THE SECOND VATICAN Council profoundly changed the Church. The Church took on a new mindset. From seeing itself as an unchanging institution in a changing world (semper idem—‘always the same’) in Vatican II it declared itself to be The Pilgrim People of God. The Church is immersed in history, in the real world. It, too, is on a journey. It has not yet arrived at its destination—it is not identical with the Kingdom of God but strives to announce the coming of the Kingdom and to prepare the way of the Kingdom.

Where the Church had been largely identified with the hierarchy—the bishops and priests, while the laity was mostly passive—Vatican II, in declaring the Church to be the People of God, declared that the Church is the whole people: laity as well as bishops and priests. The Spirit, it was recognised, works in all members of the Church. Accordingly the roles of the baptised were explored and lay ministries promoted. The Church as Body of Christ is alive and active in all its members enlivened by the Spirit. The Church could come alive.

The Church’s liturgy was reformed to reflect this teaching. It became a celebration participated in by the whole community and no longer rituals performed by the priest which the congregation passively observed. Latin was replaced by the vernacular in the Mass and the priest faced the congregation and presided at the community worship in persona Christi capitis (‘in the name of Christ the head’).

Leadership in the Church community was re-examined, and the need was seen to move away from a pyramidal or hierarchical view of the Church which placed the Pope at the pinnacle, the bishops next down the ranks, clergy next and the largely passive laity at the bottom. Such a view was rejected by Jesus in the New Testament for whom leadership among his followers must be exercised as service.

The way the Church related to the rest of the world profoundly changed. From being on the defensive and fearful of the currents in secular society—such as socialism and humanism, and above all modernism—the Catholic Church set out to dialogue with the rest of the world, abandoning its attitude of hostility and intellectual isolation. It looked for what was good in society and in human interactions. It sought to read ‘the signs of the times’ paying attention to what is happening in the world.

The Catholic Church sought to dialogue with other Christian Churches and with world religions. It emphasised freedom and human dignity and the consequences of the fact that faith is a journey. The old adage ‘Outside the Church no salvation’ was re-interpreted to accommodate the elements of truth, ‘ecclesial elements’, that are to be found outside the visible Catholic Church community.

The Church’s own intellectual life was radically altered. From its claims to ‘timeless truth’ in the philosophia perennis (‘the enduring philosophy’) the Church discovered the significance of history and development over time. The major disciplines were renewed—biblical, patristic and medieval studies, as also the study of liturgy and theology. Scholars returned to the sources of Christian theology and Church life.

As a consequence the Church could enter into dialogue with secular intellectuals and participate in the life of the secular universities.

Further, the Church became the Church in
the modern world, on pilgrimage with the rest of humanity. It strove to be in touch with the real world and developments in society at large. Such was the message in the opening words of the ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’ which was expressing an aspiration as much as a fact:

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

This was something of what Pope John XXIII meant when he expressed the task of the Council to be aggiornamento (‘updating’).

The pastoral mission of the Church was seen to be to dialogue with the people of our time, and to communicate God’s word in a language that people in the modern world can understand.

Thus Vatican II sparked a renewal of theology and worship and a new way for the Catholic Church to be in the modern world.

The Council was a great surprise. Church life and pastoral practice were transformed in ways previously unimagined. But it was not a total novelty; there had been a build-up to the Council such that what happened in the years of the Council itself was to some degree a culmination of developments that had their origins years before. There had been movements in the Church that had been precursors and people who had been pioneers of what occurred in the council.

A book that demonstrates this fact is Thomas F. O’Meara and Paul Philibert, Scanning the Signs of the Times. French Dominicans in the Twentieth Century, ATF Theology, Adelaïde, 2013. It describes the contributions of seven French Dominicans whose work paved the way for the Council. The seven were Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, M-D Chenu, Yves Congar, Louis-Joseph Lebret, Jacques Loew, Pierre-André Liégé and Marie-Alain Couturier.

These seven theologians provide examples of what creative people—not just Frenchmen and not just French Dominicans, but especially Frenchmen and French Dominicans—contributed to the transformation of theology and ministry brought about by Vatican II.

What this book also shows is the amount of opposition from Church authorities that these pioneers of Vatican II were subjected to. The developments were resisted consistently until they were incorporated into the teachings of the council.

In 1930 Yves Congar composed a prayer that read in part:

God, why does your Church always condemn? True, she must guard the deposit of faith, but is there no other means but condemnation?...If your Church were only more encouraging, more comprehensive...The Church must make itself intelligible to every human ear...The times press—there is so much work to be done. (Ibid. p.46)

That may have been so in 1930, but the attitude of a number of influential members of the hierarchy was quite supportive of many of the new pastoral initiatives during the forties and fifties—e.g. Cardinal Suhard of Paris (ibid. p.83) and, most significantly, Cardinal Roncalli, nuncio in Paris and future Pope John XXIII (ibid. p.87).

Momentum was building and the Second Vatican Council, though it was a surprise to most, was not a bolt from the blue.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

In the course of the twentieth century theologians and pastors passed from an attitude of comfortable entitlement or cultural isolation to a new attitude of apostolic creativity. ... The council brought about a renewal in practice and perspective...that has changed the life of the Catholic Church. (O’Meara and Philibert, Scanning the Signs of the Times, p.xi)
I WAS IN ROME studying Theology during the second, third and fourth sessions of the Council. I did not keep a diary, but I did the next best thing: I kept carbon copies of my letters to family and friends, all typed on my portable Olivetti typewriter that had been given to me by my family as a going-away present.

I need to point out that I was in my early twenties when I recorded the events, and that I was a beginning student of theology.

We had twelve or so MSC missionary bishops staying in our college, so we were well placed to follow the events in the Council hall. In addition we were commissioned by some of the bishops to collect the press releases each day on their behalf, so that we got the news of what took place that morning before it was published. And we would pump the bishops for any further explanations that we wanted.

The general feeling we experienced during the Council was the feeling of excitement and high curiosity.

We would come home for lunch at 1.00 pm after the morning’s lectures and the bishops would be bussed home from the Vatican about 1.30 pm. We could tell from the noise level of their conversation in the corridor as they passed by our dining room how things had been that morning—quiet conversation, fairly ordinary morning, even boring—but loud excited conversation, something big had happened. We felt challenged to find out more

The Dramas

We knew that there had been dramas from the beginning. Congar explains that the Curia had been able to run the bishops while they were dispersed in their dioceses. In Council, the bishops were not so manageable. The dramas occurred as the Council took charge.

In a letter at the end of the second session (November 1964) I gave an account of the drama over the Religious Liberty schema. It was rather a lengthy account.

The eventual Declaration on Religious Liberty was a major development in the history of the Church. After many condemnations of other religions down the centuries, operating on the principle that ‘error has no rights’, this declaration teaches that every person should be free to profess whatever religion they choose. Furthermore, while the Church had always insisted on its freedom to exist when in a minority but refused freedom to other faiths when they were in a minority, this declaration acknowledged the universal right of every faith community to exist. These developments were vigorously opposed especially by Italians and Spaniards whose churches were protected by concordats.

Congar in his diary mentions great excitement and agitation, and suspected manoeuvring. Pope Benedict XVI describes the events as a ‘battle’, while Xavier Rynne gave a lengthy description of the excitement that was stirred up in the Council hall. My account substantially concurred with those descriptions, but I filled out the story with some detail and I cannot now vouch for its complete accuracy. But it makes a good story as I recorded it then.

I wrote on 21.11.1964:

‘The Council finished its third session yesterday. It was quite exciting while it was on—especially the last week! All the anti-Curia cries are being aired again just when the problem was beginning to be approached more calmly. It has all blown up over the Religious
Liberty schema which was originally expected to be promulgated at the close of this session. The commission worked like slaves to get it ready for printing a good three weeks before the close. It was printed at that time and ready for distribution at that time, but then, mysteriously, was ‘lost’ in the Vatican someplace; the pile of printed schemas would be about the size of a tea-chest. This went on four times, they say—the schemas being printed, then ‘lost’, or else the original being ‘lost’ before it got to the printers. One of the bishops—maybe de Smedt himself—went down with the messenger carrying it to the printers on one of the occasions, and saw it all the way to the printing machine. But blow me down if it didn’t get ‘lost’ again! Finally it was distributed to the Fathers about Tuesday before the Saturday that the session closed.

Came Thursday morning and Cardinal Tisserant got up and said that because a ‘great number’ of Bishops (the Spanish and some of the top-flight Italians) have asked for more time before voting on the schema in order that they might study it better there would be no votes taken this session on Religious Liberty. Silence. Then de Smedt [Bishop Josef de Smedt of Bruges] got up to read his relatio—almost in tears he said that the Commission had finished their job on such a date and his text of the relatio had been printed on that date, and there was no reason that it should have taken so long to get to the Fathers.

Then the riot began—the Bishops stood up and applauded and applauded—hundreds came pouring in from the bar—a petition to the Pope went around straight away and within an hour had more than 500 signatures. But there was nothing much the Pope could do about it. According to the rules, if a good number want more time they are to be given it. But the Bishops are really savage about the skullduggery that went on to make sure there wasn’t enough time. And it is just as well it occurred on the second-last day of the session, or the Council might have got quite undignified within a week or two. As it is, it seems that the Curia has shot its bolt for good and all as far as the Council Fathers are concerned.

Good old Radio Vaticana that night gave us a great piece of objective news reporting: it reported scrupulously the results of voting done just before the rumpus, right down to the juxta-modum-therefore-null votes. But when they came to what everyone was waiting to hear, they said only that ‘then Bishop de Smedt presented the relatio on the schema on Religious Liberty’, and the news service closed! The Church of Silence.

I don’t know where we will get our excitement from now that the session has ended.

The Magnitude of the Changes

Many people today are hardly aware that there were so many changes occurring in a short time. So many things are now just taken for granted, but they were often quite momentous as we experienced them.

As I experienced it, the issue of clericalism was a major one. In the closing days of the first session Bishop de Smedt denounced the first draft of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church for its ‘juridicalism, clericalism and triumphalism’—and demanded that a whole new document be drawn up.

The next draft and the final document opened with the chapter on ‘The People of God’—a significant development. The Church is first of all the whole people, not the clergy alone. The laity were very much the Church. It is obvious now, but groundbreaking then.


**Anti-clericalism**

In my letters to family and friends I expressed my personal reaction to clericalism in Rome that subtly reflected the Council developments.

One letter (21/7/66) showed that I was not finding it easy living in Rome as a cleric. There was too much clerical stuffiness, too many clerics, and too many clerics still living and thinking in the manner of the middle ages. There was also much anti-clericalism. We were spat upon from a balcony in Trastevere by a burly gentleman—a communist (I presume).

There was a clerical caste system, as I saw it, with a consequent distancing of the clergy from the rest of the Church community. It was not the ‘People of God’ style of Church, and there was little emphasis on the role and responsibility of the laity in the Church.

But there was the Pope John XXIII factor.

The best *riposte* to anti-clericalism, I discovered, was to invoke the memory of Pope John XXIII. Pope John had died on June 3rd, 1963, before I got to Rome in September of the same year, but his influence was still strong. I found that I could settle any argument about the Church, religion, clergy, simply by saying, ‘Ma, Papa Giovanni!’—the reply would invariably be: ‘Ah, Papa Giovanni—he was different!’

In my letters I related some of the stories about what Pope John used to do and say: he was a really extraordinary character.

Once when he was returning from one of his previously unheard-of train trips he had to wait at a junction somewhere, and when he was told that the wait was because they had to change back to a steam engine from the electric one to get back into the Vatican he said: ‘Ah yes, back to the Old Testament!’

Once in a public audience he met a stout missionary, and he went straight over to him, put his arms round him to measure him and said delightedly: ‘We’re the same size!’ The missionary was flabbergasted.

Pope John XXIII loosened up the atmosphere—he was universally recognised as ‘*simpatico*’. His address at the opening of the Council is justly famous. It was revolutionary for the times. He stated:

‘It seems to us that we must resolutely disagree with those prophets of doom who always proclaim that the worst is coming, as if the end of the world were upon us. In the present time the Bride of Christ prefers the medicine of mercy rather than take up the arms of rigour; she believes that she must face modern needs by showing more clearly the value of her teaching rather than by condemnations. Since that is the way things are, the Catholic Church, while raising the torch of Catholic truth, wants to show herself to be the most loving mother of all, gentle, patient and moved by mercy and goodness towards the sons separated from her.’

**Clerical Dress**

I particularly reacted against the rules about clerical dress. On 6th June 1964 I wrote: ‘It is getting hotter here, and the clerical wear in Rome has not felt any of the modernizing influence since the middle ages in fact. You wear the soutane indoors and out, rain, hail or shine or roast.’

Then in late April 1966 I wrote that ‘we have had a revolution here in Rome—we have jumped over about ten centuries in the matter of clerical dress—we now wear suits in the street instead of soutanes! That is to say, when we foreigners wear them these days we are not breaking the rules any more—the Italians, Spaniards and a few other national groups still stick to their soutanes, but eventually they should come round.

The permission shows that a tremendous battle has been won among the Italian bishops. From what we can gather, at the bishops’ meeting before last any change in the matter was hooted right out of the house. Many were quite hostile, it appears. All this ‘degrading of the priestly state to the level of the world!’ And the big argument was: ‘If they don’t wear the soutane, what will hold them in?’—having in mind that as soon as the priests wear something less conspicuous they will get up to every
kind of mischief.

Then all of a sudden, at the last meeting a complete about-face was achieved—well, not quite complete—the changeover has sent the local clergy into quite a dither'.

One day I was riding my bicycle in Rome wearing my clerical suit (1/3/67). Some students from the Spanish college (wearing their soutanes) commented loudly: ‘sembra un kangaroo!' (He looks like a kangaroo!) I don’t think they knew how close to the mark they were.

The People of God

My awareness of the Church as ‘People of God,' was slowly developing. In October 1963, soon after my arrival in Rome I was present in St Peter’s for the opening Mass of the Second Session. I wrote: ‘This morning I saw the pope from very close. I was about twenty feet from where he delivered an address, and when he was carried out in his sedia (his special chair the Italian nobility carry him in at functions) I was much closer still.

This morning’s was the first liturgical ceremony we’ve been to in St Peter’s. Mass was celebrated by the pope. It gives one a clearer idea of the Church—shows you just how human it really is. What I mean is that in Australia I knew alright that the Pope was really a human being, but in the back of one’s mind the Pope and the hierarchy seemed to always have a sort of aura or something around them all the time. But then to see them in actual fact and to attend Mass with them (the Council Cardinals and Bishops were all there this morning), taking part in the same ceremony so that in actual fact you are rubbing shoulders with them in the Church, all that brings home the fact that the Church is a big crowd of human beings with all the limitations of human beings, but with the Holy Spirit working away in the midst all the time, with the patience that he needs when dealing with humans. So to speak, it comes as a jolt to find that what you knew already was true—there is not a group of semi-divine beings governing the Church from Rome!

Liturgy

I was very aware of the need for liturgical reform. Liturgical practice reinforced the marginalization of the people. I made many mentions of liturgy in Rome and Italy. I wrote in July 1964:

‘Your questions, ‘I suppose you are well ahead in the liturgy over there, are you? Probably have Mass in Italian?,' evoked one of those patient, wry smiles that most foreigners cultivate automatically within a short time in Rome. Liturgically, Rome is in pretty bad shape. There is not a sign yet of vernacular in the Mass—but that is one of the lesser things to be hoped for. The people have to be given a bit of solid religion first. For the most part they don’t seem to know what the Mass is: they wander around the church all the way through Mass touching statues and blessing themselves, carrying on conversations with the rest of the congregation, lighting candles to the Madonna and making as much noise as is physically possible as they put the coin in the slot.

There is a saying in Rome that the only people who go to Church are the ‘skirts’—the women-folk and the clergy. It is not quite true, but uncomfortably near to the truth. The men, by and large are a pagan lot.’

In May 1965 I mentioned the annual May procession of the Madonna, when everyone becomes a fervent Catholic for the space of two to three hours. The first communicants are dressed up fit to kill, with the girls in wedding dresses and much fanfare with brass band and roses. I commented: ‘One wishes they would get a tenth as interested in the essentials as they are about the trimmings’.

When we went on holiday to Rieti, about thirty miles from Rome, we found the state of Catholicism even worse!

On 19th March 1964 I wrote: ‘The pope has given some very hopeful directives about
the training of seminarians—only in general terms yet, but the Council will follow it up quite obviously. Liturgy has just been imposed as a major subject in seminary studies, which is most progressive, and will mean a terrific lot in a few years time—the Easter ceremonies (I was writing at Easter time) will come into their own at last.’

Liturgical renewal was taking place in our community; we had concelebrated Mass every morning, mostly concelebrated by the student priests, as the older priests of the community didn’t feel inclined (12/11/66).

After many centuries of Latin, the vernacular languages were starting to be used. There were some difficulties with the beginnings in Italy: we students were asked by the local parish priest to come along and answer up and give volume to the responses (21.3.65).

**Theology.**

As a theology student I found that Vatican II made theology interesting and exciting! The dry scholastic text books gave way to texts that incorporated the new understandings of Church and of Revelation. I wrote:

‘There are a number of very important movements going on in the intellectual and pastoral fields at the moment—have been for some years—reaching their high-water mark in the council battles going on now. So things are really stirring everywhere; a real rejuvenation. and you can feel it in most of the lectures at the Greg. [Gregorian University]’. (15.12.1963)

There were also some reforms in the system of learning at the Gregorian University. (8/1/67). The language changed. Whereas lectures and exams, written and oral, had always been in Latin, now they began to move into Italian. Also a new schema on seminary training was approved by the Council, which included a pastoral year, and more stress on pastoral training.

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**Return to Australia—My Efforts to Share the Experience**

Upon my return to Australia and in my early years of ministry I found that Vatican II gave us language that people were able to hear—it spoke to people of that time

I returned keen to start work, and even offered to be available for ministry while on holiday and waiting for an appointment. I presided at Mass in a girls’ college and one of the girls was seen taking notes on my homily. I presided at a parish Mass, and heard one of the volunteers in the parish say: ‘Why haven’t we heard this before?’

When I started lecturing in St Paul’s National Seminary, a seminary for mature students for priesthood that operated from 1968 till 1998, the students who had been consumers in the pews all their lives delighted in the theology they were learning.

We presented a series of lectures for the public which we called ‘The St Paul’s Lectures’. Thirty to forty people came out at night to listen and learn.

I became involved in presenting the Certificate of Religious Education courses for teachers in the Sydney Archdiocese. The teachers often began the course because they needed more qualifications to work in Catholic schools, but found that they liked what they were learning.

Theology of Vatican II responded to people’s needs.

Still feeling the need to extend my horizon I began part-time studies at the University of New South Wales and gained a Doctorate in the School of History and Philosophy of Science. I was an Honorary Fellow for some years, participating in the academic life of the School.

Pope John Paul II admitted that the Church had made grave errors in the Galileo Affair, causing difficulties in the relationship between the Church and the modern world right from the outset of the modern period (31st October 1992).

At the University of New South Wales I
particularly enjoyed the re-trials of Galileo that we presented as staff-student activities for a number of years.

Usually I took the role of Cardinal Bellarmine. At the first re-trial, with the audience as the ‘jury’, Galileo was declared innocent. We of the prosecution got our act together in future trials and had him judged ‘guilty as charged’—he had presented the Copernican system as a picture of the real world, despite his promises not to do so. (The fact that his judges adhered to an essentially fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture was irrelevant for the trial.)

Another time I took the role of Giordano Bruno—and was complimented for showing that Bruno deserved everything he got!

After many years of lecturing at St Paul’s seminary I was posted to Rome and had time to present a ‘Cursus Specialis’ (an optional course) at the Gregorian University on ‘Catholic Theology and Science’.

The Statement of Conclusions

The Ad Limina visit of the Australian Bishops to Rome in 1998 and the subsequent document Statement of Conclusions was a reality check. Collegiality, such an important principle in Vatican II—that the Pope and bishops were the successors to Peter and the other eleven apostles—was still not the way the Church was governed.

I was in Rome in May 1998 and I was told then by a monsignor who has worked for many years in one of the dicasteries that the word getting around the Vatican was that everything in the Australian church was going downhill—parishes, religious education, priestly ministry, religious orders, prayer life...everything! He was wryly amused by the generality of the negative assessment, but I took it as a warning of what might lie ahead.

The Statement of Conclusions was a predominantly negative assessment of the state of the Church in Australia. Obviously the unrepresentative minority who had been bombarding Rome with letters of complaint—in one period of time more complaint mail was arriving from Australia than from the United States—had been listened to and apparently believed.

One sentence in the concluding paragraph of the Statement of Conclusions provoked an important discussion here in Australia about who has the right to do what in the Church. The sentence, or rather the disputed part of it reads: ‘the meeting between the Church in Australia and the primary collaborators of the Roman Pontiff’.

Here we were, back to where we were before the Vatican Council started, with the inflation of the power of the authority of the Roman Curia at the expense of the legitimate authority of the college of bishops.

The collegiality of the bishops was affirmed in Vatican II but no way of safeguarding it was put into place. After the Council the Curia were still able to govern the Church from Rome, and the bishops spread throughout the world were not able to exercise their rightful authority. The Statement of Conclusions was a clear instance of a national bishops’ conference being over-ruled by the lesser authority of the Roman Curia. This lack of collegiality will be a challenge for Pope Francis.

But, after my experiences of Catholic life in the diocese of Rome, what I personally found the most galling thing of all was being lectured to about the quality of Church life in Australia by the collaborators of the bishop of the Church of Rome.

REFERENCES

5. Statement of Conclusions, from the meeting between various Dicasteries of the Holy See and bishops representing the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 14 December 1998, p.34.
THIS YEAR THE the focus has been on the fruits of the Vatican II Council in the life of the Church as a whole and indeed the world. Like all such events it had a pre-history which tends to be overlooked and therefore lessens the depth of general understanding of this pivotal event. Also men and women’s histories converge on such occasions as in all human activities but women’s history tends to be disregarded.

Introduction
The comment could be made that a more accurate title for this essay would be ‘Stirrings of Feminism in the Church and Vatican II’ since at the time of the Council women in the Church were not actively promoting their wider and fuller participation in the Church. Alas, such a suggestion is a fruit of the loss of women’s history to all and most tragically to women themselves. We have forgotten about the women who insisted on being part of the flight to the desert in Egypt in the very early times in the Church; and those who worked as deacons with women and children; and insisted on being part of the monastic movement that followed, as well as being involved in all subsequent developments in religious life. We rarely hear how women led the way in the development of the simple vowed orders following the Reformation and industrial revolution. In the early 19th century ‘feminism’ was termed ‘The Woman Question’ and only a few have been introduced to Margaret Cusack, a Catholic writer and founder of a religious congregation, who specifically addressed this important question.

It also needs to be recognised that ‘feminism’ may be considered a ‘Humpty Dumpty’ word which means whatever the person using it wants it to mean. On the other hand, it needs to be recognised that ‘feminism’ is a pithy word which is rich in meaning and, in the last analysis, concerns the vital relationship between men and women. There has always been ‘a woman question’ or a ‘feminist movement’; it is intrinsic to human nature. It needs to be pointed out, too, that across the centuries there have always been men who supported women in their endeavours to attain an education and use their talents beyond the home in the Church and the wider community. Their history is also generally neglected. All of the above are important aspects of the history which the Vatican II Council inherited as it emerged within the wider context of the 1960s.

‘Divine Discontent’
The 1960s was a period of prosperity following post-war reconstruction in Europe and the Pacific area in the late 1940s and into the 50s. It brought with it a consumer culture generated by technological advances in industry. The factories churned out goods and the burgeoning advertising industry, through newspaper, radio and television, influenced the buying habits and life-style of the public. The atheistic variety of the influential philosophy of existentialism encouraged an ever-increasing challenging of authority.

Many women, who had willingly been confined to the domestic sphere following the Second World War, were experiencing ‘divine discontent’ with their position. At the same time leaders in various areas within the Church were hoping for overdue reforms. The time was ripe for action in the areas of the Church and Feminism.

Key players in these reforms were: in the Church, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, who succeeded Pius XII as Pope John XXIII and called the Second Vatican Council in 1962; and in Feminism, Betty Friedan, married and a journalist with a strong background in psychol-
ogy and sociology, who published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1960. Born in 1921 into a Jewish family in Illinois, in Midwestern America, Betty Friedan was educated at Smith College and won a scholarship for postgraduate study in psychology to Berkeley University. Later she declined another scholarship for doctoral study to marry Carl Friedan. She worked as a journalist until the birth of the first of her three children.¹

After ordination and subsequent doctoral studies, which had a strong historical emphasis, Roncalli was appointed secretary to Radini-Tedeschi, the social-justice minded Bishop of Bergamo. This socially-aware bishop was among the first in the Church to recognise the ‘feminist question’ as an ecclesiastical question and, as his secretary, Roncalli had assisted the Bishop in various pro-woman activities, including the establishment in his dioceses of the League of Women Workers. It was from these early days that Pope John XXIII became a lifelong friend of the distinguished Italian feminist Adelaide Coari.²

There followed for the young Roncalli, among other things, a stint as a war chaplain during World War I, a diplomatic mission to Turkey and Greece which lasted ten years followed by an appointment to France including the position of being Permanent Observer for the Holy See in UNESCO. In 1953 he was created a cardinal and appointed Patriarch of Venice. Always Roncalli sought to promote friendly understanding among rival groups in every area in which he worked.³

Being well advanced in years at seventy-six when elected, Roncalli was popularly perceived as a stopgap pope. Nevertheless, he assumed the responsibility of this crucial office with extensive pastoral, diplomatic and administrative experience. In addition, it is evident from the journal, which he kept from his adolescence to old age, that he had a well-developed feminine dimension to his personality. He was tender-hearted and in his relation with Jesus, which seemed to have become increasingly mystical during his life, he assumed a spousal stance. As he reflected upon his ministry as a bishop he did not hesitate to urge himself, among other things, to be ‘a mother to all’.⁴

By 1961, when Betty Friedan was working on *The Feminine Mystique*, John XXIII had initiated preparations for an ecumenical Church Council.

Concerning her life during the 1950s Betty Friedan recorded: ‘I was experiencing a profound discontent, becoming increasingly conscious of the limitations of my narrow domestic world. Finally I revolted. As a wife and mother of three small children, half-guiltily I took up again my profession of journalism.’ Through her research she discovered that many women shared her experience and she named the false image to which they were unhappily trying to conform themselves, ‘the feminine mystique’. After a long period of in-depth research, in 1963 Betty Friedan published a book by that name which became a world-wide best seller. Among many other pivotal things she declared: ‘The early feminists knew that marriage and motherhood are an essential part of life but not the whole of it.’⁵

She also drew attention to the fact that: ‘Generally psychologists gave their professional approval to this current ‘permissive’ attitude to sex, seeing it as a healthier state of affairs than the previous hypocritical denial of sex.’ But, as she pointed out, ‘even the professionals at times express concern at the growing trend and wonder what the next step in salaciousness will be.’ With genuine concern, Betty Friedan declared: ‘The image of woman

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¹ See the biographical sketch of Betty Friedan by Dr Sophie McGrath rsm.
² See the biographical sketch of John XXIII by Dr Sophie McGrath rsm.
³ See the biographical sketch of Roncalli by Dr Sophie McGrath rsm.
⁴ See the biographical sketch of Betty Friedan by Dr Sophie McGrath rsm.
⁵ See the biographical sketch of Betty Friedan by Dr Sophie McGrath rsm.
in another era required increasing prudishness to keep denying sex. This new image seems to require increasing mindlessness, increasing emphasis on things: two cars, two TVs…’6

Seeking to understand the pre-1960s situation, which was the context for Vatican II, Betty Friedan declared:

Women went home again just as men shrugged off the bomb, forgot the concentration camps, condoned corruption and fell into helpless conformity, just as thinkers avoided the complex larger problems of the post-war world. It was easier and safer to think about love and sex than about communism, McCarthy and the uncontrolled bomb. It was easier to look for Freudian sexual roots in man’s behaviour than to look too critically at his society and act constructively to right its wrongs.7

Betty Friedan’s work was underpinned by wide scholarly reading. Pope John XXIII had always had strong scholarly tendencies and followed with interest the significant social thinkers of his time. Such a one was Pietro Parvan, who had been influenced by the democratically-inclined scholars around Jacques Maritain and the early Christian Democrats. Indeed Parvan had had a major hand in drafting John’s social writings, especially Pacem in Terris, the encyclical on peace.8

In this encyclical John XXIII supported much of the feminist agenda beginning with the fundamental declaration:

The Creator of the world has imprinted in man’s heart an order which his conscience reveals to him and enjoins him to obey…. This natural law is the law for interpersonal and inter-state-relations. This is the law which is being urgently demanded today by the requirements of the universal common good.9

Like Betty Friedan he appreciated the enormity of the task: ‘There is an immense task incumbent on all men of good will—the task of restoring the relations of the human family in truth, in justice, in love and in freedom.’10

John XXIII further strengthened the case for women to develop their latent talents to contribute in the wider community in a variety of fields:

The natural law gives every person the right to share in the benefits of culture and therefore the right to a basic education and to technical and professional training in keeping with the stage of educational development in the country to which he or she belongs. Every effort should be made to ensure that persons be enabled, on the basis of merit, to go on to higher studies, so that, as far as possible, they may occupy posts and take on responsibilities in human society with their natural gifts and the skills they have acquired.11

Most significantly in this ground-breaking encyclical leading up to the Vatican II Council, John XXIII implicitly endorsed Betty Friedan’s central thesis in The Feminine Mystique:

Our age has three distinctive characteristics. First of all, the working classes have gradually gained ground in economic and public affairs. Secondly it is obvious to everyone that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations of Christian civilisation and more slowly but broadly among peoples who have inherited other traditions or cultures…. Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life.12

In one of his meetings with a group of the Italian Catholic Women’s Movement John XXIII acknowledged that one result of the dynamic rhythm of technological and social progress in the last fifty years had been ‘to take women outside the four walls of their homes and to place them in direct contact with public life.’13 He also acknowledged that modern social structures did not allow woman, in the exercise of her profession to achieve the fulfilment of her potential and that there was a pressing need to find new solutions. Indeed, he stated categorically that ‘woman is as necessary as men to the progress of society, especially in all those fields which require tact, delicacy and maternal intuition.’14

He was conscious, however, of the many stresses that women faced when endeavouring to balance the demands of family life, especially their relationships with their husband
and children when they worked in the wider community. He feared that ‘the harsh realities of outside work’ would ‘dry up the richness of their inner life, the resources of their sensitivity’. He wanted them to go to ‘the fonts of prayer and sacramental life to maintain themselves on a level with their matchless mission.’

John pointed out: ‘Today’s work has need of maternal sensibilities to dispel the atmosphere of violence and grossness in which men are struggling.’ He was opposed to married women being forced to work arguing that ‘a man’s salary should be sufficient to support his wife and family so that his wife is not forced to work outside the home by economic necessity.’\(^{15}\) Alas, this empathy with women did not translate into his including them as participants in the Vatican II Council.

John XXIII died in 1963 soon after his great reform project had been launched. His wide popularity was encapsulated in a cartoon in a newspaper which featured a world globe draped in mourning robes and inscribed with ‘A death in the family!’ However, he did not die before creating a new secretariat for promoting Christian unity and appointing in 1961 the first Catholic representative to the Assembly of the World Council of Churches. His interest in the worldwide extension of the faith and its continued growth among non-Western peoples was seen in his elevation to the cardinalate of an African, a Filipino and a Japanese as well as the consecration of fourteen bishops for Asia, Africa and Oceania.\(^{16}\) These initiatives were to be picked up and developed at the Council.

Both John XXIII and Betty Friedan had experienced ‘divine discontent’. Hers was with the situation of women and his with the situation in the Church. Both had responded to these stirrings within them with decisive action: she through the researching and publishing *The Feminine Mystique* and he through calling the ecumenical Council of Vatican II. Neither realised what repercussions their initiatives would have on society.

* * *

**Pope Paul VI and Feminism**

It was left to John XXIII’s successor Pope Paul VI to address the problem of the absence of women from the Council. Alas, this was done grossly inadequately under the heavy weight of the bureaucracy of the Vatican secretariat and did little to promote the aspirations expressed by John XXIII in *Pacem In Terris*. This has been well documented by Carmel McEnroy in her thoroughly researched publication *Guests in Their Own House—The Women Of Vatican II*.\(^{17}\) However, when Paul VI met with Betty Friedan in 1974, when she sought an audience with him, he presented her with a medal for her service to women.

It was Pope Paul VI along with his successor Pope John Paul II, who was to be in the position to evaluate the mixed fruits of the Council. Betty Friedan lived on to be able to critique the effects of the publication of *The Feminist Mystique* and the various feminist activities flowing from it. This she did and produced an insightful, humble, honest assessment in her second book, *The Second Stage*, in 1982 when she confessed: ‘I became aware that something was off, out of focus, going wrong …’ and she made the seminal observation: ‘I believe it’s over, that first stage: the women’s movement. And yet the larger revolution, evolution, liberation that the women’s movement set off, has barely begun.’\(^{18}\)

**Insights into Post-Vatican II Feminism**

Challengingly Betty Friedan declared: ‘The second stage cannot be seen in terms of women alone, our separate personhood or equality with men. The second stage involves coming to new terms with the family—new terms with love and with work…..’ She went on to ask:

How can we transcend the polarization between women and women and between women and men to achieve the new human wholeness that is the promise of feminism and get on with solving the concrete practical everyday problems of living, working and loving as equal persons? This is the personal and political business of
the second stage.¹⁹
She was concerned about the backlash against feminism and at the time thought that ‘the Vatican was part of the backlash.’²⁰ But Pope John Paul II expressed the humility that she was seeking in the relationship between men and women when he stated in his Letter to Women in 1995:

Unfortunately we are heirs to a history which has conditioned us to a remarkable extent. In every time and place, this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women. And if objective blame, especially in particular historical contexts, has belonged to not just a few members of the Church, for this I am truly sorry. May this regret be transformed on the part of the Church, into a renewed commitment to fidelity to the Gospel vision.²¹

Also in his encyclical Familiaris Consortio on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World John Paul II declared:

The sharing of parenthood by men and women is one of the significant goals of the feminist movement and every effort must be made to restore socially the conviction that the place and task of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance.²²

In Conclusion

Since the relationship between men and women is arguably the most important relationship in human society there is no doubt that the principal focus of the Church in the period following the present ‘Fifty Years On Evaluation of Vatican II’ must include feminism. It is clear that in this area of human concern there is a positive historical tradition to draw upon for inspiration and to develop for the common good.

NOTES

2. C. Militello, Il Volto Femminile Della Storia (Italy, Piemme,1995), 404.
6. Friedan, The Feminine, 68.
8. Hebblethwaite, John XXIII, 470.
15. Liebard (ed), Love, 261, 266.
19. Friedan, Second, 47.
20. Friedan, Second, 43.
SIN AS FAILURE TO BE FULLY RESPONSIBLE

BRIAN LEWIS

T he biblical renewal has led to the popularisation of the term ‘responsibility’ (literally ability to respond) as the framework to understand Christian life and morality. God calls—we respond. God is present to us always and makes a call to us in every action upon us. In responding to these actions upon us we respond to God. ‘Responsibility’ thus means responding to God by making a positive response to genuine human goods and values, and ultimately to persons.

The failure to do this, ‘irresponsibility’, understood as refusal or failure to respond as we should to the good of persons (including ourselves) is what is meant by the term we use—in our tradition we call it sin.

Sin is a religious term which is used to refer to a reality, a mystery of evil, which experience shows is very much part of the human condition and which in some way involves a negative relationship to God. Sin is meaningless without awareness of a relationship with God, who reveals himself in Jesus and pours out his love through the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that sin is not also a moral evil, for it is about the moral evil that people do. Still sin is not just about doing evil; it is about saying no to God. If it is not this it is not sin in the proper sense. If we use the word in other ways that do not refer to the fundamental relationship with God we are using ‘sin’ analogously, as we do, for example, when we talk about original sin or social sin.

Perhaps the unpopularity of God-talk for many today is one of the reasons why sin-talk is not much in fashion in our secular society. People use other ways of describing wrong conduct, whether the vandalism of festooning walls with graffiti or violence in our streets or whatever. It is ‘unacceptable’, ‘inappropriate’, ‘disgraceful’, ‘unfair’, ‘irresponsible’. It is this last commonly used term understood as a rift in our relationship to God, whom we do not see, brought about by our wrongful behaviour in the world we do see, that may help to bring home to people today the reality and meaning of sin.

Our experience

It is a fact of personal experience that people are very often irresponsible, in that they fail to respond creatively to the good and value of human persons. Indeed, much human behaviour is destructive of human relationships and in fact dehumanising. Ethnic cleansing, violence, rape, sexual and physical child abuse, corporate crime, wanton waste of the world’s forests for the sake of monetary gain, cruelty to animals, are some examples of this. Personal moral failure, doing evil, sin, is unfortunately our common experience as human beings. Rifts in personal relationships are let go on because people are too proud to acknowledge their part in them and apologise. People are hurt when personal gain or job satisfaction are put ahead of concern for the welfare of others, even sometimes of members of the same family. Some in our community fail to control their sexual drives and may even be led to commit violence against others. Most of us are sometimes irritable and impatient. Or we jeopardise our health by over-indulgence in food or drink. People often hate to admit that others may be better than themselves and how often do we find some persons seeking to cut down ‘tall poppies’ as much as they can. We probably have to admit that we are
often enough wanting in commitment, or lazy, or unwilling to expend sufficient effort in working towards our personal growth.

Commenting on Western democratic societies, the Pontifical Biblical Commission says: ‘On the plea of the right to total liberty, people claim the right to commit abortion, euthanasia, to genetic experimentation, homosexual unions, and to behave as independent authors of their own being. Consumerist greed can often be satisfied only through the exploitation of other people and of weaker nations’ (The Bible and Morality, 2008, n.117).

We fail, not only by our actions, but also by our omissions. It is much easier to shut our eyes to such failures than to own up to them. The worst sins of omission these days occur in the public arena. Senseless slaughter of innocent children causes great concern in the community, yet most of this focuses on the perpetrators of such crimes and very little on those who could have done something but did nothing to prevent them. Psychologists and sociologists have studied what they call ‘bystander apathy’, the reluctance of observers to act to save someone in danger. Various suggestions are offered to explain this. It is due to fear, to the conscious or unconscious rejection of something too horrible to contemplate, to the excuse that others also see the evil and do not act and therefore action is inappropriate, to a diffusion of personal responsibility in society.

There may in some instances be a reasonable explanation for the apathy that leads people to do nothing when doing nothing allows evil to triumph. The fact remains that this is at root a moral failure, because we do have a responsibility towards each other, particularly to children and others most in need of care. What people do as individuals and as members of society matters. Sometimes what they do (or fail to do) matters even more by reason of the destructive impact on personal relationships and conditions.

* * *

The Bible and Sin

Perhaps the most striking words used for sin in the Bible mean ‘to miss the mark or the target’, as in the sport of archery. In the context of the Covenant the words took on the religious and moral meaning of failing to meet one’s obligations to other persons and so breaking one’s relationship with God. The Covenant is essentially relational (The Bible and Morality, 2008, n.14-22). We sin against Yahweh whom we do not see by breaking his Law and in violating the rights of the neighbour we do see (Leviticus 19:9-18; Isaiah 1:23-25). It is the same with the New Covenant in Christ Jesus. Love of God and love of neighbour are inseparable (Mark 12:28-31; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-370).

Sin is expressed, like most decisions, in individual external actions or omissions concerning persons, such as lying, theft, murder, adultery, or negatively in failure to come to the aid of the needy. But of much more importance than the external act or omission is the inner attitude, the heart of the person (Isaiah 29:13), from which the external act (or omission) proceeds and which gives meaning to it. In the Bible ‘heart’ is more than the symbolic seat of affections, as we think of it today. The ‘heart’ means the inner self in its totality. It is the place where projects are born, where decisions, good and bad, are made, and above all it is the meeting place with God. ‘What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery,
fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man’ (Matthew 15:18-20).

This sinful inner disposition is variously described in the Bible. It is not just opposition to the revealed will of God and rejection of God’s law of love but a kind of idolatry, not so much blatant as in the making of the golden calf, but in terms of putting the focus on the self rather than acknowledging the Lordship of Yahweh (recall the desire of Adam and Eve to ‘be like gods’ and the rebuke levelled by the prophets against Israel wanting to ‘go it alone’). It is not only selfishness, it is infidelity to the ever faithful God and to the love owed to oneself and to one’s neighbour as a sister/brother in Christ, for ‘he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen’ (1 John 4:20). At root it is blindness, the failure to consider what should be taken into account (as in David’s adultery with Bathsheba), the ears that will not hear and the eyes that will not see (Isaiah 6:9). One who sins does not come into the light of Christ but remains in darkness. ‘For every one who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed’ (John 3:20).

Against this background it is clear that every sin stands in relationship with God: it is a turning from God, an offence against God, and also a violation of the relationship that should exist with God’s people. It is not often that God is offended directly, as in blasphemy. God is most often offended indirectly through the persons he has created and redeemed, whom he loves. One who sins misses the truth of human creatureliness before God the Creator and Redeemer and so is alienated from the self (Romans 1:26ff). It is only by turning to God again that one can find the true meaning of human existence (Penance and Reconciliation, 1984, 13:31, 517, 522-3).

Much more important than the reality of sin taught in the Scriptures is the biblical stress on the readiness of God to forgive the sinner. The New Testament writings are in agreement on the central truth that God granted pardon for sin through the person and work of Jesus (The Bible and Morality, n.82-84). In the Synoptic Gospels sin is never mentioned except in this context of forgiveness. From the promise of the Garden of Eden, to Yahweh’s repeated renewals of the Covenant with Israel, to the message of the prophets, God’s mercy and compassion are constantly emphasised. It is this that Jesus came to reveal in his words and deeds and in his whole life, as the Synoptics show, for example, in the parable of the Prodigal Son and the stories of the woman taken in adultery, Mary Magdalene and the good thief. For John, Jesus is the ‘Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world’ (John 1:29), ‘the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world’ (1 John 2:2). And Paul had already made the point that ‘God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:8).

Certainly Jesus is not presented in the Gospels as underplaying the evil of sin or as treating it with false indulgence. Indeed, he was often more demanding than the scribes and Pharisees of his day. But there is every indication that he was at pains to challenge the attitude of his contemporaries towards sin and the importance they attached to it (he caused surprise by eating with sinners and associating with Samaritans and prostitutes), because their view deformed the image both of God and of humanity.

**Sin in Christian History**

It has been a constant temptation for Christians to revert to the attitude to sin that was the stock in trade of the establishment in Jesus’ day and that is still found to some extent in the New Testament, notably in some of the
writings attributed to St. Paul. Sin is placed at the centre of human existence and seen as defining both the human condition (our status is precisely to be sinners) and the God who in forgiving sin brings salvation (Jesus is virtually defined as one who saves from sin).

This exaggerated dramatic conception of the Christian life was taken up by St. Augustine and through him had a dominating influence on Martin Luther and later on Pascal in France and Protestant theologians Barth, Bultmann, Pannenberg and Moltman in Germany. Unfortunately, some popularisations of sound theology, for example, St. Anselm’s theory of redemption, have led at the popular level to quite distorted views about God and sin, about satisfaction for sin, redemption as substitution, etc. However, another healthier perspective, which is also as old as the New Testament, sees God’s saving work precisely in the giving of a new life over and above the life given to us in creation, a richer relationship with God and with one another, and Jesus Christ as primarily the one who in his incarnation has revealed this life for us. Sin is not eliminated in such a perspective—it can disrupt and even destroy this gift of new life and so it calls for corrective and preventative measures. It is important but it does not occupy centre stage (J. Pohier, God in Fragments, 1985, 214-244).

**Sin as Failing to be Fully Responsible**

Acting against or refusing to respond creatively to basic personal values, and ultimately to the good of persons is what in general terms we mean by sin. We have suggested it be called moral irresponsibility.

We act irresponsibly when we disrespect and are destructive of human persons, when we inflict harm, particularly serious harm, on them (and on ourselves). We are irresponsible when we refuse opportunities to grow as persons by making any form of radical commitment, because we are afraid of the demands that may be made upon us or of the risk of exclusion from the group to which we belong. We are irresponsible when we are resistant to change because we fear it might disturb our personal comfort, challenge our complacency, or lead us where we do not want to go. We are irresponsible when we fail to seek to improve relationships within our family, when we ignore the cry for help, whether spiritual or material of those in need, when we are not concerned to attempt to better social, economic, ecological and political conditions of living in our community and in our world, when we condone unjust structures in our society.

Failure to respond to truly personal values can range from some minor fault to an action that is seriously harmful to persons. Not all moral faults are equally bad. They can range from a passing hurt to a person to a completely irresponsible act that is totally dehumanising and totally destructive of a human relationship. The degree of seriousness of a moral fault, a sin, will depend on the harm one intends to do and in fact does to human persons in themselves and in their relationships.

Addressing economic matters, the Catechism of the Catholic Church instances kinds of behaviour contrary to human dignity: theft, deliberate retention of goods loaned or objects lost, business fraud, unjust wages, forcing up prices by trading on the ignorance or hardship of another, the misappropriation and private use of the corporate property of an enterprise, work badly done, tax fraud, forgery of cheques and invoices, excessive expenses, waste and such like (n.2408-2413). At a deeper level it condemns ‘actions or enterprises which for any reason, selfish or ideological, commercial or totalitarian—lead to the enslavement of human beings, disregard for their personal dignity, buying or selling or exchanging them like merchandise. Reducing persons by violence to use-value or a source of profit is a sin against their dignity as persons and their fundamental rights’ (n.2414).

In regard to the political sphere, Pope John Paul II specified relevant moral principles and stressed that these ‘are primarily rooted in, and
COMPASS

in fact derive their singular urgency from, the transcendent value of the person...’ He followed this with a timely warning about the grave danger in modern societies of these principles being violated. For ‘in every sphere of personal, social and political life, morality—founded upon truth and open in truth to authentic freedom—renders a primordial and immensely valuable service not only to the individual person and his (her) growth in the good but also for society and its genuine development’ (Veritatis Splendor, 1993, n.101). The transcendent value of the human person is then the ultimate criterion of what is morally right or wrong.

The human person as the foundation of morality was again the emphasis of Pope Benedict XVI in his address on the foundations of law to the German Parliament in 2011, in which he appealed to the example of King Solomon’s prayer for a listening heart. ‘Through this story, the Bible wants to tell us what should ultimately matter for a politician. His fundamental criterion and the motivation for his work as a politician must not be success, and certainly not material gain. It must be a striving for justice, in short, for the good and the rights of persons’ (The Listening Heart, 2011,1).

Clearly therefore sin, or moral irresponsibility as we have defined it, generally involves harm to human persons in themselves, in society or in their environment. God is offended because human persons made in his image are harmed. Could it be said that too exclusive a focus on sin as offence against God while taking too little account of the relational dimension of harm to others has led to failure to recognise the reality and extent of sin today? Do we need a re-awakening in this regard?

The reality is that in the normal case the immediate criterion of what is moral or immoral is the reality of human persons and through them and in dialogue with them our response to God. Could we say simply that before God what is sinful is that which conflicts with human well-being. Sin offends God because it hurts persons, whom God has created and whom he loves dearly. As St. Thomas Aquinas said long ago, what is morally wrong is that which conflicts with human well-being (Summa Contra Gentiles, 3,122).

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Christians see their morality in a particular context. In the Christian religious tradition, as in the Jewish, morality is markedly religious. That is, it is immediately related to God and its significance is seen in the God-context. It must be so because the Christians view the whole of creation as God’s creation and themselves as part of that creation.

—Komonchak et al. (Eds.), The New Dictionary of Theology, ‘Moral Life, Christian’.
REMEMBER WELL the statement of the ex-Captain of Australia’s cricket team, Ian Chappell, after he made a visit to the Baxter detention centre. He was asked by the journalist how he felt after being shown through the Baxter facility. Unhesitatingly he replied that he felt, “………. angry.”

When asked why he felt angry, he replied that he always felt angry when he was made to feel ashamed to be an Australian and having seen Baxter, and seen what was happening there, he felt quite ashamed.

I shared Ian Chappell’s views as a result of my frequent visits to Baxter and the evidence from the diocesan team who visited much more frequently. It was a relief to see Baxter closed even though the traumas live on in so many peoples’ lives.

Now we face another crisis as we see something of a ‘race to the bottom’ by both the major parties as they not only continue with mandatory detention of men, women and children, but have sloughed off their international responsibilities by sending asylum seekers to other countries for processing.

We now have asylum seekers being sent to Nauru and Manus Island which is generally understood to be a message to deter others from claiming asylum by coming to our shores, especially by boat.

I was distressed to hear on a TV interview recently, Dr. John Valentine of the International Health and Medical Service, saying that having worked in our offshore detention facilities that he too ‘felt ashamed to be Australian.’

It seems so odd that we would send people to Nauru and Manus Island, when in fact they have arrived on our shores seeking asylum, as they have a perfect right to do.

I have just spent some time on Christmas Island, where I had unfettered access to the detention centres there.

Each day, in fact many times each day, I stood and prayed above the cliffs where the Siev-221 boat smashed to pieces on 15 December 2010 killing forty eight people—so many children, women and men.

Not only was that in itself a dreadful event, but it was traumatic for all the local people who stood on the cliff, unable to help in any way, although desperate to help. They simply had to watch as so many other human beings were smashed to death. I met a person whilst on Christmas Island who was there that day. I can only say that this person is still enormously traumatised.

In so many ways, this should have been a game-changer for our community, in much the same way as the Cornelia Rau saga was during the time of the Baxter detention regime. We were appalled that she could be treated that way when we discovered that she was an Australian. However, whilst we assumed that she was an ‘illegal’ intruder, we felt comfortable with her treatment. Many Australians began to revisit their attitude at that time and concluded that the system was flawed in the way it treated human beings.

Politically astute advisors have been keen to label people who arrive here by boat.

They label these people as illegal, even though they have a perfect right to seek asylum, as queue jumpers even though there are no queues. They are labeled terrorists, despite the logic that would suggest that it would be unthinkable to train someone for years to do a specific job, and then put them on an unseaworthy vessel that may not reach Australia, and if it did, the person would be taken into detention and closely examined. Surely if there were terrorists coming to our country they would come with full documentation, a three piece...
suit and travelling first class….yet we mindlessly go on repeating this nonsense.

Why do spin doctors persist with this?

Clearly if we can label people in this way, we can generate a community attitude that is hostile. If we label them, then we can demonise them, without ever seeing their faces. I was struck by a statement from a person in response to the recent arrival of the boat in Geraldton. He said, “I have always been against boat people, until I actually saw them.”

That’s the reason we keep these people in remote areas and in detention.

The great danger is that once we label people….any people, as anything other than human beings, we run the risk of treating them unjustly. There are famous historical examples of this.

It seems reasonable that we ought not to judge until we know the story. In my experience, most times when I know the story, then I have nothing to judge, except how to be compassionate.

When we realize that 6000 people have been killed in Syria in March alone and people are fleeing in the thousands, where do we expect them to go? Who do we expect to care for them? If and when they arrive here by boat, why would we be so determined to turn their boats around? What does such an attitude say about us as a community of Australians who live in a country not originally ours?

In our diocese we have two priests who are boat people…I’m so glad we didn’t turn their boats around.

Whenever I go to Timor Leste I sense a great affection for Australia and Australians, because of the way we received so many here during the tragedies in their country. Whilst they came without suits and without the necessary documentation, we understood the turmoil and the tragedy that prompted their need to flee and to come here. We received them with immense compassion and that is well remembered.

This certainly makes me proud to be an Australian.

I wonder whether those presently coming to Australia to escape torture and persecution, have the same sense of affection for us.

Whilst urging a more compassionate and decent policy, everyone recognizes that we have a duty to manage our borders and manage the cohorts of people who claim asylum. Undoubtedly there are some villains among the thousands of people who are genuine refugees. There should be no compunction in sending them back. However that is not what refugees and asylum seekers need.

The major political parties claim that the present policy is about avoiding the tragedy of deaths at sea. The claim seems to be that if they make coming here by boat so punitive, then it will deter others from coming and so avoid deaths at sea.

Whilst I presume this is a genuine concern, it does not in any way justify the present policy.

When I asked those in detention, including families with little children, why they would undertake such a perilous journey, they shared stories with me that inevitably ended up by explaining that even though they were aware of the real possibility of dying, it was a much better option than staying where they were.

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THE MORALITY OF DRONES

Targeted Killing

BRIAN V. JOHNSTONE, C.SS.R.

The Facts of the Case.

The main areas where armed drones are being employed are in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan is a declared war zone; Pakistan is not. This makes a difference with respect to international law as will be explained later. The NATO Forces have been using drones in Afghanistan, and it is planned that these facilities will remain after the withdrawal of the coalition’s troops. Drones are being also being used in Yemen and Somalia. The U.S. has recently opened drone bases in Saudi Arabia, Djibouti and Niger.

What is the Australian situation with regard to drones? On Sunday July 21st Fairfax Media reported that the spy base at Pine Gap in Central Australia has had a key role in the United States’ drone strikes directed at the ‘targeted killing’ of the leaders of al-Qaeda and Taliban. Australian forces are reported to have used drones in Afghanistan; for years the US military launched spy drones from an air force base near Adelaide. On August 3rd The Age carried a report that U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry has said that President Obama hopes to end US drone strikes aimed at terrorists in Pakistan. However, this would mean the cessation of strikes in one area, not a renunciation of the use of drones elsewhere. Before the Australian government goes further down this path, Australian citizens should have the opportunity to debate the matter.

There is much controversy on the topic in the United States, but as yet little debate in Australia. Mark Mazzetti, author of The Way of the Knife: The CIA at the Ends of the Earth, a book on Drones, was interviewed by Tony Jones on Lateline on July 27th. The Melbourne Age of August 1, 2003 carried a two page report by Andrew Purcell of Jeremy Scahill’s Dirty Wars which is very critical. These books, especially Scahill’s, provide revealing accounts of how the policies were formulated and carried out are most revealing. However, while Scahill in particular deals with issues of U.S. law, these authors do not deal specifically with the moral issues. These will be the focus of this article. My thesis of this article is that the lethal use of drones is arguably against international law and against the moral law as expressed in the traditional just war doctrine.

The relevant international law has been outlined by the Notre Dame University professor of international law Mary Ellen O’Connell. 'Under the UN Charter the use of major military force, such as the kind of force that drones deploy (missiles and bombs weighing up to 500 pounds), is lawful only in three situations: First, where a country has been the victim of an armed attack—as provided for under Article 51 of the UN Charter; second, when authorized by the Security Council; and, third, where a state is assisting at the request of a government in an armed conflict zone, such as the civil war that’s being fought in Afghanistan. The US and other countries, in particular NATO allies, are involved in an armed conflict, a civil war, at the invitation of the elected authorities of Afghanistan, in particular Mr. Karzai. There’s no other situation in the world where the US is involved that meets those criteria—Article 51 self-defense, Security Council authorization, or express invitation from the legitimate authorities of a country to be involved in suppressing a civil war.'
calls for ‘police action.’ While the use of force in self-defense on the part of a nation is legally justifiable, every attack does not justify war. Counter-terrorism must be primarily a form of police action. To name an armed response to terrorism as war is a way of justifying the use of military weapons which would not be allowed in police action: drones are military weapons, as Professor O’Connell has argued and so ought not to be used in situations that do not qualify as war. Terrorists in Pakistan are non-state actors and their criminal acts should be dealt with by appropriate police actions.

The U.N. Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights Ben Emmerson has written that the current use of armed drones in Pakistan does not have the consent of the legitimate government of that country and so is against intentional law. Whether the use of these weapons in the other countries mentioned is against international law would depend on the relevant circumstances and this question is beyond the limits of this article.

The ethical issues have been widely debated outside Australia. Michael Walzer, the author of Just and Unjust Wars has argued that drones as weapons were not unethical in themselves; he saw no ethical difference between the use of drone to kill and an enemy and the use of a sniper. However, he expressed unease about them because they were so easy to use; a fact that could lead to excessive use. He expressed reservations about the inevitable ‘collateral damage;’ the killing of civilians which comes with the use of these weapons despite the claims of their superior accuracy. Walzer also expressed raised concern about the process of selecting the candidates for execution. He suggested that a selected committee could function as a kind of jury, but this still leaves unanswered the question of the legitimacy of the ‘jury,’ the reliability of the information available to them and the criteria by which they would reach their judgment.

Robert George, a professor at Princeton University, noted for his pro-life writing, has stated that the use of such weapons is not immoral in itself but would condemn their wholesale and indiscriminate use. Brian Orend, a just-war theorist argues the use of drones is justifiable tools of warfare. The chairman of the U.S. Catholic bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace, Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, has written calling for public discussion and raising several serious questions about the military use of drones. Bishop Pates, citing the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, urged that U.S. officials ‘exercise leadership in advancing international norms, standards and restrictions’ on the use of drones and called for greater scrutiny of their use. While he acknowledged that countries have a right to use force in self-defense, the bishop warned that not every attack by al-Qaida or other terrorist organizations justifies war as a response.

The bishop here is pressing an argument that has been made very cogently by professor Mary Ellen O’Connell. As an alternative, he proposed that the counter-terrorism tactics used by the U.S.A. should be non-military, that is they should adopt police action tactics. In particular, he urged that policy makers should work to foster peace through building up respect for human rights and working to remove the injustices that that terrorists can exploit. The bishop’s letter focused on the just-war standards of discrimination, imminence of the threat, proportionality and probability of success and puts these forward as appropriate criteria for judging the morality of targeted killing.
I will now develop an ethical argument in more detail.

I begin with a summary of the requirements of the just war doctrine. Here an important distinction needs to be made: for some exponents of the doctrine the principles are ‘conventions’ or agreements between nations; thus when one party to the convention breaks the agreement that other is no longer held to it. For others, for example among ‘secular’ authors Michael Walzer and Brian Orend, the principles are moral requirements and not merely conventions; this is also, of course, the Catholic understanding of these principles. However, as a student of ethics would know there are disagreements regarding the ethical theory that supports the requirements. In this paper I will not enter in to this question; I will presume a theory of natural law as based on reasonable arguments.

Before listing the requirements of the just war, I note that there are two ways of regarding war. One is based on the assumption that considered human nature and human history we must presume that there are going to be wars until the end of human history; this we could call the Augustinian assumption. Thus, the doctrine of just war is an articulation of the ways of limiting the evils of war as far as possible. ‘As far as possible’ is the key phrase here. The tradition of just war represents the endeavours of ordinary people, canon lawyers, lawyers and theologians, to develop legal and moral structures to limit war. The second accepts that war itself can be an undertaking directed to a positive goal, for example, a crusade, or a secular version such as ‘a war to make democracy possible’ or a ‘war to end all wars.’ The problem with this ‘idealist’ notion of war is that the higher we elevate the goal of war, the higher becomes the acceptable level of the force that is ‘proportionate’ to that goal. I would argue that in the present case the goal of ‘keeping the U.S.A. safe from terrorism’ is being given such a high value by some of its proponents that it takes on the aura of an absolute: means are being considered as just-
initiating war. The concept of proportion is difficult to clarify; in general it means that a judgment must be reached that a war, with all the harms that it will produce does more good than harm.

Again, there are two distinct ways of interpreting proportion. For the first what is required is that the action, the war in its totality, be directed to or proportioned to achieving the purpose of self-defense. The second is pragmatic or consequential; it states that the positive results must be foreseen to outweigh the negative. In this interpretation the assessment of proportionality can come down to calculating the number killed as compared with the number saved; this simplistic calculation is not what was meant by proportionality. Numbers killed are not the only criteria of proportionality, nonetheless when many are killed those guiding the war would be ethically required to re-assess the judgments of the goal and the means they have adopted. The next criterion is last resort. In relation to the present case the question would be whether a police operation, involving counterterrorist tactics would be sufficient to achieve the purpose of self-defense. These principles govern the decision to initiate war.

There are further principles that concern the conduct of war, (Jus in Bello). The first and most important of these is discrimination that is the requirement that those not engaged in the conduct of the war, or noncombatants not be attacked. This is the principle of noncombatant immunity. For the Catholic tradition this is a moral requirement based on the argument that since war may be directed only to self-defense against aggression, only those who are engaged in aggression may be targeted; those who is not so involved must be kept immune from attack. Some regard this as merely a convention. Others, such as Walzer, Orend and in particular the Catholic tradition of just war consider this a binding ethical rule. It has been argued in favor of targeted killing that this enables attacks to be much more discriminate than other means, for example high-level bombing. This argument by itself does not justify drones. The use of high level bombing could be insufficiently discriminate and so immoral; the use of drones might be relatively less indiscriminate but still indiscriminate. We need to examine the relevant facts.

The criterion of discrimination has a two-fold application; first it applies to the process of selecting candidates for execution, second it applies to use of lethal weapons against the chosen candidates. I remind the reader that all the reports we receive of the killings carried out with drones are of ‘suspected’ terrorists. We are being asked by governments to accept the legal and moral justification of executing suspects. There is no judicial process open to public scrutiny by which the persons are designated for execution; nor is there any process by which these persons can be warned beforehand and given the opportunity to surrender. (However, Holder stated recently that when it is feasible to capture a target, targeted killing will not be carried out.)

We can note the language; a person is reduced to a ‘target.’ Through a process of gathering information and making judgments that is not open to judicial review, certain person’s names are added to a ‘kill list.’ It has been reported that in selecting ‘targets’ the presumption is that any male in certain regions is presumed to be a combatant, unless the contrary can be supported by evidence. A front page story in the New York Times, in Spring 2012 reported that Obama would often personally approve the names of terrorism ‘suspects’ to be added to a ‘kill list’ compiled by officials of various government agencies. This evoked the unwelcome image of the Roman emperor giving the thumbs down signal for the killing of a defeated gladiator in amphitheatre. As was noted earlier Michael Walzer is concerned about this process and proposes adding some kind of public accountability by requiring that a committee carry out the judgment on the victims. A secret committee however is hardly adequate to ensuring public accountability.

A further relevant requirement of the just war doctrine is that to justify the use of force
against aggression the attack must be actual or ‘imminent.’ To be justified in responding to aggression the defender is not required to wait until the attack actually begins, to hold back until the tanks are at the door for example. But the aggressor must be demonstrably in the process of preparing to attack: it is not sufficient that a presumed future aggressor is thought to be considering an attack or belongs to a group that has attacked in the past. The accounts of actual targeted killings provided by Scahill would indicate that this rule has often been violated.

The second argument is that, in practice, targeted killing in not sufficiently discriminate. Reports indicate that many civilians have been killed. While the ‘pilots’ of the drones can observe closely the targets at which they aim, it is pointed out by critics that since the focus of the cameras is narrow they may not be able to see what surrounds the targeted person; there may be family members or other non-involved persons, in the vicinity; this is known as ‘the soda straw effect.’ Their vision is limited as would be the vision of someone looking through a soda straw.

Critics also allege that after the initial attack, a second attack is sometimes made on the same target so as to kill by-standers who have come to inspect the damage. Especially problematic are the so called ‘signature attacks.’ These are directed against persons or groups whom intelligence suggests may be involved in terrorist activity; these suspicions are not confirmed. More recent reports indicate that these may be more restricted. However, there is clear evidence that the criterion of discrimination is being violated by the killing of unknown persons.

Proportionality

What is known about the numbers of those killed by drones in the conflicts going on in Afghanistan and Pakistan? In contrast to more conservative official U.S. statements, the accounts provided by the Stanford/New York University report—entitled ‘Living Under Drones’—offers higher figures published by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, an independent organization based at City University in London. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reports that from 2004 through 2013, available data indicate; total strikes 372, total reported killed 2,566-3,570; civilians reported killed 411-890; children reported killed, 167-197; total reported injured 1,182-1,485. On the basis of these killings it must be concluded that the drone attacks fail the criterion of proportionality.

NOTES

2 Time, April 1, 2013.
4 The United States flew highly classified Global Hawk spy drone missions from the Royal Australian Air Force base at Edinburgh in South Australia from late 2001 until at least 2006.
5 The Age, August 3rd. 2013. 20.
11 ‘Why the Use of Drones Should Make Us Un-
The strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

— the damage inflicted by the aggressor or the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave and certain;

— all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;

— there must be serious prospects of success;

— the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the ‘just war’ doctrine.

— *Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2309.*
WHAT REALLY MATTERS

BISHOP ANTHONY FISHER O.P.

Homily for the Conference of the Australian Catholic Theological Association and the Australian Catholic Biblical Association, Shrine of St Mary MacKillop, North Sydney, 2013.

The first Hobbit film grossed over $1bn at the box office. Gandalf the wizard tricks Bilbo the hobbit into joining a band of dwarves seeking to reclaim treasure stolen by an evil dragon. Along the way Bilbo matures, learning what really matters, what battles are worth fighting. But his companions’ development remains arrested, so that when the dragon is ultimately defeated, lust for gold divides them. Only our hobbit returns home satisfied with his little treasure, handing the next adventure over to his nephew Frodo.

Much might be said about the meaning of Tolkein’s epics. We find themes from Catholic social teaching in an age of capitalist exploitation, about reconciliation between races and concerning responsibilities of leaders... As a bishop amidst the child abuse crisis, I take great comfort from what is said about the trials and responsibilities of a ring-bearer. When Frodo says in The Lord of the Rings ‘I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened,’ Gandalf responds, ‘So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world, Frodo, besides the will of evil. Bilbo was meant to find the ring. In which case, you were also meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought.’

If Tolkein speaks to those in authority he also speaks to ‘everyman’ about loyalty, courage and character. Redemption comes through joint adventures for noble ends. His are ecclesial epics, for none of our heroes achieves greatness alone. But for many people today religion no longer plays the prominent role it did in the imagination of the Inklings, and that must affect their understanding not just of ‘The Greatest Story Ever Told’, that of Jesus Christ, but of all those stories told in its shadow.

Dwarfed moral sensibilities and structures of meaning can make it especially hard for people to cope when the hard times come—the poverty, powerlessness or suffering that touches even the Halflings in Tolkein’s cosmic struggle between good and evil.

The seventy-two return in our Gospel (Lk 10:1-12, 17-20), like the dwarves measuring their success by who or what they’ve subjugated. Jesus tells them not to rejoice in their spiritual power but in the heavenly rewards for their efforts. Clericalism is already in his sights, as it is clearly in the sights of his new Vicar, Francis. There’s a lesson in that for us, not just clerics and religious bearing rings of authority, but the theologians and all those whose knowledge of the mysteries gives them a certain spiritual power: that our adventure includes not only the ring bearers and wizards, but dwarves and hobbits and regular people together in a joint struggle for redemption.

* * *

The film musical of Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables opens with ex-convict Jean Valjean freed from his chains but not from the cynicism life had taught him. Then a bishop he has robbed delivers the Good News: ‘By the witness of the martyrs, by the passion and the blood, God has raised you out of darkness: I have bought your soul for God.’ The film follows up with Jean Valjean kneeling in the bishop’s chapel after receiving absolution. He prays fervently that the ‘high plan’ to which he has been called might be realized and concludes, as if quoting Paul on becoming an altogether new creation (Gal 6:14-18): ‘Jean Valjean is nothing now. Another story must begin!’

Like Tolkein’s mercy for the ring-bearer, so Les Mis’ willingness to see good in a bishop is very welcome! But so is the thought that Catholic prayers, sacraments and convents might ac-
tually be good for people: that they can give them a new start, hope, vocation. While the world admires the law-abiding such as officer Javert, the wealth accumulators such as the Thénardiers, or the ideologues at the barricades, *Les Misérables*’ heroes demonstrate that redemption is pure gift from God. And this adds insight to the redemption offered in *The Hobbit.* It is not just through loyal companionship in struggle, but by the pure, undeserved gift of life in Jesus Christ that we are saved.

Which may leave us with a nagging question: what about the outsiders? What about Tolkein’s ‘Smeagol’ or Hugo’s revolutionaries, driven by compulsions or ideology? Are they beyond the pale of redemption?

* * *

A third cinematic treat released last summer was Ang Lee’s film of Yann Martel’s novel, *The Life of Pi.* It’s a fantasy adventure about a boy who survives 227 days at sea after being shipwrecked in a life-boat with a Bengal tiger. President Obama, who read the book with his daughter, declared it an elegant proof both of the existence of God and of the power of story-telling.

Whatever we think of the answers in the book, the question of God is irresistible, it seems, even for the most powerful family on earth. And there are so many related questions, questions as-it-were packed into that one. In the movie young Pi Patel explores various religions in the search for answers. In the novel, when his teacher condemns all religion as darkness, Pi thinks ‘Darkness is the last thing that religion is. Religion is light.’ He wonders if the teacher is testing him, like when he says ‘no mammal lays eggs’ waiting for the boy to respond ‘platypuses do’. In the film it’s his father calls religion darkness and Pi responds by making the sign of the cross and declaring he wants to be baptized!

Perhaps Pope Francis had seen the film before choosing to call his first encyclical *Lumen fidei.* Pi Patel would certainly approve. The Holy Father’s idea is that the light of the cross illuminates all subsequent history; and ‘the light at the end of the tunnel’ that is the Resurrection draws us like moths to itself.

Questioning is useful, Pi concludes; we must even have our times in Gethsemane, like Christ anguished in prayer. ‘But we must move on. To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation.’ Later recalling the days lost at sea, Pi says, ‘It was hard, oh, it was hard. Faith in God is an opening up, a letting go, a free act of love—but sometimes it was so hard to love. Sometimes my heart was sinking so fast with anger, desolation and weariness, I was afraid it would sink to the very bottom of the Pacific.’ So hard until, near drowning point, Pi surrenders to God in the pouring rain, with his arms outstretched like Christ on the cross. God’s grace won by Christ was big enough for this Christian-Muslim-Hindu seeker. If by Abraham are all nations blessed, so we may hope that by the cross of Christ all humanity will one day be reunited and redeemed.

The film concludes by asking us which story is more satisfying: Pi’s with God in it, or the secular world’s story without? It’s a rather post-modern way of framing the question of God. But as Pi concludes in the novel, God doesn’t need us to defend Him: He’ll be just fine whether we believe in Him or not. It’s us who need to be shaped by the questions and answers. It’s us who need Philosophy, Scripture, Theology. It’s us who need the joy of homecoming, like Isaiah’s Israel or Jesus’ 72. Awe and gratitude, hope and love, open us up and faith in Jesus Christ redeems the Jean Valjeans and Bilbos and Pis in each of us. ‘May I never boast—except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!’
FAITH VERSUS NATURALISM

NEIL BROWN

The New Atheism acts like a magnet drawing a congenial array of ‘isms’ to itself, such as secularism, liberalism, utilitarianism, various versions of humanism, and naturalism. It has to be a magnet because in itself it is a ‘denial’ and it needs all the help it can get to be an attractive alternative to religion for modern Westerners. Given that it goes much further than the simple ‘not knowing’ of agnosticism, the New Atheism requires grounding for its ‘denial’, which it finds in scientifically based ‘naturalism’.

Naturalism, a reincarnation of materialism, piggybacks on science, and draws its modern prestige from that free ride, even though it goes far beyond legitimate scientific research methods and findings. Not content with investigating the material world as true science does, naturalism claims that the material universe and all it contains is all there is: all of life, with all its features and activities, is to be understood exclusively within a closed material framework.

Naturalism seems to fit neatly into our modern mindset, which is so highly dependent on the instrumental reasoning of science, technology and commerce: our culture seems more and more focused on material production, resources, goods and services; we live in large anonymous cities with impersonal legal, bureaucratic and governance structures. All of that seems to slide naturally into conceiving the universe and all it contains in a similar vein. Facts rule our lives: subjectivity, heart, soul and values, all struggle to find a toe-hold.

Religious faith, however, is embedded in that threatened subjectivity, with its underpinning systems of relatedness, commitments, meaning, values and purposes—without that soil to grow in faith shrivels.

Naturalism, on the other hand, thrives in that other environment: it takes scientific methodology, which is properly concerned with calculation and empirical observation, and, using its own form of alchemy, turns it into a very saleable commodity:

First, as Kerry Walters in his Atheism: A Guide for the Perplexed so succinctly states: ‘there is nothing in reality that can’t be understood ultimately in material physico-chemical, naturalistic terms’; the only admissible evidence, therefore, for any claim whatsoever must consist in empirical, observable changes in the world—this is then taken to define what ‘reason’ is; so it is not surprising that Richard Dawkins considers God an ‘unequivocally scientific question’.

Secondly, as Sam Harris states, this rules out all religious claims, because there is ‘nothing about this world, or about the world of their experience, that would demonstrate the falsity of their core beliefs’, even ‘the Holocaust’ he goes on, ‘didn’t lead most Jews to doubt the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent God’; this eviscerates all religious claims as personal experience, spiritual benefits and beneficial actions, are all said to be susceptible to naturalistic explanations, thus unleashing a witch-hunt for the most unflattering explanations they can devise for any form of ‘religious’ experience or practice—from ‘placebo’, ‘gullibility’ or gene ‘misfiring’ to an overactive intentional stance creating ‘spiritual beings’ out of fear and ignorance; faith, therefore, is always blind or an exercise in incredulity.

Thirdly, natural selection, ‘the non-random survival of randomly varying hereditary equipment’, plus an ‘improbable’ (but not as improbable as God) series of chance events, is sufficient to describe the world we know -
‘there is no overall plan of development, no blueprint, no architect’s plan, no architect’, it is ‘the only game in town’.\(^6\)

Fourthly, subjectivity and mind are either reduced to or determined by chemical processes and physical mechanisms—as Richard Dawkins explains, citing approvingly a fellow atheist, Julian Baggini, ‘although there is only one kind of stuff in the universe and it is physical, out of this stuff come minds, beauty, emotions, moral values—in short the full gamut of phenomena that gives richness to human life’.\(^7\) A similar fate awaits ‘freedom’, which Kerry Walters describes as ‘illusory’, but because we ‘feel’ free, ‘we accept personal responsibilities and assign social ones as if we were free’.\(^8\)

Fifthly, morality, always problematic in a material universe, receives a circuitous evolutionary explanation via ‘selfish’ genes misfiring, through the intricate manoeuvres of game theory, until some form of reciprocity gains a tenuous foothold through a combination of natural feelings of sympathy and compulsion.\(^9\)

Finally, in this system human meaning can never be ‘intrinsic’ or ‘ultimate’, but only ever be ‘pockets of meaning’ created by ourselves, which ‘have a point or significance, such that it’s well worth living—even if the universe isn’t’;\(^10\) and as Christopher Hitchens adds, we have “the study of literature and poetry” to draw upon, rather than “sacred texts that have been found to be corrupt and confected.”\(^11\)

Despite the long standing Enlightenment fear that belief in God conflicted with human autonomy, it is rather modern disbelief that entails a devaluation of human meaning and value. Naturalism strips humanity to its bare bones and holds that everything else is a matter of physics, chemistry, and survival strategies. While it is true all that is the scaffolding of life, there is also the flesh and blood of human consciousness, reasons of the heart and mind that differentiate human experience, and the sheer inventiveness of the human spirit, none of which can be reduced to its material structures without catastrophic loss.

While science has become ever more successful at mapping the human brain and explaining how it comes to have the content it does, the ‘what’ of consciousness always depends on our own personal accounts of experiencing or thinking or intending. We are always more than physics, chemistry and our genetic packages: we have personal experience, history, culture and community. As subjects we thrive on ideas, meanings, symbols, relationships, commitments, values and choice. Chemical substances and outside physical stimuli, whether medicinal or otherwise, will affect us bodily and mentally, but we are who we are in another realm, and that realm cannot be collapsed to its substratum. To say otherwise is to open ourselves up to those futuristic scenarios where we can be artificially programmed according to some social formula or plan.

From the original ‘stuff’ of the universe has emerged life, consciousness, subjectivity, freedom, culture and spirit: science investigates the physical and chemical properties of this ‘stuff’, but there are also qualitative aspects that are crucial to our humanity; on occasion, even the New Atheists admit that these exist, although they arbitrarily rule religion out of contention as a possible contributor to their meaning.\(^12\)

For the New Atheists the universe is a closed system, an accident waiting to happen, an unfolding algorithm in the vastness of space, until the whole system collapses in on itself.
Quoting E.O. Wilson, Kerry Walters believes that the ‘evolutionary epic, retold as poetry, is as intrinsically ennobling as any religious epic.’

In this same vein, Daniel Dennett lyrically maintains that what is left when God is removed from the equation,

...is what the process shuffling through eternity, mindlessly finds (when it finds anything): a timeless Platonic possibility of order. That is, indeed, a thing of beauty, as mathematicians are forever exclaiming, but it is not itself something intelligent but, wonder of wonders, something intelligible. Being abstract and outside of time, it is nothing with an initiation or origin in need of explanation.

While mathematical equations may be beautiful, there is little to nourish the human heart and soul in that ‘epic’. Yet, despite Dennett’s best efforts to outlaw further questions, the scenario he describes begs for an explanation of where this beauty and ‘intelligibility’ comes from. Yet, again, it is no wonder that these further questions arise given what we understand about ourselves, as Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp ask:

What exactly is it about finite beings who are self-aware, self-transcending, conscious of but also awed and mystified by death, and fascinated by ideas like goodness, truth, and freedom—what is it about such beings that their very existence should seem, at least to many of us, to demand an explanation that grounds those properties in the ultimate source of existence itself?

The New Atheists delight in hurling derogatory epithets at that kind of questioning, such as ‘delusion’, and ‘magical or wishful thinking’, but, within the debate, it does seem that it is the value placed on human life that is the determining factor as to whether or not you look for a ‘personal’ or some other explanation of the universe beyond naturalism and its put-downs. The well known author and scientist Paul Davies, for example, because he does regard ‘life’ and ‘mind’ as ‘special’, searches for ‘life friendly laws’ to account for this value, even if he does not go as far as belief in God—still, for him, more than physics and chemistry are required to explain who we are.

There is much to debate about with regard to the origins and make-up of the universe, but the British philosopher, John Cottingham, offers some important advice about one important way forward that should not be overlooked:

What does the work in bringing people to God is not intellectual debates about the transcendent, but the immanent aspects of religion—the transformative power of religious ideas and practice in our human lives and experience. Belief in a God who transcends all natural categories of thought comes as result of trust and involvement in a living community of faith...

The evolutionary epic offers little to support such values as unconditional love, justice as redistribution, breaking through the barriers of reciprocity to those in need, gratitude, forgiveness, intrinsic human worth and meaning, hope, and a way to understand suffering and the plight of victims of injustice and atrocity. Why also, given the evolutionary epic, should our response to one another be ‘sympathy’ as the New Atheists seem to take for granted? Why not ‘cupidity’ and ‘avarice’, which Christopher Hitchens reminds us are ‘by a nice chance... the spur to economic development’, just as he finds ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’ ‘too extreme and too strenuous’.

It is not that atheists can’t be moral, but that morality requires an ‘epic’ able to provide meaning and values to live by—in reality, the tooth and claw story of survival, without any other dimension to it, is so bleak and flat a view of human life that it tends to subvert meaning and value rather than enhance it. If that is the ‘epic’ that wins the day, life and culture as we know it will change dramatically.

Naturalism arbitrarily closes the universe to anything ‘beyond’, and so closes human experience in on itself. Richard Dawkins, a little too conveniently, supposes that all reli-
Religious experience consists in hearing ‘voices’, but that is not what believers ordinarily mean when they speak of their religious experience—what they refer to is that within their practice of such things as love of others, caring for creation, seeking justice, forgiveness and worship, they experience a ‘Presence’ that they have come to recognise as the Presence of God.

As human beings we rely on many ways to come to conclusions about each other and our world, in particular, about the qualitative dimensions of life, which escape the narrow and sometimes destructive, confines of ‘instrumental reason’—such ways as perception, aesthetics, empathy, metaphysics, moral reasoning and consideration of virtue, and most fundamental of all, our coming to love one another.

Kerry Walters, one of the most reflective of the New Atheists, admits that at base ‘naturalism’ is a ‘choice’, ‘a matter of non-scientific opinion or ideology which is hard to separate from personal preferences’. This is so, because as many have pointed out, naturalism, as a theory, can’t measure up to its own rigorous principles of empirical verification.

Our own religious experience then may lead us to make other ‘choices’. Coming to faith is both personal and relational, and is based on the evidence of our reflection and experience as pieces of the jigsaw of life fall into some kind of order. We will not find an ‘object’ of the kind that science is able to investigate, but rather find that the traces of the divine in the universe, the personal glimpses and intimations we have, the energies we experience, and the values we discover, all converge so that we are ‘found’ by God in faith.

This faith will be an affirmation of our human subjectivity and agency, which exist so precariously in our modern world. It will also open up for us a way to understand, value and respect other faiths, which New Atheism’s disparaging epithets dangerously undermine. Faith in God is the choice that truly accepts who we are in all our aspirations and frailty, and provides the meaning and value our hearts and souls so desperately need.

NOTES

5 See The God Delusion, 163-207; Breaking the Spell, 97-152.
7 The God Delusion, 13-14.
10 Atheism: A Guide for the Perplexed, 139-149.
12 See The God Delusion, 54-61; The End of Faith, 204-214.
14 Breaking the Spell, 243-4.
18 God is Not Great, 255.
19 The God Delusion, 154.
21 See for example, Sam Harris’ dismissal of Islam, The End of the Faith, 108-152, 223-7.
A LAINE DE BOTTON’S argument in his book *Religion for Atheists* is that we have secularised badly. It is not that he is against secularism. He remains a staunch atheist throughout the book. It is just that atheism has been carelessly negligent. It has not catered for the ‘the needs of the soul, which are to learn, to love and inwardly grow’ (p291).\(^1\)

One can mostly agree. But de Botton underestimates the extent to which society has moved to meet these needs with something that is nearly a religion, and for a small but significant section of society, with something that actually is part of religion.

It is common for religious people to have a crisis of faith. Did de Botton ever have a crisis of faithlessness? Did he ever teeter on the edge of theism? He did. His feelings of doubt had their origin in listening to Bach’s cantatas, were developed by certain Bellini Madonnas and became ‘overwhelming’ when he was introduced to Zen architecture. De Botton resisted this onslaught and remained an atheist.

What de Botton was experiencing was not new. As the church has long known, art may function as an ante-chamber of religion. That is especially so of music. Listening to music is a metaphysical experience. The awareness of harmony in the notes is not something done by the ears, nor is the response to the harmony done by the brain. The attention to the harmony and the attendant feeling are the work of the spirit. It is the spirit that is transported by music. Which is why it lends itself so readily to religion.

The prolific biographer AN Wilson, previously a theist but now an atheist, remarked that, notwithstanding his atheism, whenever he heard Beethoven’s music, he would always think of God. No one expresses the power and tenderness of God better than Beethoven.

Many millions of people play great music on their electronic equipment. Without knowing it, they are engaged in a metaphysical experience on the threshold of religion, so it is not difficult for the greatest composers, Bach, Beethoven and Mozart, to carry them over. De Botton uses the word ‘sublime’ only once in his book, and experiences of the sublime are not uncommon in listening to music. It is impossible to say whether some parts of the choral movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony are religious or not. The same is true of Mozart’s slow concerti. The sublime is of a higher order of experience, partly in heaven.

Now for the part of real religion that has been absorbed by a section of society. These are the arguments to the existence of God from nature. The basic insight is that we can learn something from a work about its maker—we learn something of a book about it’s author, and from the book of nature we learn something about the Author of Nature. We learn that He is responsible for the orderliness of the world, or that He is necessary, whereas the world is contingent, or that there is a First Cause of the world, which we call God.

Some of these arguments are as old as Aristotle, but it is the Church which has carried and fostered them throughout history, so much so, that they came to be regarded as Catholic intellectual property, just as the Talmud is Jewish intellectual property. Well into the 1960’s, you could be sure that if anyone was advancing an argument for the existence of God, it was a Catholic.

But over the past fifty years, that has changed. The arguments for the existence of God are now part of mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, and there they live independently, debated by the most able philosophers in the world. That is a major achievement, largely unrecognised. Natural theology has become part...
of the subject matter of Anglo-Saxon philosophy, and probably, world philosophy.

There was no campaign to bring that about. Catholic philosophers like Maritain, Gilson and Frederick Copleston in the 1950’s and early 1960’s believed that they had a reasonable case for belief in God, and kept on advancing it. The next generation, though less well known, did likewise, and soon, the profession as a whole took up the case for reasonable belief as an issue worth investigating, and now it is firmly established on the agenda.

That was a major achievement, comparable, though perhaps less momentous, to the Russian Church making the idea of the suffering servant part of Russian culture, and comparable, if Newman is correct, to the British Church making the idea of Providence part of the national psyche, though he made that claim in 1870.

The international philosophical community is, of course, a fragment of the whole, but potential fallout is immense. Witness Dawkins’ impact in Britain, the United States and Australia. He represents the atheist faction of international philosophy. But he has plenty of able, though less well known, adversaries who deserve more publicity.

There is a prospect of spirituality being made part of the broader community. To some extent, that is already happening with yoga. Yoga is bringing meditation into the whole world, even into serious mental health care, and it looks like it’s here to stay, to the benefit of everyone. Spirituality extends well beyond meditation, and most importantly, it is complemented by prayer. We should remember St Bernard’s claim in his controversy with Abelard: ‘We search in a worthier manner, we discover with greater facility through prayer than through disputation.’

The contemporary world is interested in results. We must make it clear what the discoveries are. There are many, of course, but one which recommends itself to a busy world, is St Teresa’s Fourth Mansion, in which we are united to God inwardly while engaged in our day to day tasks, whatever they may be. St Teresa writes that though she is experiencing physical turmoil, ‘the tranquility and love in my soul are quite unaffected.’ Elsewhere she writes that we may be ‘wholly united with Him in the Mansions very near His presence while thought remains in the outskirts of the Castle’. Hence it is something that may be aspired to by a mother looking after her children, a bus driver driving a bus, a magistrate on the bench, or a chef preparing a meal—indeed by anyone engaged in work. How we get there from here is the next question, and there is no shortage of practical advice, as this journal attests.

So secular society contains something, music which can be so close to religion that it occasionally passes into it, and it has appropriated natural theology and is assimilating meditation. It is capable of absorbing spirituality as well.

Dostoyevsky was accused of trying to turn Russia into a gigantic monastery. That, of course, is going too far. But there is everything to be said for making secular society less secular.

REFERENCES

5. Ibid. p77.
REVELATION OF A PERSON v. REVELATION OF TRUTHS—A NOTE

FRANK MOBBS

‘And so the Council produced the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum). In this document the Council emphasised that revelation is above all God’s self-communication, and is not to be reduced to a communication of truths’, remarked the Editor in the Autumn 2012 edition of Compass.

The quotation is a summary of his brief report on an important change from (a) the account of the nature of divine revelation which dominated theology in the period prior to the Council to (b) that contained in Dei Verbum. Seeing that others have made the same point, I thought it worthwhile to explore what this claim is worth.

What two versions of revelation are being contrasted? On the one hand, revelation is God’s self-communication. That is the Council’s teaching, the Editor asserts. On the other, revelation consists in communicating truths. So it looks as if God’s self-communication does not consist in the communication of truths only, but truths and something else. What might this be?

The answer becomes clear by considering a necessary condition of communicating. In both the specified kinds of communication, communication occurs only if the recipient comes to have beliefs. It does not make sense to say, ‘God communicated with me but did not bring about any beliefs in me.’ At the least, I would have to come to believe that God was doing the communicating, that he intended to communicate, and that there is a content to the communication, e.g., ‘I created the cosmos.’

Now the content of a belief is commonly called a proposition. If God reveals himself then he necessarily reveals truths about himself—through God’s action I come to believe facts about God.

Facts are the contents of true beliefs and beliefs are said to be ‘true’ in that their contents are true propositions. Indeed, the only things which are literally true are propositions. Here I use ‘true’ with the sense it has in, say, It is true that the Earth is round. Of course, a denial can be true, as in, It is false that the Earth is triangular.

I take it that when God reveals, either by his actions which give reason to believe certain propositions, say, that he cares for humans or he declares that certain propositions are true. His declarations can take many forms, such as uttering words through a prophet or angel or uttering them directly to the recipient. Such acts of revealing always involve revealing something about himself—thus he is self-communicating, as is the case when a human communicates. At the least he would reveal that he is a communicator and that he has intentions of communicating but that is incidental to his revealing a truth of a proposition more substantive. Indeed, if God does not reveal that certain propositions are true, then he fails to reveal anything, for even a revelation of himself would have to consist of propositions in order to qualify as the contents of beliefs about him.

I find untenable a distinction between God’s revealing himself and his communicating truths. Even in the case of God’s communicating truths, one is believing him because he says so and that is inter-personal communication.¹

THE SPIRIT OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA

DAN O’DONOVAN

IN THE SUMMER 2013 issue of Australian Catholics, which takes as its theme, The Spirit of Indigenous Australia, well-known leader Vicki Walker-Clark, of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Melbourne, is quoted as saying:

What else is there we can do now? The Church isn’t even asking the question any more. I would really like to see a gathering of Aboriginal people from around the Catholic community talking about this very thing.

The front cover of that same issue shows a painting by Indigenous artist, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, of Nauiyu (Daly River, N.T.), titled, The Tree of Life.

During these last two or three decades, the Indigenous voice has become resoundingly heard through some eloquent, convincing speakers. Political, social, economic fields of action humming with creative endeavour, well publicised through the media.

In one article for The Weekend Australian, April 24-25, 2010, Noel Pearson writes,

It is hard to capture the intangible engines of human motivation in a service plan or a program plan. Services and programs can be only secondary enablers and supports. Without the primary drivers there will be no fundamental and lasting change.

At this level of individual, the engine of human motivation that must be mobilised is self-interest...

In that same article, Pearson speaks of ‘the absence of hope.’ Again, in his book, Up from the Mission, Selected Writings, Black Inc., 2011, page 200: ‘We need new hope.’

This present article is a non-Indigenous attempt to respond to Vicki’s question, ‘What else is there we can do now?’ and to express my agreement with Noel on the matter of ‘motivation’ and ‘self-interest’, granted their religious (Christian) grounding.

It appears to me that our efforts, nationally, of late, supported in such a wealth of scholarship, are neglecting one vital aspect of Indigenous advancement.

Not that it is wholly absent, but that it has got lost, buried beneath a weight of hard crust, all but impenetrable—‘the secular’.

From government down, the resourceful striving to remedy Indigenous ills seems to have reached a dead-end. (Two more young Christian suicides last week, here in this small Dampier Peninsula. One of them, Catholic.)

Toward the end of a life’s research across the vast terrain of comparative religion, Mircea Eliade arrived at this conviction: ‘The ‘sacred’ is an element in structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness.’

Religion may be defined as motivated self-discipline. The motivation comes from one’s particular faith; for us Christians, what we call ‘the Gospel’.

Pearson’s ‘self’ (community) needs closer study than we have so far come up with. A widening, strengthening of the base.

II

To start with: I am aware of the reality Nicholas Rothwell has so clearly drawn attention to recently of there being, in fact, two divergent Aboriginal situations in Australia—the ‘urban’ and the ‘remote’, or rural; and of its immediate bearing on our present topic: revival.

The following material, somewhat aca-
demic in flavour perhaps, is offered in the hope that Indigenous scholarship, so brilliantly articulate in secular politics, may take up the subject of the place and form of *sacrality* in the rugged Aboriginal here-and-now.

Not so many years ago, I was shaken to my core by finding, in the writing of Miriam-Rose Ungumerr-Baumann, a passage which repeats, in Aboriginal Christian terms, one of the most suggestive statements about Nature-contemplation of 7th century spiritual luminary, Maximus Confessor, in chapter 32 of his great work, *Questions to Thalassios*.

Maximus is the last eminent theologian of the age of the Greek ‘Fathers’; initiator, one might say, of the Byzantine school.

I will quote first the words of Maximus concerning the contemplation of Nature, then the words of Miriam-Rose.

1) Maximus Confessor.

‘What do the words mean, ‘He made from one every nation of the world, having determined certain periods and the boundaries of every people’s country, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might grope after God and find God...’ (Acts of the Apostles, 17, 27). How is it that, groping, one can find God?

Reply:

‘Whoever sees the outside of things not according to sensation but, piercing through each visible symbol by means of the mind, and grasping passively the Godward word (*logos*) hidden in each, that person finds God in the word.

Groping through the heap of material externals, he tries to find, hidden within each of them, the precious pearl ungraspable by bodily senses, that is to say, its *’logos’*, (inner word, meaning).

Likewise whoever, not content with touching the outside of visible things by means of the bodily senses, but wisely searching with the faculty of intelligence for the *’logos’* each created thing contains, that person finds God because, through the things produced, he comes to know the Cause which produced them.

Discernment is the property of ‘groping’. So, whoever knowledgeably approaches the symbols (externals), and sees understandingly with his eyes the outside of things, - applying his discernment to Scripture (I), to Nature (II) and to the Self (III) – and distinguishing literal and spiritual sense in the Scripture, *’logos’* and outer appearance in Nature, sensation and intelligence in the Self; taking the spiritual meaning in Scripture, the *’logos’* in Nature, the mind in the Self, to unite them together indissolubly—such a person has found God in that they have recognised, as far as is necessary and possible, the God present in them.

‘On the other hand, anyone who mixed these things up—the letter (of Scripture), the superficial (of Nature), and one’s own outer sense-perceptions, is ‘blind and myopic’ (2 Peter 1,9), victim of the disease which is ignorance of the cause of things.’

2) Miriam-Rose Ungumerr-Baumann

‘This is what I long for: that (I), with the words that come to us in the Gospel of Jesus, everyone will come to listen to the Sound of God. We all have to try to listen—to the God within us, to our own country and to one another...’

There is no need to reflect too much and to do a lot of thinking. It is just being aware (II). My people are not threatened by silence. They are completely at home in it. They have lived for thousands of years with Nature’s quietness. My people today recognise and expe-
perience in this quietness the great Life-giving Spirit, the Father of us all. It is easy for me to experience God’s presence. When I am out hunting, when I am in the bush, among the trees, on a hill or by a billabong, these are times when I can simply be in God’s presence. My people have been so aware of Nature. It is natural that we will feel close to the Creator...

Today, I am beginning to hear the Gospel at the very level of my identity (III). I am beginning to feel the great need we have of Jesus—to protect and strengthen our identity, and to make us whole and new again.

If our culture is alive and strong and respected, it will grow. It will not die.

And our spirit will not die.’

Miriam-Rose, unwittingly, I would guess, or in other words by ‘in-spiration’—has passively hit upon the same graced intuition as Maximus Confessor, expressing it more simply, more personally, less philosophically.

But then, Maximus was a Greek, wasn’t he.

WORDS TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY

To you, the students,

This International Day is about you. It is a day when our cultures are celebrated and recognised as being of great value and a gift to the world.

For over forty thousand years our culture knew about this thing that was bigger than our own self: Yuranbull, Wadjina, Bunjal, Biami, God. Our lives were linked very closely through ceremony and lore, over thousands of years, to this being that showed itself to us in the many forms of our Dreamings.

Some four thousand years ago a man called Abraham, the Father of our Christian faith, also knew Creator being, Yahweh. This always astounds me and is why I can really believe in this living God. This God who still speaks to us today through our Culture and our faith is the God of Abraham.

One hundred and seventy years ago this year we came to learn more about this person Jesus the Son of the Living God. His teachings have supported and strengthened our belief in this God who manifests itself in the many things and peoples around us. We have always been people of faith. Today is no different. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are still the same.

Today you must take this opportunity which is before you through the education you are receiving to learn all you can about this modern world. This knowledge you gain will be the tool you will need to be able to move through your life and get the balance right between your own cultures and the modern world. As you can see you are not alone. Walk together. Have faith.

If there is one thing I can leave with you, it would be this:

Remember who you are and where you come from. Yes, learn the new way but also search and celebrate who you are as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is who you are and although things may change it is the great gift the Creator gave to us at the beginning of time. I wish you well.

—Graeme Mundine, Executive Officer, Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Sydney.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students’ Mass, St Mary’s Cathedral, 9th August, 2013, Celebrating The International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. The Mass was attended by hundreds of indigenous students from Catholic schools in the Sydney Archdiocese. By 2014 more than 1000 indigenous students will attend Sydney Catholic Schools.
I share my reflection of a pilgrimage that I attended hosted by The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) which was their Way of Peace event for 2013. It marked the fifteenth anniversary of the first WCCM pilgrimage to India, which initiated the Way of Peace programme. Of that original pilgrimage, His Holiness the Dalai Lama recently wrote: ‘In 1998 I joined as historic pilgrimage of practitioners of both the Christian and Buddhist traditions in prayers, meditation and dialogue in Bodhgaya... Each morning under the Bodhi tree, we all sat together and meditated, which I think was historic.’

Rather than provide a travel log of the whole pilgrimage I would like to share my reflection on three places that spoke to me especially: Sarnath, Boudhanath and Bodghaya. I will share my experience of each in turn.

**Sarnath**

Sarnath is where the Buddha gave his first teaching at a place called Deer Park. We meditated as a group at this site and the meditation and the setting was peaceful, open and relaxing. I experienced it as a much needed break from the frenetic pace of travel. I was touched by the stillness and tranquility that inhabited this place. The restfulness and the sacredness of the site acted on me as something of a salve soothing my weariness. Up to that time I hadn’t had much quiet time in India. We had arrived in Saranath via an overnight train trip from Kolkutta, and our timetable in Kolkutta and surrounds had been very busy.

Sarnath was billed as the highlight of the pilgrimage as we enjoyed a day of dialogue, prayer and meditation on Saturday January 12, led by the Dalai Lama and Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB. I will share a few thoughts from the speakers on the day. When introducing the Dalai Lama, Fr Laurence said of him that ‘he doesn’t play a role, that he is the same, when he is on his own, with friends or in public life’.

Fr Laurence spoke about being a disciple of Jesus, ‘My centre of gravity is in the person of Jesus...the centre of gravity straightens me out little by little...we awaken to the inner Christ...the historical Jesus is present within us...at the heart of the human is the possibility of inner expansion. There is an experience of awakening to him and in him. It is a continuous one. I experience Christ in me and being able to recognise the kingdom in each other-Christian or not...For me the connection between the historical Jesus and the inner Christ is the most interesting and mysterious connection in my life. And to feel connected with that makes me feel connected with everything in this world.’

The Dalai Lama spoke about the Buddhist way as using ‘human intelligence to transform our human emotions. The non-soul theory tries to help reduce human pride and arrogance and self-centeredness. Arrogance is the basis of all destructive emotions including hatred and anger... It’s our ego that holds onto resentments, wanting to punish, to be right. It is important to sit in silence in order to build spiritual relationships in harmony together...the way to enlightenment is through serious practice- the practices of morality, concentration and wisdom.’
The Dalai Lama added that ‘I think it is very interesting to see Jesus, ‘The Christ’, not just as some kind of historical symbol, but as each of us carrying something like the nature of God, or a blessing of God. That is what Christ symbolises. We carry that cross in a real sense in our heart. Because God blessed it. That is, in a different sort of words, but quite similar with Buddha Nature’.

**Boudhanath**

Boudhanath in Kathmandu, Nepal is a world heritage site and a place of sacred pilgrimage to Buddhists. Boudhanath means Lord of Wisdom and is considered to be a protective, purificatory and wish-granting stupa. I didn’t experience any of those effects but I found it had a peaceful and prayerful ambience; indeed I experienced it as grace-filled.

A friend and I enjoyed a morning tea on a terrace overlooking the stupa and we were joined later by another of our group for lunch. Much of the time we sat silently taking some well needed time out on this sunny terrace. I wrote in my journal at the time, ‘The stupa had a softening and relaxing effect on me—it was something like the effects of the sun’s rays calming my soul’. The peace and ease of this place was a welcome contrast to much of the bedlam of northern India.

Boudhanath is strewn with miles of Nepalese prayer flags with the wind blowing the prayers and mantras of the pilgrims to spread good will and compassion to all in that place. I appreciated this devotion and I bought some prayer flags myself in Nepal and have hung them on my deck at home. I love to see them flutter in the breeze, blessing my home and the people therein. It reminds me of the nearness and loving kindness of God whose presence can be sensed in the gentle breeze.

**Bodhgaya**

Bodhgaya is the most important of all Buddhist pilgrimage sites. We initially visited Mahakala cave, where the Buddha practiced a strict asceticism prior to his enlightenment which had a prayerful, meditative atmosphere. We then visited the place where the Buddha renounced the extremes of asceticism. Under a banyan tree he accepted rice pudding from a milk maid thereby taking up the middle path and thankfully avoiding starvation.

And then the most holy of holies for me was visiting the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment, the Bodhi tree. Our group held Eucharist and had an extended group meditation at the site which I found very moving. I wrote in my journal at the time, ‘I was charmed by Bodhgaya—it felt like a truly holy and spiritual place’. It was full of the sights and sounds of thousands of monks praying, chanting, prostrating and circumnavigating the Bodhi tree and temple. Though the sacred site was very active and filled with movement and sound, it exuded a sense of stillness and calmness. I felt blessed to have been there.

One final experience which touched me was travelling with a group of fellow pilgrims who were from across the world and of different ages and backgrounds. I enjoyed sharing prayer, meditation, good conversation and visiting and discussing exotic places with the other pilgrims. We had a lot of fun and laughter and our share of difficulties on the journey. Yet we were joined by regular meditation together and a common desire to understand and to experience more deeply our own and one another’s spirituality. An effect of the pilgrimage on me was that I grew in appreciation of my own Christian faith and developed a greater understanding and respect for the Buddhist path.

Early on in his most recent book, James Charlton poses an important question for the student of Western theology. He asks if it is ‘matter’ that has ‘prevented humanity’s greater access to wisdom and compassion?’ (p.18) The question is certainly a legitimate one, and the book attempts to answer with a strong ‘No’. Reading some of the dominating voices of the Western theological canon, dualism—the dividing of matter and spirit—is a commonly found theme or underlying presupposition. Is there, however, a case to argue that dualism has had negative consequences in the spiritual development of Western minds? It is a question Charlton forces us, at the very least, to consider.

*Non-Dualism in Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne: A Theopoetic Reflection* is Charlton’s third book. In 2001 he published *Luminous Bodies* (Montpelier Press) and followed this up with *So Much Light* (Pardalote Press, 2007). Both of these are poetry collections. And *Non-dualism*, despite its academic nature, is clearly the fruit of many years of poetic and theological reflection. Indeed, the book is filled with Charlton’s own poetry, illustrating and illuminating his ‘theopoetic’ reflections upon the three writers whom he contends ‘share what might be described as qualified or moderate non-dualism’ (p.1). The question Charlton poses that was quoted at the beginning of this review seems to me to be central to the book’s main thesis: namely, that Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Thomas Traherne correct the tendency of Western thought to dualistic categories, collapsing the boundaries between transcendence and immanence by their non-dualistic spiritualties. In demonstrating this the book is original in a number of ways and I am amazed that Charlton has been able to fit so much into it in terms of methodologies and content. His skilful weaving of his own poetry into an examination of Eckhart, Julian of Norwich and Traherne, with the more thorough-going Hindu non-dualism of Ramana Maharshi as a counterpoint, makes for an interesting, if confronting, thesis.

As a historian of Christianity myself, I personally would have liked to have read more about the histories of the individuals discussed in the book. For example, did Traherne, as an Anglican, rebel against dualist theologies then present in his seventeenth-century Anglican milieu? This is not a criticism so much as an observation made by a curious reader. Perhaps a more philosophical point to raise would be my belief (I would not go so far as to call it a conviction) that Christianity cannot ever wholly escape a certain element of dualism, though there is no question its more negative excesses do need to be exorcized from Western spirituality. Dualism always needs to be reined-in and Charlton has produced a highly convincing case, at the very least, for the integration of a moderate non-dualism into Western theology. To be sure, the book is not easy reading, but it is an outstanding and highly original achievement. Moreover its thesis is, as Charlton asserts, ‘confronting’—confronting not only because it challenges a common Western theological category, but ‘because … [i]t confronts us with potential layers of meaning that require response’ (p.93). Anyone interested in the fundamental questions of theology and spirituality will want to consult Charlton’s book.

—Robert Andrews, University of Notre Dame Australia (Fremantle)

It is almost never the case that the view of an institution, especially a church, is the same from the inside as it is from the outside. As an outsider, my view would be different from that of a long time insider like Scruton.

What he says from the inside is, nevertheless, mostly recognisable to an outsider, even one living in Australia, as is his view that God is an Englishman, 'uncomfortable in the presence of enthusiasm, reluctant to make a fuss, but trapped into making public speeches.' [p.40] His frequent nut shell descriptions of the Anglican Church are wonderful, for example, ‘the Anglican Church emerged from the smoke and gun fire (of the Civil War) as a creative muddle, a genial mixture of belief and scepticism, of Christian devotion and ironical self doubt.’ (p.78)

An outsider is struck by the pervasive Calvinism within the Anglican Church at all levels, manifest in the persistent scepticism and the occasional anti-Catholicism. Scruton, on the other hand, sees a major departure from Calvinism in the Sacraments within the Anglican church. In fact, the importance of these is a major theme in the book, and Scruton gives a forceful defence of them. The Sacraments, he writes, provide ‘the ordinary sinful person’, for whom the Anglican Church exists, with ‘a point of intersection of the timeless with time.’ Moreover, England itself is a kind of Sacrament, ‘the nostalgic vision of our country that lies at the heart of the Anglican faith.’ Hence becoming a Roman Catholic is one way of rejecting England, he alleges.

Which Sacraments matter most? His view of Christianity is highly redemptoral. At the centre of Christianity is Christ’s crucifixion as a propitiation for our sins. It looks like penance is the Sacrament that should matter most, and, in fact, Scruton regrets the absence of a special sacrament of penance within Anglicanism.

Hence the Eucharist becomes the Sacrament of expiation, of atonement. But it has another aspect as well, to symbolize the exchange of love between the soul and God – ‘I in thee and thou in me.’ To be fair to Scruton, he does mention that, but union with God doesn’t loom large in his vision of Christianity.

There is little emphasis on the inwardness of religion in the book, which may explain why Scruton misses a big one about English culture. When one looks at Russian literature, one is struck by the huge religious presence in the great novelists, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, and one can sense it in Solzhenitsyn. It is completely lacking in the English novelists, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Charles Dickens and D.H. Lawrence.

But it is there in abundance in English poetry, which is the inner voice of English literature. For example, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Crashaw, Vaughan, Dryden, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Hopkins, Oscar Wilde (‘The Ballad of Reading Gaol’), R S Thomas, Belloc, Chesterton, T.S. Eliot. And there are more. English poetry is a God-bearer, just as Russian novels are. Could it be that Scruton misses the English soul?

What made the Anglican Church, repeats Scruton, are the Authorized Version of the Bible, and the Book of Common Prayer, and these are now going, or gone. Hence he is pessimistic about the future of the Anglican Church. But it is likely to be more resilient than he anticipates.

The book is provocative and delightful.

—Reg Naulty


In his recent book, *The God Argument*, the prolific atheist author A.C.Grayling, gives the impression that the atheist side is prevailing in the debate with ridiculous ease. This collection of articles by fourteen scholars shows
that this is not so. Some of them are theists and some are atheists, all well positioned in British academia, and the theists turn in a commendable performance against formidable opponents. It is a great contest.

The first paper is by Richard Swinburne, arguably the most outstanding proponent of the theist arguments for the last thirty years. He is not well known, since he writes mainly for his peers (he is an Oxford professor). He has written one book for a wider readership Is There a God? but as it is written for his daughter, it lacks polemical intent, and has not set him directly against the atheist opposition. The article here is entitled ‘God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe’. The argument is that simplicity is the criterion which favours God against competing explanations as the cause of the universe. God emerges from his paper as everlasting omnipotence, plus perfect freedom. God’s other attributes follow from that. Swinburne makes some noteworthy points. He has a restricted notion of divine omniscience. God’s omniscience is restricted to all truths about the past and all necessary truths (including the necessary moral truths, p.17). Conspicuously absent is foreknowledge of human choices.

Another very interesting point is that God has not been considered as timeless by mainstream Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy. Instead, God is held to be everlasting. One reads this with some relief. If God and eternity were timeless, it is hard to see how anything could happen, since all happenings take time.

The second article defends the fine tuning argument from its critics. This argument has it that the universe is fine tuned for life; that is, had the universe been slightly different physically, life would have been impossible. Where there is fine tuning, there must be a fine Tuner.

That is challenged by Richard Norman in another article, which seeks to strengthen Dawkins’ case. ‘The theistic hypothesis may be simply stated’ Norman writes, ‘but the existence and agency of such a being stands much more in need of explanation than what it is supposed to explain’ (p.107). This argument turns up in other contexts, and should be resisted. If the conditions favourable to the emergence of life are together too much of a coincidence, there must be something else which explains them, even if it is currently mysterious. There are parallels in science. When an object in space passes close to the earth it is sometimes pulled by a force in to the earth. That force is called a gravitational field, which is more mysterious than an object falling to earth. But we give it a name and wait for further elucidation.

There is another objection Norman raises, an old one, about how can mind causally affect matter. Science has helped with this one. It has been discovered that small electric currents run through nerve membranes in the brain. These generate an electromagnetic field around them. These fields are not tangible, but they do have at least one property of matter. Light is part of an electro-magnetic field, and it is bent on its way past the sun, due to the gravitational pull of the sun. So electromagnetic fields have one property, i.e. weight. They have some, but not all properties of matter. Perhaps mind influences the brain through the field. As Bertrand Russell once remarked, modern science has shown that physical nature is less material than people thought.

The book contains articles on Darwinism, Purpose and Meaning, Christianity and the Errors of our Time, Spirituality for the Godless, Living in the Light of Religious Ideals (mainly about Kierkegaard). They are mostly philosophical. There are two mainly religious articles, one about sacrifice and the other about the Incarnation. The book concludes with a useful article on toleration.

About four of the articles would be for specialist readers only. Unfortunately, Swinburne’s is one of them. The other ten articles should be accessible to the general reader. This would be a good book for a library to purchase.

—Reg Naulty
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 the readings for Sundays between October 2013 and January 2014, from the Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year C to the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

1. The First readings generally are selected with the Gospel reading for the specific Sunday in mind. This could appear to make the first reading simply a precursor to the Gospel. However it would be important to allow the unique insights and celebration of the First ('Old') Testament readings to be honoured in their own right. The First Testament readings between November 2013 to January 2014 fall into three main types of literature: prophetic (Is, Mal, Zech, Zeph), historical (2 Sam, Mac) and wisdom (Sirach).

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

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

2. The Second Reading for each Sunday is drawn from the letters of the New (or ‘Second’) Testament, with the exception of the Feast of the Baptism (Jan 12) when the reading is from Acts 10. This reading is very important. It sets up the future missionary agenda for Paul in the Book of Acts. God’s community is called to be inclusive of all peoples, rather than exclusive. This is a central baptismal theme to be celebrated on this particular feast. Apart from Acts 10, the rest of the selections for the second reading are from letters by Paul himself (Romans during Advent, and 1 Corinthians on OT 2 to 3), his disciples
(for example, in 2 Thessalonians on OT 32 and 33; Colossians on the Feast of Christ the King—which might be called the Feast celebrating Jesus’ Universal Authority) or the Catholic epistle of James (Advent 3). This broad selection of various writings from early Jesus households offers a glimpse of the vitality of their lives and some of the pastoral issues they faced.

- **2 Thessalonians**, written towards the late first century, deals with concerns about the delay of the second coming of Jesus and the need for disciples to be alert to God’s coming—appropriate readings for the final Sundays of the liturgical year.
- **Ephesians and Colossians**, penned perhaps in the 70s, to Jesus disciples living in Asia Minor, present an image of Jesus as Lord of the universe, and of Christians called to holiness in their union with Jesus, confident of his presence in their struggles.
- **Romans**, Paul’s great epistle written about 57 CE from Corinth, presents the maturity of his theological reflection, especially God’s plan for all people and desire for salvation. These ideas can be well developed in the celebration of Advent as our parish and faith communities look to God’s care in the midst of their challenges.
- **1 Corinthians** is an important letter from Paul, written around 57 CE from Ephesus. It is heard in 2014 in the first Sundays of Ordinary Time. In the letter Paul attempts to address issues of elitism and factionalism amongst the Corinthian disciples of Jesus, concerns that are still with us. Pope Francis offers fresh insights about this for today’s church.


- We conclude ‘the Year of Luke’ with texts from Lk 20 and 21. These encourage us to embrace a spirit of theological watchfulness to what is happening and an alertness to God’s presence in the events that occur. These readings prepare for the final Lukan reading on the Feast of Christ the King (Nov 24), where the dying Jesus offers compassion and forgiveness to a repentant criminal. Within our Australian context, this gospel reading subverts the conventional image of leadership. Luke portrays a leadership exemplified by compassion and forgiveness. Given the political discourse over asylum seekers in 2013 around the time of our federal elections, compassion remains a national issue. Again, Pope Francis’ words on this and related topics are relevant.

- The new liturgical year which begins on Advent 1 (Dec 1) also commences our readings from Matthew’s Gospel. This will be the principal gospel throughout the rest of the liturgical year in 2014. Written in the mid 80s of the first century to Jewish followers of Jesus, it presents Jesus as the authoritative presence of God who is able to interpret the Torah for disciples in a time of dire change. Advent 1, when Mt is first proclaimed, continues the theme of watchfulness, and subsequent Sundays prepare us for the coming of the teacher-like-Moses, Jesus. The readings in the first Sundays of OT from Mt begin to explore the nature of Jesus’ ministry (OT 3).

**PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS**

**October 6—Ordinary Time 27**: Hab 1:2-3; 2:2-4. The prophet cries to God for deliverance from violence. God offers a vision of the possible. 2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14. The leader is encouraged to be a person of integrity, reflection and trust. Lk 17:5-10. The disciple is encouraged to act authentically. Theme—Acting in Faith: In a world of violence, the disciple must retain a perspective and trust centred on God. Local communities abound with living examples of such contemporary disciples.

**October 13—Ordinary Time 28**: 2 Kings 5:14-17. A Syrian (and foreign) army-officer obeys God’s prophet from Israel and is healed of leprosy. He seeks to offer the prophet a gift for his healing. 2 Tim 2:8-13. This is a revered
early Christian hymn about Jesus that encourages closeness to him. Lk 17:11-19. Jesus heals those who are excluded from community life because of their disease. Theme—Exclusion: The first reading and the Gospel invite us to ponder the power of exclusion which suffering and illness bring. How does the local Christian community seek to include those who seem excluded? Who are the true healers in our community?

October 20—Ordinary Time 29. Ex 17:8-13. Moses’ prayer for victory is effective. 2 Tim 3:14-4:2. The minister is encouraged to be faithful to what has been taught, to Scripture, and to the task of courageous proclamation. Lk 18:1-8. An unnamed widow’s persistence gains justice and response from an elite dismissive judge. Theme—Prayer: The Eucharist is the local church’s moment of prayer for and union with all humanity and creation. What are the current situations and events that could be the focus of our Eucharist celebration and intercession today?

October 27—Ordinary Time 30. Sirach 35:15-17, 20-22. According to this wisdom writer, God shows deference to the poor whose prayer ‘pierces’ the clouds. 2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18. The writer affirms God’s fidelity in a time of suffering and trial. Lk 18:9-14. Jesus’ God subverts the social expectation of favour and privilege. Theme—God Listens: God responds to our cries in times of difficulty, loneliness and distress. God seeks to be with all who struggle. What makes us sad? What is difficult? Who are struggling?

November 3—Ordinary Time 31: Wis 11: 22 – 12: 2. This is a song about God’s wisdom, patience, love and forgiveness for humanity. 2 Thes 1: 11 – 2: 2. The writer prays that his audience will be faithful to their call, reveal God to others and remain patient for God’s final coming. Lk 19: 1-10. Zacchaeus’ conversion reveals the essential attitude of the potential disciple: open to change, ready for justice, and available to provide hospitality. Theme—Openness: The second reading reads us for the final weeks of the year as we turn our thoughts to the many ways God comes into our lives. Zacchaeus in today’s Gospel expresses this openness in action which surprises everyone. Who in our faith or civic communities reveal a similar spirit?

November 10—Ordinary Time 32: 2 Mac 7:1-2, 9-14. Jewish martyrs witness to God’s power to raise them up. 2 Thes 2:16-3:5. God is faithful and loves us especially in adversity. Lk 20:27-38. Jesus teaches about a vision beyond the present which is a share in God’s life. Theme—God’s Life: People constantly reflect on their present and commit themselves to God even in adversity. They witness to God’s presence in their world and beyond what appears to be. Our communities are filled with such ordinary and faithful witnesses.

November 17—Ordinary Time 33: Mal 3:19-20. The prophet affirms that God’s care (‘sun of righteousness’) will continue to be revealed to us in the midst of difficulty. 2 Thes 3:7-12. People are encouraged to continue to live committed to the present world rather than focus purely on the world to come. Lk 21:5-19. Jesus encourages his disciples not to be led astray, or follow messianic pretenders who promise everything but deliver nothing. Theme—Fidelity: In our local community, many model fidelity to love God and follow Jesus even in the midst of difficulties. These people can be named and celebrated. (A little note about today’s gospel: This is apocalyptic writing at its best, not literal descriptions but poetic theological insights into God’s presence.)

November 24 — Christ the King: 2 Sam 5: 1-3. David is anointed king over Israel. Col 1:12-20. This is a rich hymn celebrating Jesus’ cosmic, universal rule and leadership of the Church. Lk 23:35-43. Jesus’ final word before death is forgiveness to a criminal. Jesus’ compassion continues right to the end of his life. This is the true celebration of this Feast. Jesus as King, or perhaps more relevantly as the one who possesses ‘Universal Authority’ and reveals this authority through his forgiveness. Theme—Compassion: Jesus shows that a true
leader (in political, civil or church life) is one who shows compassion, especially to those who seem undeserved. Such leadership goes against the convention in which compassion is shown only to those who deserve it. Jesus’ approach is non-discriminatory.

**Liturgical Year A**

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

**December 8—Advent 2:** *Is 11:1-10.* The prophet envisions a new era of social communion, cosmic harmony and deep kindness initiated through God’s spirit through the ‘root of Jesse.’ *Rom 15:4-9.* Paul encourages community hospitality and unity as his readers await God’s coming. *Mt 3:1-12.* John the Baptiser proclaims Jesus’ coming encouraging his audience to be open and repentant. **Theme—Conversion:** The Baptist’s message announces what is essential for us as we prepare for the birth of Jesus: openness to God and our world, and a spirit of conversion. These have universal and cosmic implications (as in Isaiah). **December 15—Advent 3:** *Is 35:1-6a, 10.* God’s coming will bring cosmic and earthly renewal, and human liberation. The whole universe and all that enlivens it will be liberated. *James 5:7-10.* We patiently await God’s coming. We live peaceably with all. *Mt 11:2-11.* Jesus announces his mission of liberation and healing. **Theme—Liberation and healing:** Our world struggles and is in need of God’s healing. God desires our wholeness, healing and happiness. We celebrate God’s desire in our Sunday Eucharist.

**December 22—Advent 4:** *Is 7:10-14.* God promises through the prophet that King Ahaz will receive a sign of royal perpetuity. The King resists God’s promise. *Rom 1:1-7.* This introduction to Paul’s great letter summarises the heart of the Gospel: Jesus’ role with humanity. *Mt 1:18-25.* The announcement of the birth of Jesus to Joseph: Jesus is named ‘God-with-us.’ **Theme—God’s presence:** Every Eucharist is a celebration of God’s presence in this community, and through this community to the world. Many desire to experience this presence. Examples abound, can be named and celebrated.

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

**December 29—Holy Family:** *Sir 3:2-6, 12-14.* The sage encourages wisdom that comes from the parents and openness from children to respect, honour and look after their parents, especially as they age. *Col 3:12-21.* This is a challenging reading, especially if the last part of the reading is proclaimed. The early part encourages the kinds of virtues and qualities typical of Jesus followers: compassion, humility and love. The final part, if is proclaimed, must be situated in the patriarchal culture of the ancient Greco-Roman political structures in which intergenerational obedience and respect was expected. *Mt 2:13-15, 19-23.* Joseph is portrayed in as a figure of wisdom: open, listening and obedient to God’s voice. **Theme—Wisdom:** We search for wisdom from various sources. The readings invite us to continue that search from those who guide, nurture and form us. Who are such figures today?
January 5, 2014—Epiphany of Jesus: Is 60:1-6. God’s light shines on creation and humanity. This makes a difference to how our world is perceived. Eph 3:2-3, 5-6. The mystery of God’s universal and hospitable love means that we share in God’s life. Mt 2:1-12. The wise follow the stars; their eyes are on the heavens, their ear to the Scriptures and their desire on Jesus. Theme—Being Enlightened: At the core of every being is the inner light of God. We affirm our search for God and the way we draw close to God through Jesus. Epiphany is a continuous feast (however unrecognised) in the heart of every human being. Can we identify its manifestation today in the hearts of those we know?

January 12—Baptism of Jesus: Is 42:1-4, 6-7 God delights in the Servant, who will bring liberation to the disconsolate. Acts 10:34-38. Peter acclaims to Cornelius’ Roman household that Jesus is God’s baptised and anointed one. All people, no matter their social or ethnic background, belong to God. Mt 3:13-17. Jesus is baptised and declared ‘beloved.’. Theme—Being Beloved: In a world of turmoil, this celebration offers an opportunity for the baptised community to remember and celebrate its ‘belovedness.’ God delights in us. This is an important moment to name who God is for us, and we for God, especially when contrary voices seem to dominate.

January 19—Ordinary Time 2: Is 49:3, 5-6. God’s Servant is chosen from before time, with a mission of restoration to a broken and dispersed people. 1 Cor 1:1-3. This is the beginning of a famous letter, in which the Corinthian Jesus followers are reminded of their call to sainthood, and their relationship to God and Jesus. Jn 1:29-34. John the Baptist recognises Jesus as the chosen one and possessor of God’s Spirit. Theme—Spirit Possessed: Our communion with Jesus through baptism and Eucharist reminds us that we, like Jesus, possess the Spirit of God. We are called, like the Servant, to proclaim restoration and hope to people

January 26—Ordinary Time 3: Is 9:1-4. A beautiful poem of God’s overwhelming vision for humanity: light, peace and freedom in the midst of oppression. 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17-18. Paul addresses the problem at Corinth of division. The true source of unity is Jesus, the Good News. Mt 4:12-23. Jesus’ presence and ministry echoes the Is reading of liberation. Jesus calls his first community of disciples. Theme—Liberation and Hope: The hope expressed in the vision of Isaiah in the first reading touches our deepest desires. Mt’s Jesus expresses this as he calls his first disciples. How is our local faith community an expression of that hope and liberty, of Isaiah’s vision?

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Zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, a movement of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

—Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium, no.43.