarnation (Newman 1890, 36). Everything else in Christianity can be said to be nothing more than an addition to this one monumental event in human history. The growth and development of Christianity over time is thus the development of an idea, the process whereby over time such an idea is ‘brought into consistency and form’ (Newman 1890, 38). This meant ideas also become subject to change, at least in their outer manifestations. In *The Essay on Development*, Newman was opposed to the idea that Christianity was an unchanging religion (*semper eadem*). Such a position Newman believed to be unhistorical, despite the fact that it had been common amongst Catholic apologists for centuries (Chadwick 1987, 140-141). For Newman, however, change did not equal imperfection or the possibility of corruption (a typical knee-jerk objection); instead the opposite was the case: change was the means of growth, expansion, perfection and supremacy. As Newman famously observed, ‘to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often’ (Newman 1890, 40).

Such a position was crucial for Newman in furnishing an argument on behalf of Catholicism (and by default, Mariology) for the reason that the fact of change, manifesting itself throughout history, had always been felt by Protestant critics to be one of Catholicism’s great defects. Put simply, it was the charge that the evangelical simplicity of early Christianity had been replaced by centuries of corruption and superstition. In the preface to the 1878 edition Newman stated the problem in a way that would have been familiar to his fellow Anglican churchmen.

However beautiful and promising... [Catholicism] ...is in theory, its history, we are told, is its best refutation; the inconsistencies, found age after age in its teaching, being as patent as the simultaneous contrarieties or religious opinion manifest in the High, Low, and Broad branches of the Church of England’ (Newman 1890, vii).

For Newman, the *Essay on Development* thus became ‘an hypothesis to account for a difficulty’ (Newman 1890, 30).

Newman’s argument was not to deny that Catholicism had changed or developed over time, but instead to argue that such changes and developments were natural, orthodox and most importantly, providential (Newman 1890, viii). Yet if this be the case, how is one able to distinguish between legitimate and non-legitimate developments? In the *Essay on Development* Newman proposed seven ‘notes’ (originally ‘tests’ in the first edition) that stood as criteria for distinguishing between true and false developments. They are:

1. *Preservation of Type*. This evokes the analogy of physical growth. To use a common image, used by others: an acorn grows into an oak tree (Ford 1989, 39). The entire oak tree is contained within the acorn, yet an oak tree is vastly different in appearance to an acorn. This is preservation of type, a development that maintains its original identity, despite the fact that the ‘idea does not always bear about it the same external image’ (Newman 1890, 178). Another analogy, more powerful in its symbolic imagery, is the gift of human life itself. A human life, begun at conception, bears no external resemblance to any of its later growth and development—yet as Catholic teaching regarding the sanctity of life insists, a human life has indeed begun at this point.

2. *Continuity of Principles*. Principles in Newman’s mind are permanent. Doctrines, on the other hand, grow and develop. For example, a doctrine derived from a mystical interpretation of Scripture will flow out of the *principle* of mystical interpretation. Similarly, a true development will have been faithful to its permanent and guiding principle.

3. *Power of Assimilation*. Growth is never done in isolation from the external world. So it is with a true development of Christian doctrine: development will take in things external to it, just as a living organism needs to eat food in order to grow and become stronger (Dulles 2002, 75). An example of this would be the Church’s use of Aristotelian philosophy in at-

tempting to explain the Real Presence.

4. *Logical Sequence*. True developments will arise out of the fact that they are logically implied by their source. Baptism, for example, being an unrepeatable Sacrament, implied the necessity for the development of a post-Baptismal rite that was able to forgive post-Baptismal sins—the Sacrament of Confession.

5. *Anticipation of Its Future*. This means that prior to the occurrence of a development certain signs will manifest themselves that suggest such a future development. Thus, the very high moral estimation of martyrdom within the early Church anticipates the future development of the cult of saints and of their invocation (Dulles 2002, 75).

6. *Conservative Action upon Its Past*. In the development of a doctrine its past manifestations will never be contradicted, reversed, or abolished. In Newman’s words a development ‘is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds’ (Newman 1890, 200).

7. *Chronic Vigour*. True Developments will always possess duration as one of their characteristics. A true development will have a long and vigorous life whilst a false development will have a short life and fall into decay. The early Church, for example, is full of various heresies (e.g. Arianism), yet all eventually passed away into stagnation and decay whilst true developments (e.g. the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity) live on and expand further.

### **3. Theological Controversy and the Rise of Marian Devotion**

Unlike the theological contemplation seen in Newman’s sermon for the Feast of the Purification, in the *Essay on Development* the Virgin Mary of Scripture became the Virgin Mary of Catholic history. Such a change of emphasis corresponded with the main goal of the *Essay on Development*. This was to focus not upon what Scripture said about the faith, but about what history said of it. Yet in contemplating a conversion to Catholicism, a problem for Newman emerged. The problem was that whilst Scripture revealed a silence regarding the fine details of Our Lady’s life, as well as of her theo-

logical significance, the Catholic Church up to the Reformation had said much to fill in the gap. Significant development had clearly taken place. For Newman’s thesis on development to succeed, the place of the Virgin Mary within Catholicism would have to be shown to be a true development and not a corruption.

Compared to the work as a whole, Marian themes occupy only a small part of the *Essay on Development*. There are only three sections that deal specifically with Mariology. The first is found in Chapter 4, ‘Instances in Illustration’, where Newman attempts to justify through historical examples, the basic underlying thesis of the *Essay on Development* (Newman 1890, 122-165). There, Newman devotes fourteen pages to the Virgin Mary in a section entitled, ‘Our Lord’s Incarnation and the Dignity of His Blessed Mother and of All Saints’ (Newman 1890, 135-148). The second section that deals with Marian themes is found in Chapter 10, where Newman applies the fifth note of a development (anticipation of the future) to the Church’s historical development (Newman 1890, 400-418). Thus, in a section entitled, ‘Office of the Blessed Virgin’, Newman devotes four pages to the place of the Virgin Mary (Newman 1890, 415-418). The third and final section is found in Chapter 11 where Newman applies the sixth note of a development (conservative action upon the past) in the same manner as Chapter 10 (Newman 1890, 419-436). Thus, in a section titled: ‘Devotion to the Blessed Virgin’, Newman devotes twelve pages to Marian themes (Newman 1890, 425-436). Of course, there are mentions of the Virgin Mary scattered throughout the *Essay*, but these are usually insignificant, especially when compared to the above-mentioned sections.

In Chapter 4 Newman begins his argument in favour of the development of Mariology within the context of the early Church’s reflections and pronouncements on the heresy of Arianism and the struggle to assert the truth of Christ’s divinity. Newman rightfully recognizes the fact that Mariology, as it developed in the early Church, was always seen as being inseparably linked to Christological developments

(Blancy *et.al.* 2002, 20). Thus, within this context, Newman sees that in the early Church’s condemnation of the heresy of Arianism and its positive affirmation of Christ’s divinity, there was already an implicit acceptance that the Virgin Mary had a venerable and honoured place amongst God’s creatures that did not place her on the same level as God. This was because the Church, in condemning Arius’ denial of Christ’s divinity, was implicitly establishing the theological principle that an exalted creature could never be worshipped or regarded as God.

[T]he Nicene Council recognized the eventful principle, that, while we believe and profess any being to be made of a created nature, such a being is really no God to us, though honoured by us with whatever high titles and with whatever homage. Arius...did all but confess that Christ was the Almighty; they said much more than St. Bernard or St. Alphonso have since said of the Blessed Mary; yet they left Him a creature and were found wanting... The votaries of Mary do not exceed the true faith, unless the blasphemers of her Son came up to it. The Church of Rome is not idolatrous, unless Arianism is orthodoxy. (Newman 1890, 143-144)

What Nicaea had achieved was the implicit premise that allowed the Virgin Mary to be venerated without such veneration being the same as that which is given to God, for ‘to exalt a creature’ could not imply a ‘recognition of its divinity’ (Newman 1890, 144), otherwise the Church’s condemnation of Arius who exalted Christ yet kept him a creature would have made no sense. As Newman put it, ‘The Church of Rome is not idolatrous unless Arianism is orthodoxy’ (Newman 1890, 144).

Newman next considered the development of how the Church considered the Virgin Mary to hold a place within what Newman phrases, ‘the economy of grace’, what may otherwise be described as the Virgin Mary’s role in the salvation of mankind (Newman 1890, 145). Newman makes the observation that it was not until the fifth century that the Church made an official recognition of the Virgin Mary’s place within the economy of grace, an observation that raises the question of why such a move took so long?

Newman's answer is that the Church could make no reference to the Virgin Mary's role in the economy of grace until it had first settled the paramount issue of 'our Lord's proper Divinity' (Newman 1890, 145). If Mariology is, as other historians of Christian theology have noted, nothing more than 'a Christology' (Blancy et.al. 2002, 20), as the early Church seems to have viewed it, then one could not reasonably have expected any official developments in Mariology until there had been ample developments in Christology that would allow Mariological developments to make sense. This echoes a similar comment Newman makes later in the same chapter when he deals with the question of the development of the Petrine Ministry. There, Newman makes the point that when one looks for evidence of a Papal primacy in the early Church, particularly during the sub-Apostolic period of the second century, and seemingly finds none (at least no evidence that corresponds to the actions of the See of Rome in later centuries), one is missing the point that a fully-fledged Petrine Ministry could not have emerged because there did not exist the reasons for such an emergence, just as prior to the fifth century there did not exist a reason for an official pronouncement on the place of the Virgin Mary within the economy of grace (Newman 1890, 149). Newman was aware of the fact that the Church only ever grew and developed, as its needs required it to, and never before. The same was true regarding the place of Our Lady.

Newman thus notes that in the fifth century the Church defined the Virgin Mary as being *Theotokos* or 'Mother of God' (Newman 1890, 145). The reason for such a definition had been the Nestorian Controversy. Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431, responded negatively to a sermon in honour of the Virgin Mary preached by the famous Constantinopolitan preacher, Proclus. Proclus' sermon, preached probably on 23 December 428, was a masterful homily in which the Virgin Mary's role within the mystery of the Incarnation was lauded and the Virgin Mary was proclaimed Mother of God, for it was in Mary that Christ, true God and true

Man, had entered, as well as received, His humanity (Graef 1985, 101-103). Nestorius' response was based on a view of Christ that distinguished between his divinity and his manhood, to the point of seemingly making Christ a divided being. Nestorius reasoned that the Virgin Mary could not be the Mother of God, for a created human can only give birth to created humanity, not uncreated divinity. The result was the Nestorian Controversy, the heresy that was condemned in 431 at the Council of Ephesus.

Echoing again a comment Newman would make at the end of Chapter 4 in relation to Papal primacy—that 'No doctrine is defined till it is [first] violated' (Newman 1890, 151), Newman regarded the Nestorian controversy as the primary reason for the Church's decision to grant the Virgin Mary the title of *Theotokos* (Newman 1890, 145). However, though heresy had been the primary cause for the formal definition, this did not mean that the Virgin Mary had not previously been regarded and venerated as the Mother of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ. Newman is quick to point out that preceding the Nestorian controversy,

Christians had in great measure anticipated the formal ecclesiastical decision. Thus the title *Theotocos* [*sic*], or Mother of God, was familiar to Christians from primitive times, and had been used, among other writers, by Origen, Eusebius, St. Alexander, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Gregory Nyssen, and St. Nilus' (Newman 1890, 145).

The doctrine, in other words, was not new, for many of the early Fathers had anticipated it, in correspondence with the fifth note of a true development (anticipation of the future). Indeed, the Nestorian controversy had started when Proclus preached on this very topic, perhaps—as was likely—drawing upon a previous tradition of Marian piety and developing theology. His words certainly indicate the presence of distinct tradition of Marian veneration.

The reason we have gathered here today is the holy *Theotokos* Virgin Mary, immaculate treasure of virginity, spiritual paradise of the second Adam, workshop of the union of natures, mar-

ketplace of the saving exchange, bridal chamber in which the Word was wedded to the flesh, living bush that was not burned by the fire of the divine birth, the true light cloud that bore the One who, in his body, stands above the cherubim, fleece moistened by celestial dew, with which the Shepherd clothes his sheep. (As quoted in Gambero 1999, 235)

Historian of Mariology, Hilda Graef, regards Proclus’ homily as being typical of Byzantine preaching concerning the Virgin Mary (Graef 1985, 102). The strong reaction of the Church in Alexandria and the Church in Rome to Nestorius’ protests against Proclus’ teaching is also evidence that the Church’s definition of 431 was unlikely to have been a new teaching, but a true development, preceded and anticipated by the Church (Chadwick 1993, 196-200). Historian of theology, Jaroslav Pelikan, felt that Newman may have been slightly overconfident in his claim that: ‘the title *Theotocos* [*sic*]... was familiar to Christians from primitive times’ (Pelikan 1996, 57), but even this writer admits that prior to Ephesus (at least from the fourth century onwards) ‘it seems reasonable to conclude that the title (*Theotokos*) already enjoyed widespread acceptance in the piety of the faithful at Alexandria and beyond’ (Pelikan 1996, 57).

The remainder of the Marian themes found in Chapter 4 are devoted to strengthening Newman’s claim that the title *Theotokos* had been anticipated by many Fathers of the preceding centuries. Here, Newman’s point was not to see in the centuries preceding Ephesus exact articulations of the title *Theotokos*, but instead to see whether the doctrine was anticipated through phrases and quotations that indicate a similar or related idea. Thus, for example, Newman quotes Epiphanius’ statement that the Virgin Mary was ‘the Mother of living things’ and sees this—and other statements like it—as anticipating Ephesus’ pronouncement (Newman 1890, 146).

#### 4. *The Church Fathers*

The second major section where Newman deals specifically with Marian themes in the *Essay on Development* is found within Chap-

ter 10 where Newman applies the fifth note of development (anticipation of the future) to the Church’s historical development. The section that deals with the Virgin Mary in this chapter is relatively short (only four pages). This, however, fits in with the chapter as a whole, which is also relatively short (eighteen pages). Yet despite this brevity, Newman’s dealings here with the development of Mariology are not insignificant, for they provide an important illustration of how what the early Church had to say about the Virgin Mary anticipated future developments (Newman 1890, 415).

Newman begins with an examination of the second and early third-century writings of the Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian, in which the parallel between Eve’s disobedience in the fall and the Virgin Mary’s obedience in the Incarnation was a prominent theme. The basic teaching of these Fathers was that through the Virgin Mary’s obedience of accepting, through faith, the Angel Gabriel’s announcement that she would bear the Christ child (see Luke 1:38), the disobedience of Eve in the Garden of Eden was reversed (see Palmer 1952, 13). Furthermore, Newman notes that during the second century, the Virgin Mary had come to be seen as indispensable to the process of redemption, to the point that had she not been obedient to the Angel Gabriel, the view of Fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian was that ‘the Divine Economy would have been frustrated’ or, in other words, the Incarnation might not have taken place (Newman 1890, 415). This was the important Patristic teaching on the Virgin Mary as the Second Eve.

What, then, was the significance of this in relation to the claim that the place of the Virgin Mary within Catholicism was a legitimate development within Church history? Newman’s point was to illustrate that from the earliest centuries, the Church was already seeing the Virgin Mary as being active within ‘the Divine Economy’. In other words, Mary had, from the beginning, been seen to possess an ‘office’, as Newman phrases it—in this instance, her central role of having played an indispensable part

‘in the actual process of redemption, as Eve had been instrumental and responsible in Adam’s fall’ (Newman 1890, 415). Indeed, that the Church recognized that the Virgin Mary had been active during the Incarnation could be interpreted as being the foundation, in Newman’s mind, of all later developments in Mariology. This is why Newman records that the Church, during the third century, witnessed to the fact of the Virgin Mary not simply being active in the process of the Incarnation, but also active in the spiritual life of the Church as an intercessor and helper of Christians (Newman 1890, 417–418). One of the first witnesses of this, according to Newman, is a revelation involving the Virgin Mary that was given to Gregory of Nyssa (Newman 1890, 417). Very briefly, the revelation involved an appearance of the Apostle John (by tradition believed to be the Apostle who took care of the Virgin Mary after the death of Christ) and the Virgin Mary to Gregory of Nyssa, where Gregory receives from the Virgin Mary a creed that helps him refute heresy. The exact details of the vision are, in reality, insignificant; what the vision demonstrates, in Newman’s mind, is the fact that the Virgin Mary is active in the spiritual life of the Saints—a fact illustrated in a second example from the third century (this time recorded by Gregory of Nyssa himself), where an unnamed woman is protected from heathen interference by the Virgin Mary (presumably by her prayers, although Newman does not specify) (Newman 1890, 418). ‘In both these instances’, Newman concludes, ‘the Blessed Virgin appears especially in that character of Patroness or Paraclete, which St. Irenæus and other Fathers describe, and which the Medieval Church exhibits,—a loving Mother with clients’ (Newman 1890, 418).

It is important to note again that Newman was not seeking to produce examples from Church history that exactly mirrored later developments. If Newman’s thesis concerning development was correct, however, ‘indications’ of such developments would be discernable (Newman 1890, 400). Thus, when Newman writes that the ‘special prerogatives’ of the Virgin Mary ‘were not a new thing in the Church,

or strange to her earlier teachers’ (e.g. Irenaeus and Gregory of Nyssa), he was not claiming that such prerogatives were recognized in the form that they would later manifest themselves.

### 5. *The Devotional Cult*

Found within Chapter 11 is the section entitled, ‘Devotion to the Blessed Virgin’, which deals with the sixth note of a development (conservative action upon the past) (Newman 1890, 425–436). The sixth note of a development concerned the idea that a development will never contradict, reverse or abolish its past manifestations. To repeat Newman’s words, a development ‘is an addition which illustrates, not obscures, corroborates, not corrects, the body of thought from which it proceeds’ (Newman 1890, 200). Given the context in which Newman was writing, it was essential that he was able to demonstrate such a characteristic. This was principally because one of the main characteristics of anti-Catholic polemics was the accusation that Catholicism was an historically innovative religion.

Recognizing that the place of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism presents a major obstacle to non-Catholics embracing Catholicism (something Newman had himself struggled with), Newman begins his discussion of Marian themes in Chapter 11 with a description of what is perhaps the most important Protestant objection to Mariology: namely, that Mariology takes away from the full honour that should be given only to God. As Newman elucidated:

It has been anxiously asked, whether the honours paid to St. Mary, which have grown out of devotion to her Almighty Lord and Son, do not, in fact, tend to weaken that devotion; and whether, from the nature of the case, it is possible so to exalt a creature without withdrawing the heart from the Creator (Newman 1890, 425).

The question of whether ‘it is possible so to exalt a creature without withdrawing the heart from the Creator’ was one that Newman had already answered in Chapter 4. There, Newman had been concerned with the question as it had developed out of the context of the Arian crisis of the fourth century. Recognizing that he has

already covered the question from a different angle, Newman states that his task in Chapter 11 was instead to address the question from the perspective of its practical application within Catholic piety (Newman 1890, 425).

Newman’s first resource used to demonstrate that Marian devotion ‘is altogether distinct from that which is paid to her Eternal Son, and to the Holy Trinity’ (Newman 1890, 426) are the Church’s services, which Newman argues clearly show a distinction in tone, language and emphasis between its prayers and hymns in honour of Christ and the Holy Trinity, and those in veneration of the Virgin Mary. Newman elucidates this point further, writing that in Catholic liturgical texts:

The supreme and true worship paid to the Almighty is severe, profound, awful, as well as tender, confiding, and dutiful. Christ is addressed as true God, while He is true Man; as our Creator and Judge, while He is most loving, gentle, and gracious. On the other hand, towards St. Mary the language employed is affectionate and ardent, as towards a mere child of Adam; though subdued, as coming from her sinful kindred. (Newman 1890, 426-427)

Newman’s only sources cited are the prayers, hymns and canticles of the Roman Breviary, a work he had been familiar with from his Anglican days (see Withey 1992). Thus, to substantiate his point, Newman spends a few paragraphs in Chapter 11 briefly comparing the language and tone of God or Christ-directed prayers and hymns with similar Marian examples found within the Breviary (Newman 1890, 427).

In seeing and recognizing such distinctions, Newman had come a long way in his journey towards Catholicism. As a committed Anglican Newman could not recognize that the veneration shown towards the Virgin Mary was not the same as that which was shown towards God. Indeed, as was noted in his *Apologia*, Newman’s failure to see such a distinction had been a great obstacle to his conversion (Newman 1913, 246). However, as Newman progressed through the *Essay on Development*, it became obvious that the Virgin Mary in Catholicism was not, as Newman had described in his fictional work,

*Loss and Gain*, ‘a Goddess’ (Newman 1881, 176). The Catholic Church (along with, for that matter, the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches) had, for most of its history, always taught that there existed a distinction between the veneration given to the Virgin Mary (in Latin: *dulia* or *hyper-dulia*), and the worship given to Christ and the Holy Trinity (in Latin: *latria*). In discovering and accepting the logic of such a distinction, it was no surprise that Newman was beginning to see evidence of it within Catholicism’s liturgical texts such as the Breviary—evidence that Newman had previously, and in some cases deliberately, overlooked (see Withey 1992, 23).

Newman develops an argument in favour of the position that what characterizes Marian devotions within authentic Catholic theology is the characteristic of moderation (Newman 1890, 428). To substantiate this argument, Newman begins with an examination of a work that had personally influenced him greatly in his spiritual journey (Newman 1913, 288), that being the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola, a work which he correctly describes as ‘among the most approved methods of devotion in the modern Catholic Church’ (Newman 1890, 429). For Newman, the *Exercises* were important because they were an example of a Catholic work that outlined a path to God that was direct and without all of the caricatured distractions non-Catholics assume permeate Catholicism—most especially, the ‘distraction’ of the Virgin Mary (Newman 1913, 288). Thus, after describing the nature of the *Exercises* and their importance respectively to Catholic history and spirituality, Newman makes a key point in relation to Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary: ‘that in a work so highly sanctioned, so widely received, so intimately bearing upon the most sacred points of personal religion, very slight mention occurs of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God’ (Newman 1890, 430). Which leads Newman to the broader conclusion:

... that whatever be the influence of the doctrines connected with the Blessed Virgin and the Saints in the Catholic Church, at least they do not impede or obscure the freest exercise and the full-

est manifestation of the devotional feelings towards God and Christ' (Newman 1890, 431).

Of course, non-Catholic critics would contend that such is not the case within Catholicism: that Marian devotion *does* impede the devotional feelings towards God and Christ. Indeed, even Newman would have admitted whilst writing Chapter 11 that at certain times and in certain places, Marian devotions did—at times—become excessive in their emphasis and nature, although as he clearly implies in Chapter 11, such excesses were not the normal practice within Catholicism and certainly not the official teaching of the Church. Around fifteen years after his conversion, Newman left a number of details in the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* that shed much light upon the intent, as well as the most likely sources, that contributed to the line of reasoning evident in Chapter 11. There, in Part 6 of the *Apologia*, Newman introduces the impact and influence that the Irish priest, Charles Russell (1812-1880), later had upon his conversion (Newman 1913, 287). According to Newman, Russell helped him to see that a healthy devotion to the Virgin Mary existed within Catholicism that was not characterized by what Newman then saw (and twenty years later would continue to see) as the undue excesses of some sections of popular piety—particularly as was evident on the Continent (especially Italy) (Newman 1913, 287). Russell had demonstrated this to Newman through sending him what seems to have been quite a number of important texts that Russell believed were representative of Rome's true theological positions. Influential among these texts was a book of sermons by Alphonsus Liguori, which, though at the time—1842—did not result in any major changes to Newman's position regarding Rome, nonetheless helped soften his hard-line position against the place of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism (Newman 1913, 288).

Equally influential among the many texts Russell sent Newman was a bundle of about forty books of popular devotions from Rome, many of them containing Marian devotions (Newman 1913, 288; Newman 1890, 431). They were significant because they demonstrated to Newman that no matter how objectionable in style and

form popular devotions may be (particularly to reserved Englishmen such as himself), they in no way demonstrated the sorts of caricatures non-Catholics made about Mariology coming between the worship of God (Newman 1913, 287-289; Newman 1890, 434, 436). This was a discovery so important for Newman that these sources were included in Chapter 11 of the *Essay on Development* as the final evidence Newman needed to convince himself that Mariology, as it existed in Catholicism, was a true development. Newman's point regarding these works was brief, but nonetheless profoundly fair: their content demonstrated the same point he made regarding the nature and content of the *Exercises*—that a crucial 'distinction is preserved between the worship of God and the honour of an exalted creature', namely, the Virgin Mary (Newman 1890, 434-435).

### Conclusion

The *Essay on Development* put forward the theory that many of the changes evident in the Catholic Church over the centuries could be explained through a process of development: that such changes were natural, legitimate and providential. Newman's use of Marian themes in the *Essay on Development* was, in its simplest terms, a defense of the Virgin Mary's place within Catholicism against the claim that Mariology was an unscriptural innovation to Christianity. In contrast to this, Newman argues that Mariology is a true and organic development—the historical manifestation, that is, of 'premisses [*sic*]...laid, broad and deep' within the mind of the Church (Newman 1890, 144). The *Essay on Development* had been written so that Newman could overcome his doubts about Catholicism. The *Essay on Development* achieved this aim; indeed, it was never actually completed, as Newman had been so convinced that he simply stopped writing and not long after, convinced in his own mind that the Catholic Church was the true Church founded by Christ, Newman decided to take the action he had been agonizing over for so long.

Littlemore, October 8, 1845. I am this night expecting Father Dominic, the Passionist ... He does not know of my intention; but I mean to

ask of him admission into the one Fold of Christ (Newman 1913, 325).

The *Essay on Development* remains one of the most important theological and apologetic works that Newman ever published. Set at what was arguably the most important crossroad in his life, one in which he stood teetering on the edge of conversion to a religious system he once considered the Antichrist, the *Essay* also typified much of Newman’s later approach to Catholic theology—so much of which drew upon continuities developed whilst Newman was an Anglican. In this sense the *Essay* contained within it theological seeds that would later develop as Newman continued to defend Catholic dogma (as well as his own personal acceptance of it) late into the nineteenth century. Newman’s defence of Catholic Mariology in the *Essay* is, in many ways, illustrative of this future development—with its inseparable continuity to an Anglican past. The Virgin Mary in the *Essay*—who, as has been shown, typified for the Anglican Newman the very reality (in her own person) of institutional, religious

development—was deeply associated with the earliest patristic witness, was an inseparable part of the early Church’s Christological debates and was a creature venerated, not worshipped, by Christ’s Church—especially in the Church’s formal decrees and liturgical texts. This latter point would prove crucial to Newman’s later debates with non-Catholics, especially his former Tractarian ally, Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), who pointed to many of the extreme—and off-putting—examples of Marian devotional excess as evidence that the Blessed Virgin Mary sometimes seemed to be worshipped in place of the Holy Trinity (cf. Andrews 2007, 36-41). For Newman, the Our Lady of Scripture and Patristic witness was a model of obedience to her Divine and Incarnate Son, not a figure to displace the worship of the one true God. Because of her crucial role in the incarnation—and thus redemption—of humanity, her role in the development of Christian doctrine was an inseparable part of the original deposit of faith given to the Apostles in the first century.

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# LAITY AND THE PROMISES OF VATICAN II

GIDEON GOOSEN

JUDGING BY Vatican II and subsequent post-Conciliar documents, the laity in the Roman Catholic Church has been promised much by way of a new, updated vision of the Church and in particular, what the new, enhanced role of the laity might be. We are now approaching fifty years since Vatican II, so the question might be reasonably asked: have these promises regarding the laity been fulfilled?

The curia of the Roman Church and its bishops have, in general, been noticeably silent about the realization of the promises of Vatican II regarding the laity. True, we did have the synod on the laity (1987) attended by bishops and some lay observers, but this was not a review of how Vatican II documents on the laity were being implemented. It was a renewed statement on the laity. This synod resulted in the pope producing a document *Christifideles Laici (CL)*<sup>1</sup> to which I will refer below. Other than this publication which added to the store of documents, there has not been much action.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the curial document of 1997, *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the non-ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*, seems to be heading in the pre-Vatican II direction with fear that the roles of the laity and the ordained priest would become confused.

Sermons preached on Vocation Sunday still give the impression that 'vocation' means the priesthood and religious life (but mainly about priesthood). There are many courses offered in Australia at diocesan level on a variety of topics but not many on the promised role of the laity and how it could be implemented locally or internationally. One could argue that, at least on the international level, the Roman Catholic Church has been distracted by many

other issues since Vatican II.

In this article my objectives are to identify the promises regarding the laity in the documents; to ask whether these promises have been fulfilled; and to suggest a way forward with a new language, a new spirituality and reformed structures. I do not intend developing a theology of the laity from Vatican II documents as this has been adequately done already by a number of theologians.<sup>3</sup> I will simply refer to the core statements of this theology.

Before doing that, let me mention in passing, the main church issues which have occupied the Pope and the Curia since Vatican II. I see the main issues as communism, liberation theology, feminism and inter-faith dialogue. More recently the sexual abuse cases by clergy has become all-absorbing. Without detailing all these issues I think they have absorbed much time and energy on the part of the Pope, Curia, hierarchy in general and theologians. This energy might have gone into other issues like those concerning the laity, the application of the principle of subsidiarity and co-responsibility in the church. How the Catholic Church responded to these challenges is the topic of a separate study.

Against this backdrop, the role of the laity in the post-Vatican II Church and the theology of the laity did not get much attention. A secretariat for the laity was indeed established, but this has concerned itself with associations and groups, many European, in the Church. The Pontifical Council for the Laity was established soon after the Council, in 1967. Paul VI instructed them thus: 'Your Council', he said, 'must remain in an attitude of listening and dialogue, attentively discerning in the environments in which they (the laity) are living the needs and possibilities of salvation'. The

website gives 119 International Organizations of the Faithful and information on such events as the World Youth Day.

What has occupied the local Church in Australia? Other than the above issues which tend to engage the whole Church, there has been some movement by the laity towards reform. A number of lay groups have been formed around the theme of reform. *Catholics for Renewal*, *Australian Reforming Catholics* (ARC), *Catholica*, and *Catalysts for Change* which might all parallel, on a smaller scale, groups like the American *Voice of the Faithful* and *Call to Action* or the Austrian *Wir Sind Kirche* and the *Pfarrer Initiative*, 'Call to Disobedience'. The impact of these groups is difficult to judge but there does seem to be some momentum building up.

In 1998 the Vatican issued the *Statement of Conclusions* which described the strengths and weaknesses of the Catholic Church in Australia. This caused heated debate in Australia as some of the statements were challenged. Sections of this report referred directly to the laity. The document referred to the 'crisis of faith' among Catholics in Australia, but one criticism suggested that the crisis was rather inside the Vatican. Was the fact that people were leaving the Church due to a crisis of faith or due to a crisis within the Church, for example, the sexual abuse by the clergy, or the poor communication between hierarchy and laity? Another point of criticism of the Australian Church was that the role of the priest and lay person was becoming blurred in some cases. In passing one can note that this was also a point made in the more general Vatican document on the Ministries (1997) referred to above. There is a perception in the Vatican that lay people are confused by the rise of lay ministries to the extent that the lines between priest and layperson are being blurred. The points of difference between the laity and the hierarchy continue to ferment in the background and came to a head with *The Open Letter to the Pope and Australian Bishops* (2011).



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### ***The Promises Regarding the Laity in the Documents***

If we now turn to the actual documents of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents we can identify the promises. My objective here is to consider the current practices in the Church, and in Australia in particular, and to see whether the promises of Vatican II regarding the laity have been fulfilled. The promises derive from four main points. These are the pillars on which the role of the laity depends. They are the foundation stones of church membership and can be given briefly as follows.

#### **1. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit**

Regarding the Spirit, *Christifidelis Laici*, teaches that the living presence of the Spirit reaches the depth of every individual's heart. It is thus that lay people are formed in the church 'in mutual communion and collaboration of all her members: clergy, religious and lay faithful' (#61). All members of the church receive the Holy Spirit and have gifts of various kinds. This belief is central to understanding church and therefore to understanding the role of the laity.

#### **2. Collaboration of all members**

This springs from the above paragraph. In exercising their gifts, there is a two-way relationship: the laity are encouraged to work in close union with bishops and priests in their mission (*Gaudium et Spes*, #10), while the clergy and religious should co-operate with

laity (*GS* #26). The role of the clergy with respect to the laity is to: ‘... recognize their services and charismatic gifts that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one heart.’ (*LG*, #30). If the services and gifts of the laity are not recognized they cannot play their rightful role.

This co-operation is also stressed in the missionary document, *Ad Gentes*: ‘The Church has not yet been truly established, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there exists a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy.’ (#21) The urge to collaborate derives from the very nature of the church which is missionary: ‘The pilgrim church is essentially missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father’ (*Ad Gentes*, #2)

### 3. Laity Co-responsibility

The responsibility of the mission is such that ‘the whole church ought to feel more strongly the Church’s responsibility to obey the command of Christ ‘Go into the world...(Mk 16:15)’, (*CL*, #64). This goes back to baptism where the individual is committed to proclaiming the gospel and living out his/her Christian witness. Bearing witness is all about lay people giving an account of the hope that is within them: ‘Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them’ (*Lumen Gentium*, #10). This commitment springs from the love of God: ‘The members of the Church are impelled to carry out such missionary activity by reason of the love with which they love God and by which they desire to share with all men in the spiritual goods of both this life and the life to come’ (*Ad Gentes*, #7).

### 4. Laity Involvement in Decision-making

The responsibility goes even beyond consultation to decision-making in some cases.

When speaking about the participation of the faithful in these councils (Pastoral Councils and broad consultation) the principle of collaboration can be applied. The participation of the laity can go beyond consultation and collaboration can also apply ‘in certain instances’ to ‘decision-making’ (*CL*, #25).

From this it is plain to see what promises regarding the laity emerge. The laity (as well as the hierarchy) will be seen as experiencing the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; their services and charismatic gifts will be recognized by the hierarchy; they will be seen as collaborators of the hierarchy, as co-responsible in the mission of the Church; and in some cases, they will share decision-making with the hierarchy. These are the promises that emerge from the Vatican II documents and the post-conciliar times. Now we must ask: have these promises been fulfilled?

#### *Have These Promises been Fulfilled?*

We can begin by referring back to the four propositional points, or pillars, on which the role of the laity stands. Regarding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it could be said, generally speaking, that although it is perhaps agreed to by many in the church, the practical behaviours of the hierarchy contradict this belief in practice. Many actions of the hierarchy, as we shall see below, reflect, either intentionally or unintentionally, an unspoken belief that the Holy Spirit speaks only through the hierarchy. As regards the need for collaboration among all members of the Church, the hierarchy often fail to collaborate with the laity and their behaviours imply that the laity are not co-responsible for the mission of the Church. They do not involve the laity in real decision-making. Where there is an attempt at consultation the structures used are often dysfunctional.

It must be added that the laity often acquiesce in these behaviours, that is, they allow these understandings to prevail. I agree with Daniel Ang that the hierarchy must not be seen as the sole cause of the present situation but

they do play a vital role.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly the laity have been slow to take up opportunities since Vatican II but the years of subservience and the culture of ‘pray, obey and pay’ are difficult to overcome. Inherent negative cultural elements in any institution, are extremely difficult to change.

If we look at different levels in Church organization we can be more specific. First of all at the level of the Roman Curia. The composition of the curial dicasteries (departments) are still mainly clerical and male. The Pontifical Council for the laity is one exception but members are appointed rather than elected by their dioceses. To the best of my knowledge, there are no lay people in positions of decision-making in the dicasteries. There is no consultation regarding the election of bishops or other weighty matters such as the pool of candidates from which candidates for the priesthood could be drawn. Letters and petitions sent to Rome are often unanswered and disappear in what Lakeland refers to as the ‘inefficient bureaucratic mechanism of the Roman Curia’<sup>5</sup>. The centralization tendencies of Rome continue and the principle of subsidiarity is largely ignored.<sup>6</sup> This tendency has increased noticeably during the last two papacies. The Curia is dominated by a few cardinals. The centralist tendencies of Rome have deprived local bishops’ conferences of decisions-making ability and denied the principle of subsidiarity.<sup>7</sup>

Without doubt clericalism is a blight on church life. Many clergy and many lay people suffer from this attitude. It is the feeling that the clergy are superior (elitism) and should enjoy a position of privilege in the church.<sup>8</sup> It is the ‘Father-knows-best’ attitude in spite of the belief in the indwelling of the Spirit in all members. Both clergy and the laity can hold this attitude.<sup>9</sup> In fact while the laity go along with it, it makes it easier for (some) clergy to continue with it. Co-responsibility and collaboration in mission is always going to be difficult if clericalism prevails.<sup>10</sup>

At the national and diocesan level a number

of observations can be made. The promises listed above have not been fulfilled. This can be seen through actions or lack of actions. Synods are the first obvious potential vehicle for consultation mentioned in many Roman documents and part of an ancient tradition. Today few dioceses actually have regular synods or assemblies. In Australia the history of synods is disappointing as elsewhere. At their November meeting in 2007 (42 years after Vatican II) the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference committed itself to holding synods and consulting the members of the Church. What has happened since then? Not much if one consults the websites of dioceses. Only 10% of Australian dioceses have held assemblies or synods. The history of synods in Australia is short but not without some points of encouragement in only *three* out of thirty-three dioceses. The first synod in Australia was in Canberra-Goulburn diocese in 1989 called by Archbishop Frank Carroll. There was a second in 2004. The diocese of Maitland-Newcastle held a diocesan Synod in 1992, followed by diocesan assemblies in 1995, 1997 and 2000. There were regional assemblies in 2003 and 2004 followed by diocesan assemblies in 2004 and 2005. The bishop concerned with these consultations, except the first (1992), was Michael Malone. Brisbane has a good track record for collaboration. Archbishop Rush held an Assembly in Brisbane in 1989. In 2003 Archbishop John Bathurst continued Rush’s collaborative style with a synod. To sum up: nationwide, over forty-seven years, only three dioceses in Australia have expressed an eagerness for consultation or collaboration through a synod or assembly. Let me add that priests themselves are not being consulted adequately in spite of councils of priests.<sup>11</sup>

Let us turn to another topic: national consultation regarding international synods. As an example of this process let us mention the forthcoming Roman synod. The Bishops through the National Office for Evangelization (an ACBC agency), requested feedback from the Australian dioceses on a discussion

paper preparatory to the Synod on the New Evangelization in Rome, October 2012. Submissions were due in by the beginning of October 2011. Many people had not heard of this consultation by September 2011. Where was the problem? Obviously the bishops collectively thought it important enough to set up an agency and a bishop to oversee the feedback and provide some stimulus material but the process has not got through to the parishes. It would appear that at the diocesan and parish level there is no strong conviction that the laity should be consulted. If consultation is to be taken seriously, the local bishop with the local clergy and laity must find new ways of making it happen.

It must be acknowledged that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) has taken some decisive steps regarding the role of women in the Church in Australia (and women are part of the laity!). In 1989 they launched a project on the *Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia*. Setting aside the peculiar tone of this title which seems to imply that women are outside the Catholic Church but might be able to participate in it under certain guidelines, the project came up with a worthwhile report ten years later (1999), *Woman and Man – One in Jesus Christ*. The report admits that tensions remain in the areas regarding ordained ministry, leadership, and decision-making. However the bishops stressed this was a starting point and statement of intentions. They set up a commission for Australian Catholic Women which later became the National Office for the Participation of Women in the Catholic Church. A very practical and tangible outcome that emerged from all this was the Young Women's Interfaith Fellowship which is a programme of study and living together which resulted in a Graduate Certificate in Interfaith Dialogue for some of these young women who will be the leaders of the future. The year 2006 marked the inaugural programme. The success of the programme will be measured by the extent to which they are allowed to contribute

at the parish, diocesan and national levels. The bishops also noted that more women were now visible on councils at all levels of church life. This is a good move forward but unless women and men can share in the decision-making at these levels, the promises regarding the laity remains unfulfilled and the gestures tokenism.

What about diocesan Pastoral Councils? Certainly there are many. But here the question must be asked as to who elects the council members and who makes the decisions. To the extent that councilors are expected to follow the thinking coming from Rome and not to question anything, the presence of laity will mean nothing. Instead they should be encouraged to think creatively, to discern carefully and allow the Spirit to speak through them. Lay people who are not councilors, have done precisely that, but have not been given a hearing. These are good people who refuse to be silenced because they honestly think differently. Examples of this could be the decision to import priests from other countries. Whose decision is it and what consultation took place and with whom? The importing of foreign priests is a matter of grave concern among laity and priests.<sup>12</sup> In the election of a bishop: who among the laity is consulted?<sup>13</sup> In these matters and others there can be no feeling of co-responsibility among the laity.

Some of this honest thinking has come to the fore recently. *Catholics for Renewal*, based in Melbourne, have expressed the lack of listening and consultation in an open letter to the Pope and the Australian Bishops (July, 2011), in the following words: 'As an institution it does not yet embody the vision of Vatican II for a truly collegial Church in which decisions respect local cultures, communities and circumstances. Rather, it appears as an institution focussed on centralism, legalism and control, with few effective structures for listening and dialogue, and often more concerned with its institutional image and interests than the spirit of Christ.'

At the parish level the picture is no rosier. It is my experience and that of others I have

spoken to, that Parish Councils are often largely constituted by people who are keen to do 'what Father wants'. The infantilization of the laity continues, in Lakeland's words.<sup>14</sup> There are few good formation programmes for the laity that encourage people to think outside the square. There are plenty that emphasize the virtue of obedience and compliance. In terms of recognizing the services and charismatic gifts of the laity, there is some progress. There has been an extension of ministries such as married deacons, eucharistic ministers, senior servers, funeral ministers, RCIA leaders, but this is little in terms of what could be. Preaching talents are overlooked. Adult education programmes are underdeveloped with the result that many of the laity still fit into the 'pray, pay and obey' category of Catholics. There is curiously little delegation in spite of parish priests being overwhelmed with duties. Yet there are also some good examples of collaborative ministry where parishes operate with pastoral teams which relieve some of the workload of the parish priest.

Finally there is the ultimate and convincing piece of evidence: the fact that many Catholics do not get involved in their church activities is a sign that they do not feel the parish is theirs, they do not feel co-responsible for anything; they do not feel they have gifts that can be used. The fact that some priests use the language of 'My parish' does not help the feeling of co-responsibility. Unfortunately Canon Law re-enforces this language by speaking of priests 'taking possession of their parishes'.

### *A Way Forward: Renewed Language, Spirituality and Structures*

One cannot leave the discussion at the point of saying the promises of Vatican II have not been fulfilled without suggesting a way forward. One of the first things to attend to is that of language which deserves more attention than I can give it here. A few brief comments will indicate the complexity of the is-

sue. The language of church documents is important to the success of communication. The language we find in the church documents has its problems. Roman documents have a peculiar way of stating things which is heavily determined by the culture and theology of the centuries both within and without the church. It is formal, hierarchical, absolutist, stilted and often superior in tone. It tries to speak to many peoples of different cultures, with different educational backgrounds and at different stages of faith development, all at the same time—an impossible task. The hierarchy needs to address this problem. Current church language is a language which does not invite dialogue or co-responsibility.

I believe that we need to speak more of 'community' and less of 'priests' or the 'laity' in the sense that we form community and priesthood and all ministries flow from community. Community is the basis out of which ministry emerges. Various ministries serve the community. Lakeland emphasizes that the focus should be on the 'quality of our own particular faith communities'.<sup>15</sup> Presiding over the Eucharist and being the leader of the community is one such ministry and an important one at that, but there are many others, like visiting the sick, burying the dead, looking after the poor. Lifestyle (single, married, widowed) and gender should be irrelevant.<sup>16</sup>

Other than a renewed language, a renewed spirituality is needed. A common understanding of the importance of spirituality is a necessary basis for collaboration between all church members. The whole talk about spirituality does best when we use the inclusive 'we'. There is so much of New Testament spirituality that applies to all Christians that we should start with those aspects and relegate other matters to minor comment<sup>17</sup>. All are called to holiness and everyone lives in the world. The WCC document (*BEM*) on Ministry emphasizes this: it starts with the universal call to holiness. The Vatican II documents and *CL* call all church members to holiness and what it says on spirituality usually applies to

all members of the church.

There are many ways to respond to the call to holiness. One of the more inspiring approaches to spirituality is 'creation spirituality' with its joy and delight and awe, its silence and letting go, its creativity and emphasis on justice-making and celebration. This is a suggestion that I believe many people in the church could follow as a way to holiness because it is positive, inclusive, cosmic in scope and appealing to the contemporary person. There are other approaches to spirituality such as those advocated by religious orders and lay groups. In general though there should be room for diverse spiritualities which will need to be both mystical and contemporary.<sup>18</sup>

A way forward must also include renewed structures. Not only must spirituality be examined but the crucial aspect of structures must be courageously confronted. There has been, and still is, a systematic or structural oppression of the laity.<sup>19</sup> The principle of the church always reforming itself needs to be applied to structures as well. It is a red herring to maintain that reform must apply to spirituality only. The pursuit of a renewed spirituality can run concurrently with the pursuit of renewed structures.

In terms of ministry structures, Bevens confronts the structures in a creative way.<sup>20</sup> Bold structural steps need to be taken if the ideals of Vatican II are to be implemented. One cannot state the ideals and then use (old) structures that cannot deliver the vision. *E.g.*, if the laity are to be co-responsible they must be given the opportunity to show responsibility, that means some of the traditional ways priests operated must change. The old mould of the priesthood must give way to a new one that is more flexible.<sup>21</sup> Creative thinking is required.

One example is ordination. There is a shortage of priests but what action is called for? The old solution of praying for vocations to a celibate priesthood is advocated. This is calling on an old solution for a new problem. New structures that would accommodate married men, priests who have resigned and married,

must be considered and the idea of part-timers must be entertained.

Another example is collaboration: there need to be forums where the future of the church can be discussed, the hierarchy can listen to the laity and all can listen to each other. In this way new ideas will emerge and can be considered. Currently the existing forums are either not working or are not being used, or both. I am referring to meeting places, venues, opportunities such as synods or assemblies, or even deanery discussions, involving all members of the church. These could serve as structures for the hierarchy to listen to the laity or, if they are dysfunctional, they could be replaced by new structures. The gift of listening is not strong in the Church. For example, the current practice of inviting responses to *lineamenta* for synods is dysfunctional, past its use-by date. To some extent electronic forums such as *Catholica* have been set up, but not by the hierarchy. We need forums where all members are going to be 'present' and listen to each other. Electronic forms should be included.

### *Conclusion*

The objective of this article was to identify the promises of Vatican II regarding the laity and then test to see if these promises have been fulfilled.

Different levels were considered, international, national and local. It was concluded that the promises of Vatican II have not been fulfilled; that there is no significant consultation with the laity; that the laity is not being invited to accept responsibility which would help it to be co-responsible for the mission of the church. It is concluded that the way forward is to change the way all church members speak about church, community and mission and for all members to pursue a renewed spirituality as well as striving to renew structures which either do not bring about greater lay participation or have become dysfunctional.

## NOTES

1. Cf. Peter Coughlan, (1989) , *The hour of the laity, their expanding role: exploring Christifideles laici, the Pope's key document on the laity*. Sydney: E J Dwyer.
2. In the USA there was the very positive document of the American bishops, *The American Catholic Laity*,(1980), which saw the laity as gifted and called to (1) adulthood, (2) holiness, (3) ministry, and (4) community.
3. Cf. E. Hahnenberg, (2007), *A concise guide to the documents of Vatican II*, (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press); (2010), *Awakening Vocation: a theology of Christian Call*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press); Thomas O'Meara, (1999), *Theology of Ministry*, (New York: Paulist Press), 210-224; Paul Lakeland, (2007), *Catholicism at the Crossroads: how the laity can save the church*,( New York: Continuum); John Vincent Broadbent, (2003), *Restoring the laity's balance to an unsteady church: balancing tradition with traditions*, (Bloomington: 1st Books); Peter Coughlan, (1989), *The hour of the laity, their expanding role: exploring Christifideles laici, the Pope's key document on the laity*,( Sydney: E.J.Dwyer); Brian Lucas (1991), *The Laity Today*, (Homebush: St Paul Publications), 21-36; Basil Hume, (1994), 'Christ's missionaries, the laity', in *Remaking Europe: The Gospel in a Divided Continent*,( London: SPCK), 88-98; Richard Gaillardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, (2012), 'The Role of the Laity in the World' in *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the teachings of Vatican II*,(Collegeville: Liturgical Press), 95-101; Yves Congar, (1960), *Laity, Church and World*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman,) 60-87; and the classical and detailed work of Yves Congar (1985), *Lay People in the Church*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman).
4. Daniel Ang, *Can't scapegoat the hierarchy*. Internet, *CathBlog*, 18.10.2011.accessed on 19.10.2011; David, Orr. (2009). 'Educating for the Priesthood of the Faithful', *Worship*, 83, 5, 431-457.
5. Paul Lakeland, (2002), *The Liberation of the Laity: In Search of an Accountable Church*, (New York: Continuum),266.
6. Chris McGillion& John Carroll, (2011), *Our Fathers: What Australian Catholic Priests really think about their lives and their Church*, ( Mulgrave: John Garrett Publishing), 140.
7. Lakeland, *The Liberation...*273.
8. George Wilson, (2008), *Clericalism: The Death of Priesthood*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press). Chris McGillion, *Our Fathers...*85-100.
9. 'The Catholic laity for the most part, do not know their oppressed condition and would deny it if it were argued in their presence.', Lakeland, *The Liberation...* 187.
10. McGillion, *Our Fathers ...* 79.
11. McGillion, ... 101-117.
12. McGillion, *Our Fathers...*69.
13. Canon Law (Can.377, #3) makes provision for the papal Legate to consult with a number of people. This consultation may include a lay person 'if he judges it expedient' provided the lay person is of 'outstanding wisdom'. No such qualification is expected of the others who may be consulted.
14. Lakeland, *The Liberation...*271.
15. Lakeland, *The Liberation...*267.
16. Cf. John Linnan, (1990), 'Ministry Since Vatican II: A Time of Change and Growth', *New Theology Review*, 3, 33-45; L. Doohan, (1980), 'Contemporary theologies of the laity,' *Communio*, 7, 225-242.
17. Cf. Allison A. Trites, (1977), *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, (Cambridge: CUP).
18. O'Meara, *Theology...* 233-258.
19. Lakeland, *The Liberation ...* 187.
20. Stephen Bevans, (2009). 'The Mission has a Church. The Mission has ministries', *Compass*, 43,3 Spring 2009, 3-14; Doohan, B. (1980), 'Contemporary theologies of the laity', *Communio*, 7, 225-242.
21. McGillion... 63. . Gideon Goosen, (1997), 'A New Relationship Between the Ministerial and Baptismal Priesthoods', *Compass*, 32, 2, 17-24.

# PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

*From the Feast of All Saints (1 November) in Year B to the Feast of the Holy Family (30 December) in Year C*

Prepared by Michael Trainor

## PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from 1 November to 30 December. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source. Over this period we conclude the readings from the liturgical cycle of Year B and commence, at Advent, a new liturgical year with Year C readings.

### ***The Final Sundays of Year B***

*The First readings* over the remainder of Year B are drawn from a diverse range of literary genres: prophetic, historical, wisdom, apocalyptic and from the first five books of the First ('Old') Testament, the Torah. The *second readings* are principally from the Letter to the Hebrews, (OT 27-33), addressing Jewish followers of Jesus living in Rome. Over these final Sundays we attend to the last half of *Mark's Gospel* which portrays Jesus as God's suffering servant preparing for the struggle and passion that await him in Jerusalem. The disciples accompany him, uncertain of their future. The story of Bartimaeus (OT 29) is reflective of the disciples: wanting to following Jesus, but in need of healing from a deep blindness that prevents them from really 'seeing' and thus comprehending Jesus' journey. The year concludes, as it always does, allowing us to focus on what is essential in life, what is called in classical theology 'the last things.' These last Sundays culminate in the Feast of Christ the King (or 'leader').and the invitation for journeying disciples to allow Jesus to guide and teach us.

### ***The New Liturgical Year C***

When we turn to the new liturgical year C on

Advent 1, we begin to hear from Luke's Gospel and prepare for God's coming ('advent') in Jesus, particularly celebrated in his birth. Luke's gospel was written in the late first century CE for a Greco-Roman urban household of Jesus followers. I shall explore the background, portrait of Jesus and his disciples, and key gospel themes in greater detail in the next *Compass* edition.

### ***About Advent and Christmas***

As we proclaim the Advent readings, it is important to recognise that the First Testament readings from the prophets (Jeremiah, Baruch and Zephaniah) are addressed to the Israelite people *in their own day*, and not texts specifically about Jesus or prophesying with Jesus in mind. *In Advent* the first two Sundays look back as well as look forward. They seek to offer a link with the Liturgical Year B just concluded and look forward to the year that is about to unfold. The theme of these readings is about God's Advent: at the end of time. Therefore a more cosmic, eschatological and universal perspective dominates. In the final Sundays of Advent we are invited to celebrate God's coming and closeness revealed in Jesus. This coming is *now*, in our world, family, community, nation. At *Christmas* and the Sundays immediately following, Luke's Gospel offers particular insight for celebrating the meaning of Jesus' birth in our midst. Luke emphasizes the birth of Jesus and the presence of God's Word occurring within the context of political and world history. In other words, given our geo-ecological-political situation, the celebration of Jesus' presence with us offers fresh hope.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

**November 1—All Saints:** *Rev 7: 2-4, 9-14.* God's vision to John, the writer of Revelation (not the John of the Gospel or the Letters) identifies God's holy ones. It is an innumerable group, clothed in their baptismal garment and faithful to God through suffering. *1 Jn 3: 1-3.* We will become like God as we see God face to face. *Mt 5: 1-12a.* Jesus acknowledges the blessedness of those who are poor in spirit, meek, merciful, peace makers and suffer. *Theme—Sanctity.* We know people who have been close to us and have died; we know their sanctity. We celebrate them today. We also affirm our call to sanctity and the many ways that we live this out in our faith communities and the world.

**November 4—Ordinary Time 31:** *Dt 6:2-6.* Moses reminds the Israelites about their fidelity to God's commands. He then gives them the most important saying that has shaped Jewish history and prayer life up until the present: Listen to God who is one and love God with all one's being. This prayer, called the 'Shemah', was at the heart of Jesus' prayer life too. *Heb 7:23-28.* Jesus is our holy, innocent and undefiled priest who represents us before his God. Jesus intercedes for us eternally. *Mk 12:28b-34.* Mk's Jesus makes the *Shemah* (from the first reading) central to the prayer and faith life of the disciple. *Theme—Witness to God.* Today's readings strike at the heart of religion: fidelity to God. This is the essential aspect of Christian faith revealed to us through Mk's Jesus stepped in Judaism and its teachings about God. Who is God for us and our church?

**November 11—Ordinary Time 32:** *1 Kings 17:10-16.* The widow's hospitality to the prophet Elijah in difficult times brings her great blessing. *Heb 9:24-28.* Jesus is in the heavenly sanctuary with God, in God's very presence. *Mk 12:38-44.* Jesus highlights how the unprotected ones, here the widow, can be victimised and oppressed by a religious system that fails to liberate. *Theme—Religious Freedom.* The two widows in today's readings (1 Kings and Mk) are contrasting figures: One is liberated and blessed by the prophet; the other is a victim to religion. Vatican II's document on religious freedom affirms adult Christians in their daily lives. It is a document in harmony with the intended aspirations of our readings; it could be dusted down and highlighted for our worship.

**November 18 —Ordinary Time 33:** *Dan 12:1-3.*

God (= 'Mich-a-el' = 'One-like-God' Hebrew) will protect and deliver the people from cosmic anguish and bring them to everlasting life. *Heb 10:11-14, 18.* Jesus is at God's 'right hand,' an image emphasising Jesus' as God's agent and sharing in God's power. *Mk 13:24-32.* This 'apocalyptic' passage emphasises Jesus' continuing liberating presence with those who are faithful despite difficulties. *Theme—God's Apocalyptic presence.* Dan and Mk presume their audience's familiarity with apocalyptic thought. This unique form of writing does not offer a literal divine timetable for things to come, but a reassurance of God's presence in the present struggles of those open to this presence. Who are those struggling around us? Who are those we know are constantly faithful to God? What kind of liberation do we seek?

**November 25— Christ the King:** *Dan 7:13-14.* God's agent judges and comforts as he reveals God's glory. *Rev 1:5-8.* A beautiful song celebrating God's powerful, gentle and comforting presence. *Jn 18:33-37.* The central message in John's passion narrative, here revealed, is that Jesus is truly King. *Theme—Jesus, revealer of God's power:* The final liturgical celebration of the year traditionally spotlights Jesus as God's agent, revealing God's power and presence. In a world broken, uncertain and seduced by political voices, this is an important celebration. This feast also provides an opportunity to celebrate how this community has lived out its conviction of God's presence and Jesus' leadership throughout the liturgical year concluding today. Stories would abound, if only they were recorded or remembered.

NEW LITURGICAL YEAR C

**December 2—Advent 1:** *Jer 33:14-16.* God's prophet foresees a time of peace, harmony and communion when all will live safely. *1 Thes 3:12—4:2.* Paul's people are urged to live out their community life with love and holiness. *Lk 21:25-28, 34-36.* Our first reading of the Gospel of Luke for the new liturgical year invites an attitude of alertness to Jesus' coming. *Theme—Alertness:* Advent initially encourages us to be sensitive to the many ways God comes to us. This coming happens mostly unexpectedly, and especially in pain, suffering and death. This first celebration of our year invites us to ponder God's presence to us in all

these different ways.

**December 9—Advent 2:** *Bar 5:1-9*. This is a celebration of God's delight in creation and humanity. *Phil 1:4-6, 8-11*. Paul delights in the Jesus followers at Philippi. They witness to the gospel and he encourages their ongoing discernment. *Lk 3:1-6*. Baruch's vision finds its expression in the historical and social preparation for the birth of Jesus. *Theme—God's delight*. The advent of Jesus soon to be born among us reveals God's delight for creation and humanity. Jesus' birth involves the whole of creation that God has blessed. This powerful theme has profound ecological implications for our faith communities. It commits us to this planet and invites us to celebrate our world and lives that are good, holy and blessed.

**December 16—Advent 3:** *Zeph 3:14-18*. The prophet announces God's gladness with humanity renewed through God's love. This affirmation removes judgement and offers freedom. *Phil 4:4-7*. Paul encourages joy—a deep gift from God that alleviates 'all worry.' *Lk 3:10-18*. Jesus' coming invites conversion back to God. This has economic and social implications for daily living. *Theme—Joy and Conversion*. These two themes (*joy* in Zeph and Phil; *conversion* in Lk) are powerful and appropriate on the eve of our Christmas celebrations. Joy is God's gift in the midst of life's struggles; not simply the ever-smiling Christian untouched by what is happening. The kind of conversion suggested by John the Baptist is an openness to be touched and guided by God. It has practical, personal and social implications for how we live out these days in preparing for Jesus' birth.

**December 23—Advent 4:** *Micah 5:1-4*. The smallest and most insignificant tribe will be selected by God to rule Israel. *Heb 10:5-10*. Jesus comes to do God's 'will.' This 'will' is to reveal God's love and kindness towards all. *Lk 1:39-45*. Mary and Elizabeth meet. And the child whom Mary carries is recognised as Lord; joy surrounds this declaration. *Theme—Smallness*. Micah and Lk reveal that God's attention is focussed on the insignificant and unknown. Israel's smallest tribe is praised; Mary a village woman is blessed. Who are those in our communities that are God's 'little people' and reveal to us something of the presence of God?

**Dec 25—Feast of the Nativity**

*Midnight*

*Is 9:2-4, 6-7*. God's light shines on a people that

walk in darkness. Their hope is in the birth of one who will usher in God's authority and justice. *Tit 2:11-14*. God's love for us is tangible in the birth of Jesus. Because of this we live lives that are holy. *Lk 2:1-20*. Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. *Theme—God's Welcome*: So many will crowd into our churches this night. All seek to hear a word of hope and encouragement. In the birth of a child God is imaged as helpless, childlike, and welcoming. Mistaken notions of God as vindictive or vengeful are completely overturned. This affects the way we see our world and God's embrace of us.

*Morning*

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

**December 30—Holy Family:** *Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14*. Wisdom is found in respect and care for the older members of the family. *Col 3:12-21*. Mutual love and compassion should characterise members of the Christian household. If it is not excluded, special preaching care should also accompany the last verses of this reading, written at a time when subordination represented order and stability. *Lk 2:41-52*. Jesus is found as the teacher in the temple, and surprises his parents. *Theme—Surprise*. Families can be communities of great love and growth; at times they are also places of difficulty and pain. No family is ever perfect. Today's readings encourage an attitude of openness, mutual respect and forgiveness in family or community living. Thought should be given to how to celebrate those who live on their own. In Australia, almost a half of our households are single person dwellings. How can this feast speak to those who live singly, are unmarried, divorced, widowed or do not have children?

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