SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA

A Saint for our Time

MOTHER Teresa of Calcutta caught world-wide attention. She is a saint for Christians, and is much venerated by atheists, unbelievers, Hindus and Muslims.

Mother Teresa ministered to the poorest of the poor, but her outreach was vast and all-encompassing: those who have lost faith or who live as though God did not exist, young people without values or ideals, families in crisis, the ill and the imprisoned, before refugees and immigrants, the weak and defenceless in body and spirit, abandoned children, the elderly who are on their own. As Pope Francis said in his homily on the occasion of her canonisation: 'Her mission to the urban and existential peripheries remains for us today an eloquent witness of God's closeness to the poorest of the poor.'

She received the Nobel Peace prize for her work in 1979. When receiving the prize she said: 'Works of love are works of peace; love of neighbour is a great medicine'.

She challenged the caste system in India. She chose as the religious habit for her order, the Missionaries of Charity, the pale blue sari, the colour of the untouchables, the lowest, most marginalised people in India.

She, along with her sisters, worked for fifty years, from 1946 to 1997, in the streets, with the poorest of the poor, among the marginalised and the sick, in the slums of Calcutta, in the shantytowns lacking any hygiene services. She founded houses of hospitality.

She was noted for her joy and enthusiasm, and for being down-to-earth.

She was very conscious of the dignity of every human person. She saw Christ himself in them. She knew that God is pleased by every act of mercy because in the brother or sister that we assist, we recognise the face of God which no one can see.

She said: 'Each time we bend down to the needs of our brothers and sisters, we give Jesus something to eat and drink, we clothe, we help and we visit the Son of God… Just as the Lord has come to meet me and has stooped down to my level in my hour of need, so too do I go to meet him.'

She helped make India understand that Christianity is a religion of peace, a valuable message as there is much intolerance towards minorities and Christians in India.

As Pope Francis said in his homily at the Canonisation: 'She made herself heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognise their guilt for the crime—the crimes—of poverty they created.'

Mother Teresa accomplished much, but believed she did little. But that did not discourage her. She said: 'We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something.'

Mother Teresa was aware that one of the severest forms of poverty consists in the sense of being unloved, unwanted and despised. She saw this as a form of poverty found also in those countries and families that are less poor — a poverty that is experienced as an inner emptiness, having lost meaning and direction in life, of loneliness.

It is very fitting that attention should be given to Mother Teresa, an 'Apostle of Mercy', in this Jubilee Year of Mercy. Her message was that everyone is infinitely loved by God — people were to realise their own worth and how precious they are to God.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor
CREATIVE FIDELITY IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

JOHN THORNHILL SM

A N ARTICLE with this title was published in the Australasian Catholic Record in 2002. It is hoped that this summary of the work of thinkers who are seeking the way forward for Catholicism will make their contributions available to a wider audience. More detailed references to the works referred to can be found in the text of the original article.

The Second Vatican Council initiated a time of transition, in which the Church seeks a renewal in its fidelity to the Gospel. In recent centuries the Church had adopted a reactionary attitude towards the broader world; the Council called it to enter into a life-giving relationship with this broader world. The two main leaders initially involved, Pope John Paul II (whose massive biography (Apostle of Hope) was published by George Weigel), and the Pope's principal aide Cardinal Ratzinger (discussed in a thoughtful study by John Allen) had different views concerning the form of relationship that was called for towards the modern world and its culture.

For Cardinal Ratzinger (a follower of Augustine in the Platonic tradition) this relationship should be one of challenge and evangelization; he saw a collaborative dialogue with the contemporary world as a danger to the Church's integrity. The Pope, who had made a significant contribution to the teaching of the Council, proposing the principles that could make a creative dialogue possible, was not given strong support by his principal collaborator. John Allen points out the radically different principles behind the outlooks of these two leaders: Ratzinger's understanding of the human situation saw it as a confrontation between fallen human nature and the saving Grace the Church must offer to world; the Pope's view of the human situation affirmed the presence of another factor, between Fallen Nature and Grace: human nature itself as God's creation — and it is this factor, at work in human cultures that provides the possibility of the fruitful dialogue the Church must enter into with the culture of modernity.

Appealing to Christopher Dawson's understanding of human culture, as radically deficient and destined to disintegrate if it lacks a relation to the transcendent, Matthew Lamb (in articles published in Communio) took up the Pope's point of view, and further developed it, making use of Bernard Lonergan's understanding of the differentiation of consciousness

Other thinkers have made important contributions to the question, clarifying the problems the Church must come to terms with if it is to enter into an authentic dialogue with contemporary cultures. Gerhard Lohfink, one of Germany's leading scripture scholars is convinced that such a dialogue will only be fruitful if the Church leaves behind its over-institutionalized life as a mass movement and recovers the benefits of contemplative communion, through which it can enter into conversations with genuine seekers after truth. The Salvation History which has engendered the Judeo-Christian faith, he points out, makes it clear that God's patient offer to struggling humanity has been made through the concrete experience of an elected people, in concrete places and times. If we do not recognize this principle of Salvation History, Lohfink is convinced, there will be no effective renewal
of the Church. What united the first Christian communities that gave us the New Testament was not the search for doctrinal unity but the conviction that they were called to make God's saving plan visible in the world.

Reviewing the cultural developments that have shaped the Church's life, the French systematic theologian, Ghislain Lafont makes proposals concerning a genuine dialogue with the contemporary world that have much in common with what Lohfink has proposed. Lafont judges the problems of the Church in its relationship with the contemporary world as having their origin at the end of the first millennium, with the emergence of a dawning recognition that human and cultural developments must be recognized as having their own autonomy: something that has been clearly affirmed by Vatican II. The prevailing Platonic outlook, however, that all enlightenment came from God made it difficult for churchmen to recognize the challenge brought by this development. They faced the choice of either recognizing this autonomy, or opposing this new claim and becoming 'anti-modern'. In fact, the Church's future was shaped by this latter course, initiating an alienation that was unfortunate for both the Church and the broader world.

Lafont thinks that an internal development in Catholic culture, which he calls the 'Gregorian form' (since it originated in reforms associated with Pope Gregory VII), reforms that stressed doctrinal unity, hierarchical authority, and a celibate priesthood. Lafont suggests this 'Gregorian Form' has shaped the life of the Church until the pontificate of Pius XII on the eve of Vatican II. As a consequence, Lafont concludes, the Church has confronted the world with a 'worrisome face', whereas, showing its true self it would present a beautiful and desirable face.

Both Lohfink and Lafont point to the excessive institutionalization of the Church as contributing to the Church's difficulties. Excessive institutionalization causes a depersonalization of those who participate in any social system. The identity of the human person involves a sense of destiny. Salvation History has taught us that this destiny transcends secular reality.

The progressive institutionalization of the Church's life: clarifying the juridical implications of the Church's hierarchical constitution, and painstakingly refining the terms in which the church's doctrines can be expressed, have not brought renewed life to the Church. Instead, as the great sociologist, Max Weber, has observed, there has been a growing sense of 'disenchantment' with the claims of Christian faith.

Karl Rahner carries forward the thought of thinkers like Lohfink and Lafont. He thinks that the Church will only find the renewal it needs in order to enter into a creative dialogue with the cultures of the world if it learns to live in the presence of the DIVINE MYSTERY itself. Church leaders must share with the faithful the 'mystagogy' necessary if the Church's communion gives expression to its relationship with this mystery.

It is a mystery that is met with in the LIVING PRESENCE OF OUR SAVING LORD in the Salvation History recorded in the sacred writings of the two Testaments. It is the mystery HIDDEN FROM ALL AGES AND NOW REVEALED IN THE INCARNATE WORD, CHRIST AMONG US OUR HOPE OF GLORY.

It is the mystery forever alive, the communion we share, through the prophetic blessings that are A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.
SPIRITUAL GROWTH THROUGH AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

LAWRENCE PANG

Frequent sharing of the Eucharist guarantees God's grace for us. While this slogan which appears at a recent First Holy Communion for children has merit, it calls for deeper reflection. The truth is that years of mechanistic responses at Mass can set in place a spiritual lethargy that drains an enthusiasm to link the Eucharist to life in the real world.

Of particular interest for his paper is the Sign of Peace and Presentation of Gifts. In Sacramentum Caritatis, Pope Benedict XVI notes the great value of the Sign of Peace especially in a world fraught with fear and conflict. However, he urges restraint in the liturgical exchange of peace lest it becomes a 'certain distraction.'1 To that end he has asked 'the competent curial offices to study the possibility of moving the sign of peace to another place, such as before the presentation of gifts to the altar.'2

The proposal to link the two activities is noteworthy in view of their potential to promote spiritual growth and Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:23-24, which the Pope cites. This short paper ponders on the reapplication of Amos 5:21-24 by Jesus in Matthew 5:23-24. It closes with a reflection on Karl Rahner's insight on the inseparable bond between our liturgical life and life in the real world.

Amos 5:21-24

The prophet Amos ministered to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE). Under Jeroboam's rule, Israel enjoyed relative political peace and, as a result, prosperity came for many in the nation.3 Instead of improving conditions and relations in the relatively homogenous economic structure, it gave rise to sharp distinctions of wealth and privilege. A stark contrast between the luxury of the rich and misery of the poor emerged and the poor became a target for legal and economic exploitation (Amos 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:10-12; 8:4-6)4. Meanwhile, religion flourished. People thronged the shrines at festival time (Amos 4:4-5; 5:5-6) to offer elaborate sacrifices to God (Amos 5:21-24).5 The prophecy of Hosea, who was a contemporary of Amos, affirms the state of affair in the north. His criticism verifies that Israel's economy was prosperous, but it had led to apostasy (Hos 2:8-13; 8:4b; cf. Amos 5:10-17) and moral decadence (Hos 4:2).

As spokesperson for God, Amos berated the Israelites for practicing a form of religion that ignored and condoned the apparent social injustice. He seized their attention with a stinging introductory rebuke: 'I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies' (Amos 5:21).6 He followed with further caustic condemnations (Amos 5:22-24):

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of
your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The use of strong Hebrew terms in verses 22 to 24—the negative ‘I will not’ and the imperative and jussive verbs "take" and ‘let’—reflects God’s utter disappointment and resentment with the people’s offerings. Yet, God’s demand for justice and righteousness seems radical. It seems to suggest that the Israelites can gain righteousness for themselves through acts of justice in the social realm. The rejection of their festivals and liturgies (Amos 5:21), sacrifices (Amos 5:22), songs and music (Amos 5:23) indicates that these are not sufficient in themselves to maintain right relation with God. Moral conduct, according to Amos 5:24, is integral to their relation with God. Without it, there is no relation.8 Amos’ audience does not seem to have thought that right relation with God depended on anything other than sacrifice.

The idea that worship also entails just deeds and attitude appears foreign to them. Sacrifice was the means to preserve or reestablish their righteousness before God.9 Amos’ demand was so radical and his prophecy of doom was so startling that Amaziah, the priest of the Bethel sanctuary, insisted he returns to Judah and ‘never again prophesy at Bethel’ (Amos 7:10-13). In Amaziah’s view, Amos’ demand was heretical.

Matthew 5:23-24

Jesus echoed Amos’ imperative for justice before worship many centuries later. Firmly rooted in the Jewish scriptures, Jesus reapplied Amos’ words concerning worship and life in the real world to the people of his time (Mt 5:23-24).10

His action in the Jerusalem temple (Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-46; Jn 2:14-17) was also considered so disruptive and unorthodox that the chief priests and scribes plotted his death (Mk 11:18). They heard that he had lambasted the moneychangers and those selling doves for turning the temple into a ‘den of robbers.’ Yet, the business transactions were essential for fulfilling the divine commands for sacrifices (e.g. Lev 1:14; 14:30) to restore relationship with God. Nonetheless, Jesus was enraged at the corrupt practices and profiteering in the temple precinct.11 His hostility towards their blatant

So when you are offering your gift at the altar.
if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,
leave your gift there before the altar and go;
first be reconciled to your brother and sister,
then come and offer your gift.

The Greek imperative verb ‘leave’ in verse 24 further reinforces the prerequisite of right conduct before worship. According to Jesus, a gift is unacceptable so long as salôm ‘peace’ is lacking between the worshipper and a member or members of the community.14 In other words, ‘peace’ is not simply the lack of personal turmoil, but the absence of social harmony as a result of one’s action or inaction. Thus, worship life cannot be partitioned from life in the real world as if the latter has no bearing on the former.

Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner has shed important light on this
issue: ‘The human community's ongoing communion and cooperation with God in history is the liturgy, the primary and original liturgy.’ It lies within the history of the world. He calls this liturgy the liturgy of the world and urges Catholics to think of it as an inseparable part of their liturgical life:

When we think of liturgy, we should think first and foremost of the liturgy of the world. Worship is not primarily what happens when we gather together to celebrate the Eucharist; it is primarily what happens when we cooperated together with God in history. Liturgy is not originally the praise we give to God when we pray; it is what happens when we freely immerse ourselves in the abiding, absolute mystery during the great and small moments of life.

Having said that, the liturgy of the world does not diminish the liturgy of the Church because the two liturgies are intimately related.

According to Rahner, ‘The liturgy of the Church is one way in which the liturgy of the world is revealed and celebrated.’ The liturgy of the Church is a public proclamation of cooperation with God in history—through the liturgy of the world. The two liturgies merge as one event regardless of where one is located—in the world or in the Church. ‘Worship, then, is not fundamentally something we need to make extra time for in our daily schedules. We should, on the contrary, allow all the activities we are already involved in to be transformed into implicit acts of worship.’ As these occur more regularly, our liturgical life becomes more authentic. Incorporating both horizon and vertical dimensions, we grow in confidence knowing that God will be delighted as we gather to celebrate the Eucharist (contra. Amos 5:21-24; Mt 5:23-24).

NOTES

2. Benedict XVI, Sacramentum Caritatis, para. 49.
4. Mays, Amos, 3.
5. Mays, Amos, 3.
6. All translations are taken from the NRSV; Amos 5:21-24 was probably delivered at the Bethel shrine. James Limburg, Hosea–Micah (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 104.
7. Emphases in italics mine.
11. Mt 5:23-24 belongs to the first of five discourses in the Gospel of Matthew. It is significant that Jesus' demand for authentic worship is only found in Matthew, which has often been considered as the teaching gospel. R.T. France, The Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 9.
14. The Hebrew word salom “
peace
" derives from salem, which means ‘completion and fulfillment’—of entering into a state of wholeness and unity, a restored relationship. G Lloyd Carr, Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 930-931.
18. Shelley, Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship, 94.
The contemporary challenge of forming those in Catholic educational ministries demands concentrated and strategic response. To this end, this article which draws on a presentation at a leadership conference in Sydney, Australia in 2010 is presented to develop and sustain an informed focus on spiritual formation.

This article draws on current research, contextual factors and the significant professional experience of a network of people involved in spiritual formation of staff in Catholic Schools. It offers a context and rationale for the growing focus on spiritual formation at all levels across Australian Catholic dioceses, highlighting guiding principles and best practice. It is hoped this paper will foster further synergy and collaboration nationally and internationally as religious congregations, dioceses and educational authorities discern their response to this contemporary challenge.

Introduction

The concrete living out of a vocation as rich and profound as that of the lay Catholic in a school requires an appropriate formation, both on the professional plane and on the religious plane. Most especially, it requires the educator to have a mature spirituality, expressed in a profound Christian life.

—Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, n.60.

The need to be true to the core purpose of Catholic schools, through the work and witness of Catholic school educators, is a pressing contemporary issue (Grace, 2002; Monohan, 2003). The spiritual formation of leaders and teachers has been identified over many years as a priority issue in Catholic education in Australia and internationally (Bezzina, 1994; Cook, 2002; Dance, 1989; Feheney, 1998). The importance of the issue derives from a long standing recognition of the central place of teachers in ensuring the distinctiveness of the Catholic educational vision (American Catholic Bishops, 1976; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 1988, 1998, 2002, 2007; Ecclesia in Oceania, 2001). The Catholic School (1977), recognised the pervasive and fundamental influence of teachers:

By their witness and their behaviour…teachers are of the first importance to impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools


The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (SCCE, 1988) frames education as a dynamic and transformative process. The work of teachers in a Catholic school is vitally linked to the evangelising mission of the church and is concerned with the formation and transformation of human persons (#16). The Catholic School at the Threshold of a New Millennium (SCCE, 1998) places education for the promotion and formation of the human person as the centrepiece of the document. (#11) Significantly, this formation occurs through interpersonal relationships within an
educational community that has a theological as well as a sociological foundation. (# 18)

Probing the key elements of what might be most needed in formation for educators today, *Educating Together in the Catholic School* (2007), includes a strong call for formation for educators that is holistic and of the heart rather than solely knowledge based:

Catholic educators need a 'formation of the heart': they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens this love and opens their spirits to others, so that their educational commitment becomes a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf Gal 5:6) (2007, n 25).

Spiritual formation of staff—leaders, teachers, support personnel and central office personnel—is central to the core work and purpose of Catholic schools.

**Spirituality and Spiritual Formation**

Studies over the last fifteen years have identified key characteristics about spirituality in various contexts that are key in the contemporary understanding of Christian spirituality - it is holistic (Zohar & Marshall, 2000); it is an intrinsic human capacity (Benson et al, 2003; Hill, 2004; Tacey, 2003); it is transcendent (Zinnbauer, Pargament &Scott, 1999) and it is connective. (Rossiter, 2004; Berk, 2001; Castelli, 2000) In anchoring these characteristics to a specifically Christian landscape, the definition of spirituality 'as a way of being in the world in the light of the Mystery at the core of the universe' (Harris 1996, p 75) reflects the wider research and the Christian lens.

Spiritual formation in the Catholic Christian tradition is a dynamic process of growth in the understanding and practice of Christian spirituality. The word formation generally refers to a set of experiences designed to prepare a person or group for a particular purpose. 'Formation', in preference to a word like 'training', is most often used in the context of spiritual development and implies images of deep learning that involves attitudes, values, commitment to particular life directions as well as knowledge and skills (Gowdie, 2006).

Spiritual growth is a lifelong journey and occurs within a 'formation field' (Whelan, 1994) which includes the forming influence of memory, other people and the immediate and wider environment (Bracken, 2004). In the Christian tradition, it is also an inner journey travelled in a partnership between God's spirit and our spirits (Groome, 1998, p 325).

Spiritual formation opportunities for those engaged in Catholic education ministries therefore need to facilitate and nurture an encounter with God through communal support and resources provided in a range of ways. The effective structuring and resourcing of spiritual formation that both supports the mission of Catholic education and responds to the contexts of people's lives is a current challenge of Catholic education in Australia.

**The Contemporary Context**

The contemporary context of the wider culture and the ecclesial milieu presents significant shifts for Catholic school educators and employing authorities. The post-modern secular world has brought with it a sense of fragmentation, and there are those commentators who would say that fragmentation permeates everything. The first kind of fragmentation involves the separation of economic life from the environment. A second kind of fragmentation is social fragmentation. Another kind of fragmentation is within ourselves: we find ourselves disconnected from our bodies and our hearts (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers 2005, p 190). Joseph Campbell has identified a fourth kind of fragmentation in post-modern culture—a lack of a shared sense of meaning or mythology (Campbell, 1988).

In addition, the links to the cultural world of Catholicism through direct experience has declined. The families attending the Catholic
school are less likely to be connected to the parish or to attend mass regularly. Gen X, those born roughly between 1963-1980 (Holroyd, 2011) are the 'first post-conciliar generation with little knowledge and connection to the cohesive pre-Vatican II Catholic culture with its strong experiential indicators (fasting; benediction; devotional practices', even though their parents, while now increasingly disaffected, have this corporate Catholic memory. Gen Y, those born between 1981 and 1994 (Holroyd, 2011), are the first 'post-church generation' (Rolheiser, 2008)—children of children who have not had a childhood imbued with Catholic parish cultural experience. The predominant experience of church is the school, and they bring with them to this community their own perspective and experience of the world (McLaughlin, 2002; Rymarz, 2004).

These defining characteristics of post-modern culture, where belief in meta-narratives is questioned and where people construct their own meaning in an independent and self-reliant manner (Drane, 2000) are apparent in Australian society. The strongly defended egalitarian theme in Australian culture, where one person's position and meaning making has no more importance than another's 'storychoice', provides a robust scaffold for post-modern individualism.

At the same time, research studies suggest that loyalty, community, commitment and spiritual seeking continue to flourish in post-modern Australia—though they are rather expressed in distinctly different ways than in the past.

In addition, the worldwide picture of the general Catholic population has changed. At the beginning of the 20th century, 70% of Catholics were in Europe and North America. At the beginning of the 21st century, 70% is found in the Southern hemisphere, namely in Africa, South America, Asia, Oceania. Rather than the European countries of Poland and Spain being listed among the ten largest Catholic countries we now find the African nations of Nigeria, Uganda and the Republic of the Congo (Kelly, 2009). Indeed, we now have priests from African and Asian countries assisting in Australian parishes as the number of Australian born priests declines dramatically. At the same time that priest and religious numbers have declined dramatically, so too has church attendance. Only 12% of those who nominate as being Catholic in Australia describe themselves as regular church-going Catholics. ('Facts and Figures', 2016)

A very different picture of the staff, families and clergy who make up our Catholic schools and parishes has developed. The work of Catholic education takes place in a different world than even 50 years ago. The very tight and very visible culture of parish and religious life has altered. In Australia today, the presence of members of religious orders of nuns, religious brothers and priests as teachers and administrators in the schools, is less than 1%. (O'Donoghue, 2004, pp. 123-146).

With these shifts come different personal needs and different systemic pressures presently driving a concentrated focus on spiritual formation. These include the challenge of succession planning; the need for intentional formation of a new generation of leaders, and the changing demographic of staff working within Catholic education. Unlike earlier phases of Catholic Education in Australia staff is not generally formed within a religious community or congregation and so able to bring this formation to their work in Catholic education. Where staff are formed through association with religious congregations, the lifestyle and formation context of religious life is not applicable to the everyday lifestyle of our new generation of staff and leaders.

The many competing priorities, shifting agendas and accountabilities in education can easily threaten the broader, long term planning needed to adequately address the spiritual formation of staff in Catholic schools. It is an endeavour requiring prominence in strategic
planning at all levels.

**Practice Wisdom**

The following principles are offered as ways of strengthening the impact of spiritual formation in school communities. There is a need for:

• positioning of spiritual formation close to strategic leadership and professional learning within Catholic Education so that spiritual formation is seen as having the same status as leadership development in curriculum or pedagogy, and as a critical pathway within leadership development programs;

• system level support and financial resourcing for spiritual formation and renewal of teachers, for example, strategic resourcing directed to spiritual formation to fund appropriate teacher release and consultancy for quality experiences;

• spiritual formation programs to be substantial and holistic experiences engaging head, heart and hands, while articulating with recognised degree courses—without losing the experiential dimension;

• involvement of the leaders of Catholic Education in spiritual formation to inspire and 'model the way';

• programs that develop teachers to co-lead spiritual formation and animate others within school communities - these would be structured programs allow personal development, confidence and capacity building

• differentiated experiences since life experience and career stages of teachers suggest tailoring programs that more closely meet needs;

• whole school approach with staff teams participating in various experiences, with collaboration and co-leadership being enabled within the school;

• development of models of companioning and accompaniment in spiritual formation with emphasis on listening and dialogue. It can also be especially relevant at points of career transition;

• Spiritual formation experiences are underpinned by trust-building protocols or boundary markers since trust within groups is critical for open communication and growth.

**Facilitation Approach/Strategies**

Across the dioceses various programs and styles of events are operating, and a range of groups are targeted. There are, however, similarities in the practices which are used by facilitators and planners. In describing this practice wisdom that has emerged, the research of Bracken (2004), Davidson (2006), Varkar (2010) and Gowdie (2011), as well as the stories and rich experiences of practitioners in this network from across Australia, have been helpful.

Those who facilitate staff spirituality sessions are educators who have extended their knowledge of theology and scripture and who have attended to their own journey. In designing and presenting sessions they use an increasing range of strategies that draw on pedagogy, experience and creativity. Themes and content draw on Scripture and Theology and are grounded in the life experience of the participants. Opportunities for creative expression invite participants to reflect, identify significant ideas and create a memento that they take back to their work place.

The reflection experiences do not rely on the input alone of the facilitator but also involve the participants and encourage their contributions. A group of twenty participants is ideal to cultivate a sense of belonging and community. Where numbers are larger, techniques are used to form smaller teams within the whole group. Personal sharing is encouraged through storytelling in dyads or group sessions and protocols operate to respect personal boundaries.
Overall an atmosphere of hospitality is fostered through provision of meals, drinks, snacks in a physically comfortable environment, away from the everyday professional environment. Facilitators and/or Catholic Education Office Staff take an active role as hosts to welcome, include and develop communication and trust.

Informed by theologies and pedagogies that affirm the varieties of ways that adults learn and experience God, sessions include options for physical experiences in the outdoors and/or reflective, kinaesthetic activities.

**Guiding Principles for Effective Spiritual Formation**

1. Spiritual formation involves the autonomous choice of the person and this must be respected.
2. Within the Catholic Christian context, spiritual formation draws on the rich traditions of the Church and prepares individuals for deeper relationship with God.
3. Spiritual formation involves companioning—of the self; of each other and of the community. Processes reflect principles of spiritual direction as well as adult learning and change facilitation.
4. Spiritual formation content and processes are grounded in contemporary scholarship in theology and scripture.
5. Spiritual formation is invitational at each step within an experience/ program, respectful of individual needs and differences.
6. Spiritual formation ought be connective to the vocational (professional) context of individuals (e.g., classroom teacher, principal).
7. Spiritual formation occurs in both targeted ways and through the formative environment of the school and the formal opportunities provided though the Catholic Education system. Both complement each other and both are essential for sustainability and continuing growth.
8. Spiritual formation requires both 'chronos time' and 'kairos time' - real time away to facilitate the capacity to learn to live 'presence'.
9. Formation is predicated on a positive anthropology of the human being with an integrated understanding of the mind, body and spirit.

**Conclusion**

These insights are the result of the shared passion and intentional dialogue of the National Network for Formation of Australian Catholic Educators (FACE). This organisation includes key leaders in formation across Australian Catholic Education diocesan systems, religious institutes and independent providers working within the field of formation. It has been in operation for the past ten years to support good practice and genuine collegiality in the field of faith and spiritual formation. In this spirit of collegiality, commitment and generosity other practitioners are encouraged to continue to build on these reflections and respond collaboratively to the contemporary challenge of spiritual formation for the staff of Catholic education.

**REFERENCES**

Dr Tony Bracken’s professional experience includes a senior role in professional learning, learning services, formation and leadership development and as a secondary principal. His current role is Assistant Director, School Improvement at the Catholic Schools Office, Broken Bay Diocese, NSW.

Ms Andrea Dean is an independent consultant in the area of spirituality and Catholic Identity. She coordinates the Young Catholic Women’s Interfaith Fellowship through the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, currently directs the National Office for the Participation of Women and is based in Canberra.

Dr Jill Gowdie holds a PhD in Educational leadership and her specific area of expertise is in formation for leadership drawing together the areas of theology, spirituality, missiology, change theory and best practice in adult professional learning. Jill currently leads Mission, Formation and Leadership Services for Brisbane Catholic Education.

Spiritual direction explores a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Simply put, spiritual direction is helping people tell their sacred stories everyday....

Spiritual direction helps us learn how to live in peace, with compassion, promoting justice, as humble servants of that which lies beyond all names.

—Liz Budd Ellmann
LOOKING AT RELIGIOUS ART

STEPHEN DOWNS

More than a quarter of Australians aged fifteen and over (four and a half million people) visit an art gallery at least once a year. Particular exhibitions can attract very large numbers. Nearly half a million people, for example, visited the National Gallery of Australia's 'Masterpieces from Paris' exhibition in 2010.1 Clearly for many people today the arts are an important part of their life. Most commentators believe the arts are valued for providing not just pleasure but also insights and meaning.2

Despite its popularity and significance, we don't talk much about art. From my experience working with university students, teachers and parish staff, in classrooms and galleries, it seems many of us are unsure how to express our thoughts and feelings about it, particularly about how it relates to our spiritual life. Many are not even sure how best to look at works of art. This article makes some suggestions about these and related questions. I mostly have in mind the visual arts and visits to public galleries, though many of the principles I propose can be applied to other art forms and venues. My purpose is mainly practical: to assist anyone interested in looking at art from a 'religious perspective'. I am not proposing a particular theology of art or assuming religious faith. But I will occasionally refer to some theologians whose ideas have influenced my thinking about art and how best to view it.

Art and Religion

My first suggestion is not to expect comprehensive or clear-cut answers. Even though we can share our views with others, our experience of art is profoundly and properly subjective. It is not simply that we interpret works of art as individuals. The works themselves are inherently ambiguous, capable of creating many meanings. This is part of what attracts us to them. It is also why religious authorities have sometimes viewed the arts with suspicion. Historically they prefer to define beliefs in clear and unambiguous terms. But if we consider 'religion' more broadly, art and religion have some important similarities. Philosopher John Caputo, for example, notes that while 'confessional religions' focus on 'rites and doctrines', religion more broadly conceived involves 'the restless searching heart in the midst of a mysterious world'.3 I am sure the latter sense would speak to many artists and lovers of art.

My second suggestion is that it is helpful to consider 'religious art' in Caputo's broader, more expansive sense. This means we need to include for consideration not just those works found in churches and places of worship, that deal directly with the figures, narratives or beliefs of 'confessional religion', but any work that expresses the human quest for meaning. This makes sense sociologically. A range of scholars acknowledge that art has actually replaced religion for many people today,4 and much of the art they are interested in is not religious in the traditional sense. There are also theological grounds for a broader understanding of what counts as religious art. For the great Protestant theologian Paul Tillich art is one of the major ways in which human beings experience and express what he termed 'ultimate reality'.5

My remaining suggestions consist of a series of questions that I think can help us better appreciate religious art. An important aspect of these questions is the order in which
we ask them. We often begin by asking about the meaning of a particular work, especially if we are viewing it from a spiritual or religious perspective. In doing so we fail to appreciate that works of religious art are firstly works of art. As such, and following the advice of most contemporary writers about art, it is helpful to begin by considering what we see when we look at them. This can be followed by asking how a work makes us feel, and then what we know or can learn about it. Each of these questions prepares us for considering what a work means for me, including its spiritual or religious significance. Proceeding in this way gives us a fuller appreciation of 'religious artworks' as individual works of art. It also helps us avoid imposing on them ideas we might have about what religious art should or shouldn't be like.

What do I see?

It is important to recognise the physicality of artworks. A religious work of art may well convey ideas and arouse emotions, but it is first a thing that presents itself to us. So we need to ask, what does it look like? Initial impressions can be important and are worth noting. But it is usually helpful to look at a work very carefully. How would I describe it? If it is a painting, for example: how big is it? Is it framed? How is it hung? What is it painted on? Is the paint flat on the surface or thickly textured? What about the composition - is it balanced or chaotic? Are the colours bright or dull? What shapes and forms predominate? Does it have lines that are hard-edged or blurred? Such questions are particularly helpful when considering abstract or non-figurative art. Their apparent lack of 'content' requires us to inspect their appearance more closely.

While most art writers suggest we begin in this way, there is also a strong Christian basis for being attentive to the physical work of art, namely, the Incarnation. Anglican theologian Jeremy Begbie explains this well: 'By assuming

and redeeming the material world in Christ, God has confirmed it as a proper, meaningful environment for us to enjoy, explore and develop. For Christians, the material matters. Resisting an old suspicion of the goodness of physical creation and also the modern scientific ideal of intellectual clarity, Begbie urges us to recover 'a deeper sense of our embeddedness in creation, and of the physicality of artistic creation.'

In practice the physical qualities of artworks can be a significant part of what they mean for us. This is why we should always view the work itself and not a reproduction, if it is at all possible. We can learn about artworks from books and the internet, but if we are to experience art fully, our contact with it must be first-hand. Reproductions on paper or online rarely convey the scale or texture of a painting, for example. And the precise colour of the work itself is often quite different. Most of us know this implicitly. It is one reason why we visit major galleries when travelling interstate or overseas; why we attend 'travelling exhibitions' when they come to town. It is similar to our experience of music: experiencing a live performance is different from listening to a recording.

Because artworks are physical things, and because the process of appreciation is complex, it is best to focus on a small number of works when visiting a gallery. By all means scan whole rooms, especially if your time is limited. But try to spend some concentrated time on one or two works that have caught your attention. It is also helpful to rest our
eyes (and minds) for a short time, and return to a work for a second look and further reflection. A work that draws us back again and again is often one that we come to value highly.

How do I feel?

Works of art have the capacity to evoke the full range of human feelings, including joy, anger, peacefulness, amusement, confusion. Our feelings are part of our make-up, what makes us human. So it is important to consider what it is about a work of art that makes me feel a certain way; but also, what is it within me that makes me respond in this way?

One of the things that can affect how we feel about works of art is the commitment the artist and we the viewers may have to the spiritual quest and to beliefs and values associated with it. Traditional Christian art, for example, commonly represents events in the life of Jesus, Mary and the saints, and reaffirms certain beliefs about them. It often arouses such feelings as awe, reverence, gratitude. But it can also challenge religious or moral ideas and attitudes. An example is the depiction of God in very human terms (anthropomorphism) found in countless paintings throughout the ages. Another is the presence of nude human figures in much of the classical and medieval art in European churches. The determining factor seems to be whether or not the work has spiritual value. Throughout history religious authorities have tried to adjudicate this, sometimes censoring imagery or even destroying it (iconoclasm).

Modern and contemporary art, including religious and spiritual works, push the boundaries of what is acceptable even further. For example, it sometimes deals explicitly with sexuality and violence. This can arouse feelings of embarrassment or unease, and even disgust or revulsion. How should we respond to this? It is also true to say that modern art and artists are often critical of religion, at least in Caputo's narrow sense. In some cases (such as works dealing with religious hypocrisy) it may be appropriate to regard such works as helpfully thought-provoking.

But even when the artist seems intent on shocking the viewer for the sake of it, I think it worthwhile testing our emotional responses. If a work makes me feel uncomfortable, I should first acknowledge my emotional response and then probe the reasons for it. What is it that concerns, excites or upsets me, and why does it have this effect?

For art to be transformative, as good art can be, we need to be open to being disturbed by it, to being taken out of our comfort zone. In exploring our feelings we are reflecting more deeply on our faith. Most religions recognise that the spiritual life deals with every aspect and dimension of human experience, from heavenly bliss to deep despair, and all points in-between. So does art. In my experience public galleries are places where we can take some risks with what we experience. We are always free to decide that a work has little of value for me and turn away from it.

We might usefully note here that some contemporary art that seems to reference religion is actually more concerned with popular culture or fashion. It is part of today's secular frame of reference and worth noting as such.

On the other hand, there are contemporary artists who continue to be inspired by religious and spiritual ideas as they explore and articulate the ultimate questions of human existence. But as modern artists they often do this by creating works that challenge traditional perspectives, the status quo, common ideas and feelings.

With such art we do well to follow the general advice given to all gallery visitors: be as open as we can to what we find there, and limit our expectations as much as we can. Be prepared to be surprised. That so many people keep returning to galleries, suggests that our
efforts will be rewarded.

What do I know?

Our appreciation of an art work may also be enriched by what we know about its creation and its creator. When and where, for example, was it made? Does it belong to a particular genre, period, movement or style in the history of art? And what do I know about the artist; about their life, ideas, influences and practice. This sort of information can be very helpful, for example, for appreciating 'icons', a very distinctive form of religious art. I think the same is true, for similar reasons, about Australian Indigenous art. It's also true about 'abstract art': when there is less to see (so to speak), the viewer has to do more work. Part of this is finding out what we can about the artist and their art.

This is not to say that learning about works of art is more important than our sensory or emotional experience of it. Many critics believe that trusting our impressions (Paton) or gut reactions (Heller) is more important. This is because works of art, especially the visual arts and music, are not primarily concerned with conveying information. And experience teaches us that while knowing about the art/artist can be instructive, often it is not.10 Failing to recognise this has led some 'religious people' to question the value of the work by 'non-religious artists'. Pope Pius XII, for example, objected to modern art being included in churches—because it has mostly been created by non-believers.11 This view, still alive today, mistakenly supposes that we should judge works of art as we would statements of belief. But this is not confirmed by our experience. The meaning and value artworks have for us can transcend the beliefs (or unbelief) of their makers. The great Catholic theologian Karl Rahner thought this is because all human beings have an innate dynamism towards the infinite, which is ultimately the Mystery of God. This can affect everything we do as human beings, including the making and interpretation of art. Sometimes we are aware of this and sometimes not.12 Now I'm sure some artists would object to this theological interpretation of their life and work. But I know that many would accept that their art is open to religious interpretation, particularly in John Caputo's broad understanding of 'religion'.13

Noting this important qualification, we come back to the point that it can be helpful to find out what we can about particular artworks and their artist creators. The 'labels' supplied by galleries often include useful information. So too exhibition catalogues and guides. In the past these have been prone to the impenetrable jargon of art theory, but I think they have improved in recent years. Some people find exhibition audiotapes valuable, though they can distract us from visually connecting with the art. When I am really drawn to a particular artwork or artist, I find some research on the internet can be very rewarding. And most public galleries have well-stocked book shops. A little information, thoughtfully considered, can go a long way to enhancing our experience of art.

What does it mean?

When we have considered what we see in a work of art, how we feel about it and what we know about it we are well-placed to consider what it means for us. In fact the meaning of the work starts to emerge throughout this process. This is because experiencing a work of art is like all human experience. Interpreting and understanding something (or someone) depend on us engaging with it. The discipline of hermeneutics suggests that this process is like having a conversation.14 In this case, it is the viewer and the work of art that interact with each another. We viewers bring our questions to the experience: 'What do I see' and 'What do I know'. And the work of art asks questions of us: 'How do I make you feel' and 'What do I mean to you'.

This is a two-way conversation. It is not...
the work alone that determines its meaning (objectivism). But neither is it the viewer alone who determines what a work of art means (subjectivism). Both viewer and artwork contribute to the process of interpretation and to the understanding that emerges from it. Interpreting our experiences in this way, including works of art, is part of being human. Karl Rahner teaches us that part of being human is to encounter God (named as such or not) in our experience.¹⁵

This view of meaning has been more commonly applied to literature, including biblical texts. Here scholars refer to the importance of knowing both the world of the text and its author and also the world of the reader or interpreter. Much the same applies to the visual arts. My appreciation of an Indigenous painting, for example, will be limited if I know nothing about the worldview of the artist who created it, their spiritual beliefs and artistic practices. It will also be limited if I am not aware of my worldview, what I bring to the conversation. For example, if I assume that my modern Western idea of 'perspective' is normative. This is why my final suggestion for looking at a religious art is to converse with it.

Our primary conversation partner is the artwork itself. Of course the artist is important; they invest something of themselves in their works. That is why it can be helpful to know about their life and ideas. But most artists accept that once completed, a work exists in its own right and that viewers will respond to and interact with the work itself. Hence our focus on 'what we see'. As in all conversations, we must be open to the other party, allowing it to speak. This includes acknowledging that it is different from me, may express a different perspective. This can be very challenging. Our own view of things can be strongly held and deeply felt, sometimes unconsciously. It is hard to be truly open to 'the other'. Sometimes we conclude that a particular work 'does not speak to me' at all. But in a genuine conversation we should not rush to such judgements. And we do well first to heed Paton's advice: imagine someone to whom this particular work does speak.¹⁶ What might such a person make of it? Can I relate to that in any way? In so doing we might revise our view of the work.

My role in the conversation—my feelings, beliefs, understandings—is equally important. When a work of art speaks, it speaks to me. Very often this occurs in an act of recognition: I recognise something of my own experience in what the artwork is presenting. In the case of 'religious' works of art, it is my experience of the religious, the spiritual, the transcendent. A particular artwork might confirm my experience, but it might also help me name it, illuminate it, or refine it. Or, as suggested earlier, it might challenge me, even to the point of changing me in some way. To allow for such possibilities I need to devote time to the process; time for me to ask questions and consider the answers. But also time just to be with the art work, in a similar way that I need to spend time with a person if I am to know and appreciate them. I find that gallery sofas, especially those with good views of the art, can be a great help with this.

It is also important to remember that I am not alone when engaging with works of art. I am part of a community that includes other viewers, artists, gallery curators and directors, critics and scholars, art collectors and sellers. We all have an impact on the art-experience that we share. Art, like religion, is both a solitary and communal reality. So, for example, it can be both fascinating and illuminating to observe those around me in a gallery. How are they engaging with the works? Which ones attract most attention? What reactions can I see? Are they the same as mine? And at exhibitions with a theme it can be helpful to reflect on the curator's intentions, selection and positioning of works. Do they add to my appreciation of the works, individually or together?

If we adopt this conversational approach to interpreting and understanding art, it is
never possible to determine a single meaning of a work, the real meaning, the true meaning. Though this is something we often claim. Historically we have certainly made such claims about religious art. But as much as we can share our experience with others, we know experientially that such claims are always dubious. This not the old question of whether knowledge of art is objective or subjective. It is manifestly both. Rather, it is because our interactions with artworks are like our interactions with people; we can never fully grasp 'the other'. It might even be, as Rahner has argued, that our experience of art (like our experience of people) is connected with our quest for the Mystery that is God. In this article I hope at least to have shown that engaging with religious art in this dialogical manner can make our experience of it meaningful for us.

NOTES

2. Richard Harries, Art and the Beauty of God: A Christian Understanding (London and New York: Mowbray, 1994) 101-114. See also Grayson Perry, Playing to the Gallery (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2014). In this accessible and enjoyable introduction to contemporary art Perry never refers to 'religious art'. But he insists that art's 'most important role is to make meaning' (111); and states near the work's end that art is 'a way of accessing spirituality' (129).
5. Because of this Tillich recognised and argued that in order to be of religious significance, works of art need not have an explicitly religious content. See Paul Tillich, 'Art and Ultimate Reality', in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.), Art, Creativity and the Sacred: An Anthology in Religion and Art (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 219-235.
6. Two works that have informed my reflections on these issues are: Justin Paton's How To Look At A Painting (Wellington, New Zealand: AWA Press, 2009) and Nancy G. Heller's Why A Painting Is Like A Pizza: A Guide To Understanding And Enjoying Modern Art (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002). For their summaries of 'how to look at paintings' see Paton, 107-111 and Heller, 170-172.
9. For a general discussion of these issues see Johan Idema, How To Visit An Art Museum : Tips For a Truly Rewarding Visit (Amsterdam: BIS Publications, 2014), especially sections 7 and 14.
11. Rosemary Crumlin and Margaret Woodward, Beyond Belief : Modern Art and the Religious Imagination (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1998) 100. I might note that Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI both had a more positive view of modern art.
13. We might also note that this view of religion as 'the restless searching heart in the midst of a mysterious world' readily connects with Rahner's more explicitly theological understanding of the human person.
15. Thiessen, p. 233.
The First Epistle of St John warns us that we can't say we love the God we cannot see, if we do not love the brother or sister whom we do see (4:20). Even so we can still wonder how the 'seen' is connected to the 'unseen', and how we can even talk about the 'unseen' at all. In our empirically-minded age, anything 'unseen' is a conundrum and tends to slip out of language altogether.

Thomas Aquinas thought that after we have eliminated non-applicable words, such as big or bad, we could rely on our belief in God as the cause of all things to provide sufficient connection for at least some of our words, such as 'good' and 'just', to be extended to say something true about God—he believed effects do somehow reflect their causes, creation does reflect the Creator. Still, the manner of that 'reflection' is not immediately obvious—how do we reach our conclusions?

The major difficulty is, however, the jump from the finite into the infinite. The idea of 'cause' seems to have slipped in by sleight-of-hand: God is not a 'cause' as we know causes. The idea of 'cause' seems well and truly trapped in the finite, unable to escape into the infinite and carry our reflection with it. Quantum Mechanics has muddled our thinking about causes even further by jumbling the 'connections' and 'sequences' that we previously thought of as 'causes'. Whatever about medieval times, in our times 'causality' will no longer easily do the theological work it is required to do.

Mystical writers, such as Meister Eckhart, more or less a contemporary of St Thomas and a fellow Dominican, realized that the issue was insurmountable. They thought that all our knowledge and all our words had to be transmuted somehow into ignorance and silence. According to Eckhart all images of God had to be swept aside so that faith may attain God 'naked', not clothed in our words and images:

Since it is God's nature not to be like anyone, we have to come to the state of being nothing in order to enter into the same nature that He is. So, when I am able to establish myself in Nothing and Nothing in myself, uprooting and casting out what is in me, then I can pass into the naked being of God... All that smacks of likeness must be ousted that I may be transplanted into God and become one with Him...

For Eckhart, the intellect's task is to strip God 'of goodness and being and of all names' and thereby reach God because God truly is beyond all human concepts and images.

But again, there is a problem: if all our words and images must go, what is left? Are we giving up on saying anything about God at all? Mystical writers might answer that it is not the endpoint only that matters, the meaning is in the route taken. Again, though, how do we know whether we have lost our way or not? We seem to be back in our original dilemma: we want our words to say something about God, even if the way God is 'good' and merciful ultimately escapes us, as it did Job when God asks out of the whirlwind 'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?' (38:4). But if we do believe at least some of our everyday words apply directly to God, has God ceased to be God and then been made over into our own image and likeness? Imprisoned in our own words?

Down through the ages, philosophical discussion about God seems to have tied itself in knots: follow one strand such as 'omnipotence' and you get tangled in
questions like ‘Can God create a stone he cannot lift?’ Human beings can, why can’t God? God is omnibenevolent, why then is there so much suffering in the world? If God is omnipotent, why doesn't God eliminate or reduce suffering? If God can, but doesn't want to, how is he omnibenevolent? The New Atheists make great sport of these difficulties:

If God is omniscient, he can predict everything, including his own future acts. But if God is omnipotent, he can overrule everything, thus making all predictions about the future, including predictions about his own behavior, uncertain. So the attributes of omnipotence and omniscience are inconsistent.4

Trying to untangle these logical knots ties you up more and more in qualifications and contradictions with the result that God either becomes unrecognizable or disappears in a mental haze. One source of this fog is that God is bound up in abstract definitions of supposed attributes: 'omnipotence', for example, understood as including all possible actions and excluding all possible limitations (except the illogical) or 'omniscience' understood as knowledge of all and only truths. The omni prefix projects each of these attributes into infinity, and, in the process, into incompatibility and confusion.

For people of faith, God is personal, which at the very least, means that such attributes must converge in a unified way, each attribute qualifying and being qualified by the others. The problem still remains, however, how do our words say anything about God at all?

Renewed interest in how language works enables us to identify a few distinctive features of religious language:

* religious language has its own distinct context and purposes, different from technological and scientific language, to which it has often been disparagingly compared and confused—religious language primarily belongs to the practice of worship, prayer and faith reflection and takes its meaning from that context;

* religious language belongs to the realm of the personal and gives expression to the deepest commitments and connections that give our lives meaning and value and thereby has its own criteria of success and failure, different, for example, from the verification or falsification criteria of science;

* religious language in its disclosure and evocation of God’s presence employs, besides literal language, metaphor, narrative, sign and symbol, poetry, and any other literary resources that will enable it to reach out to the higher levels of meaning and value involved in talking to and about God.5

American theologian, Dan Striver, maintains that 'recent philosophy of language breaks down entirely the categories in which the traditional philosophy of religious language has been formulated’.6 He concludes:

The kind of paradigm that emerges is something like the idea of language as a coloured or translucent window, not a transparent one. Language is one of the frames, perhaps the central one, through which we encounter and understand our world. The fact that we cannot get outside of this frame does not in and of itself mean the window is opaque. It means that human forms of life will always shape and colour what is seen. It likely means that broad agreement upon descriptions will be hard to come by. Yet communities will still accredit and take for granted certain meanings and usages.7

Looking at religious language from...
outside then, as philosophy does, you will see the architecture, but will only ever be able to see the stained glass windows without the light shining through. From the inside of faith, however, that same stained glass is going to reveal a different world and it is within that coloured world that our religious language aspires to say something to and about God.

For those who belong to the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions, the name 'God' is a relational term, something like our use of 'I' and 'you' in conversation, terms that focus our words and actions on each other. Who I am and who you think I am and who you are and who I think you are emerges within our relationship. Similarly, with God, who, as Subject, emerges in our life and worship as our faith relationship develops.

God as Subject, however, remains beyond all that we can imagine: How, then, can we speak of this experience? The mystics are right—this 'otherness' is essential to our understanding of God, otherwise we have something less than God. Something similar is true of our use of 'I' and 'you' in our daily lives—the moment we settle on some category we have lost the point of reference to a subject, and substituted an object of our own devising instead. To be in any sense adequate, therefore, our understanding of God has to be kept open-ended, yet somehow without losing our point of reference and ending up saying nothing at all or just talking to ourselves.

We speak of God's attributes, such as love, mercy and justice, using terms we believe can be projected to God, but it is doubtful that we have any notions, such as Aquinas' 'causality' that we can rely on to reach all the way to God and provide the basis for analogy. Such terms may be better understood as metaphors with a special role in religious language, perhaps also in so doing safeguarding the element of 'mystery' that can be lost when seeing them as analogous, which somehow seems to enclose them within our own concepts of 'goodness', 'wisdom', 'compassion' and mercy.

Metaphors have a special ability to open up our everyday literal language to a further range of meanings we want to explore. Metaphors can become so settled, perhaps like God is good, God is love, that they lose some of this power, and so need to be awakened: How is God good? Loving? Just?

The Psalms abound in metaphors that aim to arouse reflection and wonder: 'The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer' (18:2); 'Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel' (80:1); and 'Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations' (90:1). Or as in the First Epistle of St John, 'God is light' (1:5). Such metaphors destabilize our settled thinking and stretch our concepts almost to breaking point and hold them open because we are never able to exhaust their meaning.

The more 'alive' metaphors are, the greater space for reflection and wonder they keep open: such as, God's 'way is in whirlwind and storm' (Nah 1:3) or 'God will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival' (Zeph 3:17). Our concepts are exploded and the aftershocks continue to reverberate in our reflection and wonder. We can't let go of the terms, however, otherwise the meaning will disappear—that meaning is not in the terms themselves but in the tension or space created between the terms. God's transcendence is safeguarded not in a single word, such as 'good' or 'just', but by what the words hold open in the relationship of faith where God is present Subject to subject.

Religious language exploits all the available resources it can lay hold of. Whereas metaphors push us to seek something we can glimpse and say of who God is, similes attempt to disrupt our settled notions of identity, so that we are pushed to explore further. Jesus' parables rely on simile:

Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep
the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost' (Lk 15:8-9).

The friends and neighbours would most likely have thought she had taken leave of her senses, was totally obsessive, and was inevitably inviting ridicule by expecting people to party over her finding a small coin. Yet Jesus likens God to her, so attempting to shatter our conventional notions of God.

A reader of modern translations of the Scriptures would immediately notice how much is presented as poetry, that in earlier versions was mistakenly given as prose. Poetry, as the Scriptural authors realized, makes words and images 'sing' and 'dance' together, allowing what is conjured between them to resonate, evoke, express and point towards the mystery of God's presence in the world", making words do together, what they were unable to do alone:

O Lord my God...
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent
You set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
You make the clouds your chariot,
You ride on the wings of the wind,
You make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers
(Ps 104:1-4).

Narrative is, however, also important in the Scriptures. Narrative figures and refigures experience to discover pattern, value and meaning, with the potential for others to inhabit the world as perceived in the story. Scriptural narratives emerge out of the events where God's identity is disclosed and a people's life transformed.

Today we are confronted ceaselessly by unconnected narratives, mostly with simplified storylines, stock characters, Hollywood endings, coded value messages, incitements to buy whatever is being sold, and images tending to replace words in the telling of stories—the surreal replacing the real.

The Scriptures, on the other hand, consist of countless narratives held together by an emerging Presence, each providing a partial glimpse of the unfolding mystery. These narratives are of real people and events, times of prosperity and the extremities of violence and tragedy, human strengths and frailty in all its forms, which culminate for Christians in the ultimate meaning and value discovered in the violent death of Jesus on the cross, a meaning and value, however, which can't be separated from all the other narratives it is bound with. In this way scriptural narrative is something like metaphor, it is not one single narrative, verse, or book that reveals God, but God's presence is met at the myriad points where the narratives meet, each one a glimpse only, and all together preserving and pointing to the Mystery of who God is.

These narratives show that any talk about God is always also a conjugation of human life and meaning. For Christians, the cross is the portal through which all the violence and chaos of the world enters, preventing any closure of religious language in the present and keeping it open to the unknown future of God. Such talk about God has its ultimate sense, not in ritual alone, but also in the community's living out of Christ's mission of forgiveness and reconciliation, outreach to the poor and oppressed, and his teaching on wealth, non-violence, love and compassion. The 'Do this in memory of me' of the Eucharistic celebration refers especially to Christ's giving his body and pouring out his blood for the many. The memory becomes reality when we follow Jesus' example in our own lives.

The 'present' in whatever age or culture it is experienced is always a bubble enclosing set ways of thinking and acting, and our own Western bubble of affluence is no exception. Any talk about God that
remains within such a bubble falls far short of an awareness of the transcendence of God. Only genuine faith practice is able to burst that bubble to allow the truth of God to be glimpsed. The British philosopher (and atheist), Terry Eagleton reminds us how deeply Christ's death penetrates to the dark heart of the world: 'His death and descent into hell is a voyage into madness, terror, absurdity, and self-dispossession, since only a revolution that cuts deep can answer our dismal condition.'  

Our experience of the resurrection of Jesus is inseparable from this immersion into the reality of our world. It is God present within destruction and death, when things appear hopeless, when violence seems overwhelming. It is there in our hope in God's promises that our religious language attains its truest reference to God.

Judge Holden, the prophet of arbitrary violence and atrocity in Cormac McCarthy's novel, Blood Meridian, states: 'War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god.' Only a little knowledge of history is needed to show how much such an assertion seems true of our world. Yet, it is not the answer of the Scriptures—that 'God is love' the First Epistle of St John asserts, is the final word of the Scriptures. God's attributes, then, for believers, are not logical puzzles, but glimpses forged in the fire of human life and history and looking in hope to God's future.

We can talk about God in the third person, but then much is lost, the words lose their vital connectedness and seem always to fall short. In their true context of first and second person, however, it is the relationship with God, with all its narrative history, its striking images, words working their wonders, and living practice, that allows the Presence of God to be a living presence, as it is when we are closest to those we love and with whom we share our deepest thoughts and hopes.

Our words never encompass God. When we think they do, we have in fact fashioned an idol for ourselves. But our words and actions, in worship, prayer and works of charity, do hold our minds and hearts open to the God who is beyond anything we can ever know or say, but who nonetheless is Present to us.

NOTES

1. S Th 1.13.5
3. ibid., Vol 2, 153.
6. ibid., 195.
7. ibid., 204.
"OPENING OUR HEARTS TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD"

Where was God when Ebola struck? Where was faith?

ANNE CAREY

THE COURAGE to respond to the threat of Ebola involved the courage to be kind to another group of people whom we could have ignored in their suffering—the result was an overwhelmingly positive outcome for West Africa and the World.

Initially the world had felt overwhelmed by the scale of the task, and the risks involved to individual health workers became excuses for procrastination. The risk of health workers bringing back Ebola to countries such as Australia enabled some to whip up fear and further paralyse our society at the very time action was needed.

In West Africa the existing health services were damaged by war and became incapable of detecting the epidemic yet alone controlling it. They did not know it was Ebola they were dealing with as they had not been exposed to it before. By the time they worked out what it was it had become widespread. This outbreak, by the time it was detected, was so large that the local health services were never going to cope with it on their own.

From the twenty previous outbreaks of Ebola over thirty-eight years we know that two of the most important things to do are to isolate sick people and create safe burial practices. Health workers were becoming ill and passing it on to their families.

Every two weeks we delayed tackling this problem allowed the outbreak to double.

West Africa and MSF were left to struggle with a nightmare that threatened to shut down whole countries. Wealthy western countries spent much effort preparing for the arrival of a disease that would never arrive if only they helped to stop it at its source. In the west many called for isolating West Africa in its hour of need.

I am sure many health professionals and others in the West contemplated going over to help but imagined they would be entering an unimaginable nightmare.

When our children have nightmares we do not wear ear plugs to stop their cries keeping us awake—we go to them and bring them comfort. I hope by briefly describing parts of my personal journey in Sierra Leone, you will see that while this was something of a nightmare, it was one that they would only wake from with some help from the world.

This humanitarian nightmare required us to support those locals on the ground who were fighting the outbreak, by providing them with equipment and procedures that would make them safe, as well as the funds to build simple hospitals, training of staff in how to work safely with Ebola patients and that contagious component of all successful battles—courage.

Remember that we were surrounded by fear from politicians and media who were hijacking the education about Ebola and turning it into a fear spectacle. Because of this my partner Donal and I felt as I left to head overseas that we might not see each other again.

The important thing here is not that I would not have returned but that I went with hope and courage to try and help people in a country.
where help was desperately needed.

*Is this what faith is? The feeling of not being alone in the presence of fear?*

Ebola gave us a challenge that required us to think about what really matters. We had to think about what our true values were. Some who claimed to have connection to God were found to be paralysed with fear. On the other hand the Red Cross-Red Crescent which sees itself as a non-religious humanitarian movement had no reluctance to step forward. Interestingly the symbols of the Red Cross are the Cross and the Crescent moon.

The positive response by parts of the world to poor countries struggling with Ebola required nations to act beyond their self-interest. Likewise we as individuals had to act beyond our self-interest. We had to respond to a sense of something greater than ourselves. We had to show courage and overcome fear. We had to listen to that part of God in ourselves, our conscience and be guided by it.

This is Faith in action.

By not leaving people alone we show there is more than self interest in the world. Something greater at work in humans than individuals.

This is kindness in action.

This is the presence of God. It is bigger than humans.

My journey to Sierra Leone started with a period of training in Geneva in the use of the high level PPE. Without PPE the death rate among aid workers would have been high. We must not forget 500 local health workers (that is doctors and nurses) died in this outbreak basically from lack of safety equipment and antiseptics.

Now let's look at what the nightmare was like on the ground.

The first time I dressed in the elaborate protective outfit that we wore, I entered the ward just as a two week infant began to fit, and he bled to death in my arms. While I found this confronting I then came to realize his mother sitting with us had just lost all seven of her children and her husband to Ebola. It had taken her whole family. She felt she had no reason to live. I realised right then I had no right to self-pity.

This was my introduction to Ebola: a disease that takes whoever it pleases baby, child, brother, sister, mother and father. Death was stalking West Africa in the same way it had during the plagues of Europe and it had brought the country to a halt through fear. Schools were closed, health resources were diverted from other priorities such as malaria and maternal health. Many businesses went under.

Over the weeks I was there I saw many children, young adults: women and men die. Sometimes they would fight so hard to survive and overcome the virus but the virus would overcome them.

Others would be doing well: eating, drinking, talking and you would think that all is OK and they are going to make it: but the virus would move in swiftly and silently and take them suddenly and alone.

That was always something I found hard: that people died alone. Some very frightened. I sat with one 16 year old who had arrived from Freetown the day before. His family came. His father was a local doctor who had died treating Ebola patients, unfortunately after he contracted the disease he had passed it on his family. His wife, his mother, two sons - one being this 16 year old, who were all confirmed cases of Ebola.
This young man was very sick. I had put up IV fluids with maybe some hope that he could successfully fight it. I then especially dressed in PPE to go and sit with him for another 40 minutes as he was scared. I held his hand during that time. I told him I had come from Australia and that my name was Anne. I told him to fight. He died.

The next day his brother who was doing well—drinking, eating, and talking—died. His mother and grandmother did well and survived. Yes they survived. Yes there are survivors.

Regarding the burial of the dead. In our non-religious Red Cross treatment centre we arranged and conducted combined Christian/Muslim services for the dead. In this way we acknowledged something bigger than our own concept of God, we generously acknowledged that others’ concepts were also valid and were guiding their actions toward a common good.

To return to the PPE for a minute…

PPE: this stands for personal protective equipment and the space suit appearance of this outfit is what the image of Ebola around the world became.

PPE made treating ill Ebola patients safe. With use of PPE the transmission of Ebola to healthcare workers dropped dramatically. Basically Ebola is transmitted by contact with body fluids. This means if your entire body is covered then body fluids cannot make contact with you and you cannot get Ebola.

It all sounds very simple. However it is not that simple.

Taking the PPE off involves taking off contaminated layers without becoming infected by contact with any of the contaminated outer surface of the outfit. It has to be done properly. It was being done in tropical heat and humidity after 40-60 minutes of being cooped up in a suit that does not let your body heat out. It is always done with a companion present to make sure mistakes do not happen.

PPE is uncomfortable and hot and you can only wear it for about 40-60 minutes otherwise you will get too hot and can collapse.

PPE includes triple gloves so it is hard to do procedures such as putting in drips and taking bloods while in PPE. The gloves also make it hard to have the usual physical contact with patients that is so much of the comforting role nurses perform.

PPE has another effect. It helps disconnect you enough from the suffering around you that you can cope better with it.

There are lessons for the world and lessons for each of us as individuals. Some communities were not slow to respond, they had faith in the value of international kindness and their people volunteered in large numbers. The Norwegians for instance, with a population of four million, spent more on the outbreak than did Australia, and Norwegians were well represented among the staff in the treatment centres. Lithuania provided half a million PPE outfits.

Organisations such as Red Cross showed that without the resources available in our hospitals we could build a simple hospital and supply simple rehydration and save so many lives. We could persuade people to enter our hospitals to isolate themselves so others could live. We tried to relieve suffering among the dying, and we provided some dignity to safe disposal of dangerously contaminated bodies.

Red Cross showed that the combination of knowledge, humanity and courage and the rejection of pure self-interest could make a difference. I believe the founder of Red Cross would be proud of what the organisation achieved.

The United States Presidential commission summed up what the world had learnt and how we should better prepare for the next outbreak. 'Ethics and enlightened interest converge in calling for our country to address epidemics at their source'. They also pointed out: 'Needlessly restricting the freedom of experts
and caring health care professionals is both morally wrong and counterproductive; it will do more to lose lives than to save them’. This could simply be stated as: the courage to be kind would have conquered the outbreak much earlier and much simpler.

Christians have no need of ethics committees to guide them in a situation such as the Ebola outbreak. The combination of the examination of one’s own conscience and the example of sacrifice that is Christ’s message, should direct us. The courage to be kind needs to flow from our knowledge, faith and love.

I found on my first return to Australia that public health officials were not focusing on educating the public that returning health professionals were not a threat to Australia. Unfortunately these officials set out to make it appear as if I was under some form of quarantine in order to allay unwarranted fears.

The simple reality is that Ebola has not been passed on in the first three days of fever and so if a returning aid worker were to be infected, there would be plenty of time to safely isolate them.

The focus here should have been to help people to understand Ebola and help contain the disease. Our role is not to respond to hysteria. Our role is to educate everyone so that we are able to maintain a public health role that is calm and rational. All those who guide public health policy such as politicians and members of the Health Departments should read the United States Presidential Commission Report for guidance on how to handle the next Ebola outbreak.

I want to share with you an instance of how easily health professionals who were experts on contagious tropical diseases could be reduced to frightened people who could no longer perform their role. Eighteen days following my first return and knowing I needed a fresh supply of anti-malarial medication and with no evidence I had Ebola, an appointment was made with a practice that specialised in travel health.

On the morning of the appointment I was phoned and informed that this practice had held a meeting and decided I was far too great a threat to be allowed inside their doors.

So I set off in a packed morning train, walked through the streets of Perth, paused to have coffee in a café and then as instructed made my way to the front door of the practice. I phoned their receptionist and waited for the door to open just sufficient for an eye to look around and a disconnected hand to toss my medication onto the pavement in front of me. The door shut as I bowed gratefully and I collected my package and made my way back through the crowds of Perth.

This brought home to me that well educated, knowledgeable fellow health professionals could be reduced to mere fools by lacking the courage to question fear. We are all capable of panic but we seldom achieve anything worthwhile when we yield to fear.

At an individual level, what did I come back with, what did it change in me?

I did not come back with PTSD. I think that child dying in my arms made me recognise it was not about me and my needs. We were there to help and if we could not save lives we were there to show the kindness of health carers.

This is Faith in action.

As a world we needed the courage to turn up and be kind to others. All of us going into West Africa had some fear of contracting Ebola. We all had that other fear that was probably stronger for most of us, that we would not cope with what we would see. Many of us on the ground found we were braver than we ever thought we could be. This included the courage not to wall off the suffering we saw around us but to engage with it. This is the courage to be kind.

UN Secretary-General Banki-Moon summed up the need for courage when he said ‘the best antidote to fear is an effective and urgent response’
What else did I learn?

You learn to cope with the knowledge that you cannot save everyone, that at times when the admission rate rose people would die for lack of simple resources. You learnt to accept that, so that you could focus your energies in ways that would save as many as possible.

You learnt how to maintain hope when people were predicting a massive world-wide epidemic. You learnt that being in a team of positive people kept hope alive. The courage to be useful and kind was what kept the teams on the ground from despair.

This is Kindness in action.

Are there lessons I brought back to my life and work in Australia?

As I said earlier, I did not come back with PTSD. I watched so many people, many younger than myself, lose their lives. My response to that is to value more the time I have and to want to use my time on earth really well…and I ask myself how can I make the greatest difference in my chosen profession, as a nurse and a human, in what is left of my working years?

I look back and realize in 2014 I had made a choice between fighting against a horrible disease or standing up against people who were making our local workplace rather toxic. I think I had made a wise choice.

I made a choice that gave me the privilege of being part of a winning team that overcame against the odds. This winning team would not have won if it was weighed down by the toxic workplace culture so common in our healthcare institutions.

I have now returned with a renewed determination to make healthcare a kinder place for the workers and a safer place for patients.

I am no longer willing to accept in silence, 20-30% of my colleagues being bullied in their work places.

Just as it took courage for the world to step up to fight Ebola, it will take courage to tackle the culture of our workplace. We must not go on accepting workplaces that drive out the more empathic and sensitive among us.

We need to provide leadership to produce more ethical, nurturing workplaces to create the next generation of health professionals so that we break a cycle of the bullied becoming the bullies.

For those politicians and bureaucrats who cannot see past budgets and measured performance indicators, we need to direct them to the literature that shows the cost of staff turnover and the effects on patient care.

It takes no more than good leadership and the courage to be kind to drive change in our work culture.

Workplace bullying is one of the unkind cuts in our society. Survey after survey shows it is very common in healthcare.

As health professionals we need to combat bullying in our workplaces to produce places that will be kinder to staff and patients.

Humanity also needs to extend its hand to the plight of refugees which is an example of the challenge to respond, to overcome fear of ridicule by the masses, to have faith that good can overcome the mediocre self-interest of our society.

Having people turn up on our shores is a test of our values. Do we only display self-interest and concern for preserving our wealth, or do we recognise their desperation and welcome them and share our resources? At the end of the day we have to live with our conscience. We need to have enough faith in the worth of our own decency to overcome the clamour of those politicians who would throw people to the lions to get a vote.

I believe that God was there in Ebola, was there in each step, helping each of us. I think the problem was faith and courage was needed to be stronger in peoples' response to help others humans on this earth.

The thing I ask you all to do is to use your faith to have the courage to improve the culture of your workplace and the world around you when you go home from here.
PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FROM THE HEART

Becoming Children of God

GLENN MORRISON

Practical theology, like worn shoes, carries the memories of our daily lives, giving opportunities for the movement of God's word to resonate from the heart (Matt 18:35). In this article, I want to suggest that the markings we make on the road to 'the paradise of God' (Rev 2:7) reflect opportunities and capacities for growth to become children of God. This entails a difficult or even a vexing adventure of faith. For 'the children of your Father in heaven' are challenged to find meaning and truth through encounters and memories like loving 'your enemies' or praying 'for those who persecute you' (Matt 5:44).

So where the heart matures into becoming curious about God who makes the 'sun rise on the evil and on the good' (Matt 5:45), practical theology nurtures a place for 'joy and gladness' (Ps 45:15) even amongst life's disappointments and catastrophes. In effect, practical theology moves forward to invite a reflection upon discerning God's movement into our personal stories so that our loving and knowing from the heart may reveal the joy and gladness of becoming children of God 'today'.

A compelling trait of the children of God is knowing what it means to abide in God. They are drawn 'to walk just as he walked' (1 Jn 2:6), as in the Garden of the Lord (Gen 3:8). Such walking with God may even take the path of mourning and weeping like David on the way to the Mount of Olives (2 Sam 15:30) or grieving and praying like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-44). The children of God possess the courage and confidence to traverse the path to God, to become holy people of God, because they know the Father (1 Jn 2:14) who is the place of joy and gladness. Abiding in God, the children of God discover forgiveness through 'Jesus Christ the righteous' (1 Jn 2:2), and await in hope to enter the Father's Kingdom through being born of the Spirit (Jn 3:5). Essentially, the children of God reveal that this hope for the glory of the Kingdom of God (1 Thess 2:12) is deeply personal. For such intimacy of hope can be born out of transformative and dramatic events like the collision between loving and knowing.

Loving and knowing

The American-Jewish author, Chaim Potok, writes in his book, The Book of Lights: 'How do you live almost a lifetime with two people, and love them, and really not know about them? What sort of energy or accident brings together loving and knowing?' (1981, 240) Existence with another may appear somewhat disjointed where opportunities or capacities for growth are lost in the mundane of everyday living. However, where bursts of energies or accidents (risks and crises) of the heart suddenly emerge to give voice to emotions and yearnings of the soul, transformation may yield itself into the scene of human relations. Potok's questions help
us to envision that a transformative, dramatic event—an 'energy or accident' uniting 'loving and knowing'—has taken place in the lives of the children of God. Such transforming events are inherently personal and relational. And importantly, these events lead to much good like the peacemaking (Matt 5:9) of healing and forgiving. The collision between loving and knowing expresses then the good truth of the risen Jesus: that God's grace and presence (Gal 1:16) is a personal and intimate encounter of the nearness (Matt 4:17, 10:7) and newness (Matt 9:17; Jn 3:3) of the Kingdom of God.

Moments of peacemaking, such as the loving-kindness of forgiveness and mercy, invite a personal 'yes' of faith in the risen Jesus. This is all the more compelling due to our vulnerable human condition. Even the glance of another's needs and desires may touch upon our strivings and put into question our conscience and self-image. Or the look of a stranger in our midst may suddenly dislocate our everyday perception and harmony. Practical theology from the heart takes seriously these wounding and stirring connections between loving and knowing. This is because it cultivates a spiritual and inter-personal lens for the imagination to grow spontaneously towards an outpouring of faith in God's Son. Such imagination exemplifies a radical choice of the children of God: to discern and integrate the enigmatic movements of God's word in our relations with others so that all may be one in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:25-28).

Back in 2005, Australian theologian, Terry Veling, wrote a book on practical theology, entitled, Practical Theology: On Earth as It Is in Heaven. The title is a clue to its creative and personal sensibility to Jesus' witness to his Father's kingdom. In the book, he draws together a number of definitions of practical theology not only from various scholars around the world, but also from sayings of Jesus from the Gospels of Mathew, Luke and John.

One provocative saying of Jesus stands out especially as it seems to guide the sense of loving and knowing from the heart - Luke 12:56: 'You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?' (Veling 2005, 20) Jesus' words are compelling as much as they provoke the heart to be open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles and prophecy (1 Cor 12:4-11). Moreover, the more we listen attentively from the heart to Jesus' words, they become through time an invitation to become children of God, that is to say, to give time to walk with God humbly in the garden of our daily, ordered and disordered, lives.

To love in truth and action

In the act of discernment, of loving and knowing from the heart, we are invited to take up the vocation of what the children of God know well from the heart: to 'love … in truth and action' (1 Jn 3:18).

Something of this message, of learning how to love in 'truth' as much as in 'action', was pressed home to me several years ago when I taught practical theology to a group of teachers including many pre-primary school teachers. I never forget the vibrant energy and hospitality of the class; they were eager to learn with 'joy and gladness' (Ps 45:15; Isa 51:3) and 'the voice of song' (Isa 51:3). When speaking with the students, joyous and inviting laughter would naturally flow into the
conversation. I sensed that something of the charism or playfulness of little children had instilled itself in the consciousness of my students. The students were at play in learning, testifying to the value of listening and sharing together.

Where learning takes on the state of internal enjoyment, a heartfelt commitment emerges. Yet, I noticed something more, like the dynamic energy of loving and knowing coming together. The love of learning was expressed in the action of participation, reflection, humility and mutuality.

The truth of the face of learning even began to unveil itself especially in moments of the students' seminars. Listening to one seminar, the whole class heard 'the voice of song'. It seemed that the joy in the student's presentation needed an action of song at the end to bless the class with 'the oil of gladness' (Ps 45:7). The 'earth and sky' of the students emotional being suddenly became alive. It struck me that the student had extended the mode of reflection to an outpouring of heartfelt discernment: to offer and reveal an intimacy of life in regards to signifying the present time as moments of connection not only with the class, but also with the Father's kingdom.

Such sacred moments become instrumental for discernment because they help to identify which Edenic fruits of the spirit are ripe in our life, such as love, joy and gentleness (Gal 5:22-23); for they lead us a little closer to inherit the Kingdom of God.

Moreover, many of the students in the class, by virtue of the working of grace in their lives as teachers, gave witness to the hope and calling to become children of God. The students elicited the charism of playfulness and intimacy inasmuch as a window into the vulnerability of truth. As a result, the joy and fun of learning nurtured hospitality and intimacy to form together into expressions of faith. On the faces of the students—who spent much of their time teaching children—I seem to hear the words of 1 John 2:28 resounding: 'And now, little children, abide in him'.

We can begin to imagine the joy and hope of the children of God to love in truth and action. In theological terms, the joy and hope that brings loving and knowing ever closer together point to an evocative conversion to the Kingdom of God: adoring the Father 'with the voice of song' (Isa 51:3), walking in the light of the risen Jesus 'with the oil of gladness' (Ps 45:7) and rejoicing in the joy of the Holy Spirit (Lk 10:21).

Knowing the depths of our being made in the image of the Triune God unveils the energy of loving: the 'joy and gladness' (Isa 51:3) of being a gift of oneself for another. What lies at our depths is so precious, so sensitive and so wounding which Triune love exalts in the Edenic, paradisal existence of the children of God, of knowing the Father's love and forgiveness (1 Jn 2:12-14) from the heart.

We can begin to discern that practical theology takes hold of opportunities and nurtures them into capacities for growth to live from the heart. In this way, a spiritual sense takes hold of raw experiences, 'energies and accidents', in the hope of finding some attunement between loving and knowing, and truth and action.

The idea of having a spiritual sense takes one beyond oneself into the realm of transformation and transcendence. This is the realm of the children of God because they live from the heart, forgiving (Matt 18:35) and keeping 'God's decrees'(Psalm 119:2). Indeed, the children of God know to be vigilant regarding matters of the heart (Prov 4:23) lest anxieties and troubles overwhelm the mind and body (Eccles 11:10). In a word, the lived experience of the children of God speaks of holiness—of living out a personal expression of faith, charity and prayer in relation to Christ.

**The Holy People of God**

*Lumen Gentium* (the 'Dogmatic Constitution
on the Church'), No. 12 sheds some light into the ideal of holiness:

The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name.

Practical theology, aspiring towards a prayerful and joyful habitus of faith, signifies, as it were, a liturgy of becoming holy people of God; children of God eager to partake of the table of the risen Lord. Where our language matures into acts of prayer, faith and love, an ideal of holiness come to mind, particularly through mercy, forgiveness and peacemaking. 'The holy people of God' learn to take up the calling to become the children of God.

In this way, the person of faith moves towards sharing in 'Christ's prophetic office'. Essentially, this infers a hospitable, hopeful and intimate life of conversion to Christ, giving the confidence and courage to seek to know 'how to interpret the present time' (Lk 12:56) through 'the tribute of [our] lips': 'See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!' (2 Cor 6:2)

The Pauline sense of the 'now' touches upon the imagination of faith. The children of God, called to the ideal of holiness, are led to hope for the fullness of salvation and the coming of the Father's Kingdom. Such hope stirs as a call and vocation to become 'pilgrim people immersed in the drama of struggling humanity' (Thornhill 1988, 194, 196).

And altogether, the very 'now' of the day of salvation stirs as the work of God in the soul instilling an Edenic-like brightness to the soul. St. Paul, a robust apostle of faith, testifies to this brightness or outburst of the soul. He proclaims, in vivid language, how the 'now' of the 'the day of salvation' comes at the cost of discipleship: '… but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger…' (2 Cor 6:4-5). Developing a prayerful sense of the work of God, St. Paul explains how, 'by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God,' (2 Cor 6:6-7), 'the day of salvation' carries the assurance of hope that 'the Lord's Spirit' is working in us.

St. Paul's message echoes forth, as it were, in Gaudium et Spes (the 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World'), No. 11, which alerts us to appreciate the Holy Spirit's gift of faith as the foundation of our 'total vocation' as 'People [and indeed children] of God':

The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other [people] of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for [humanity's] total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.

Our vocation itself would seem to possess an evangelical or Pauline quality about it, namely witnessing to Christ's resurrection and gift of salvation in the tapestry of our daily lives. Such testimony draws near to the heart of a practical theology grounded in being children of God.

For keeping in mind the stirring definition of practical theology from Luke 12:56, 'You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time,' we may suggest that a challenge for practical theology is to foster a prayerful and joyful sense of 'the paradise of God' in our daily lives.

Where the 'total vocation' of prayer, mercy and loving-kindness come together in the 'now' of the joy and hope for salvation, we may realise that we are called to be 'People of God,' people of 'the Lord's Spirit', people of the heart, that is to say, children of God who
COMPASS

vigilantly and spontaneously learn to 'decipher', for example, the other's spiritual poverty by offering the friendship of the risen Jesus (Pope Francis 2013, No. 200). Is not this a time and place of peacemaking and forgiving where loving and knowing come together!

*Today we are called to become Children of God*

I want to suggest that a key aim of practical theology from the heart is to share the friendship of Jesus 'today', especially by welcoming 'those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' (Matt 5:6). With this in mind, the gift of friendship speaks of a heartfelt truth of the mystical body of Christ: that we are called to be the children of God, sharing in the neighbour's life, joys and struggles 'from your heart' (Matt 18:35).

Accordingly, practical theology guides our desire for intimacy by offering the friendship of Jesus the messiah—a pathway to 'know how to interpret the present time'. Such heightened intimacy evokes a spiritual gift of being animated by 'the Lord's Spirit' to partake of a liturgy of joy, gladness and the voice of song, a work oriented towards Christ's prophetic office of redemption for the world.

The Lord's Spirit may well import the hope and faith that now, today, resounds with the gift and promise of salvation. Every small goodness that we can find today—every act of peacemaking, mercy and loving kindness from the heart—unveils the joy of contemplating the Father's Kingdom, discovering the word of the risen Jesus in the depths of the neighbour's poverty and suffering, and giving oneself as a child of God over to the hope for the 'paradise of God' guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Waiting to 'know how to interpret the present time' may well seem like asking, 'When will the Messiah come?' or rather, 'When will Jesus the Messiah return?' For St. Paul, following the Jewish tradition, the answer is 'today' ['now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor 6:2)], 'that is as soon as possible, if the people obey God' (Pearl 1997, 147). And so where the markings on the road to the 'paradise of God' become entrenched in the capacities, gifts and joys of 'genuine love' (2 Cor 6:6), practical theology may find an opportune time to rouse and waken the heart to know that 'today' we are called to become children of God.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


At times, life seems like a tug-of-war between cruelties and atrocities over against goodness, grace and beauty, whether in nature or in human lives. I think the more we are touched by each, and by the conflict between them, the more deeply we live. After all, compassion ('suffering-with') is a deep and rich way of being, but it wouldn't be at all if there were no suffering. Reconciliation can be an enriching and moving experience, but it wouldn't be if there were not first some kind of alienation. And I think our commitment to peace-making will be shallow if we haven't first wept over the suffering, waste, futility and personal tragedies of war.

The tug-of-war is not an everlasting, unresolvable conflict. It reached a climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus, when evil was not merely defeated; it was itself transformed by being seconded to the purpose of revealing the resurrection and future life. Evil has no future.

St Paul spoke of creation 'groaning in travail' as the prelude to sharing re-birth. Perhaps he could have said 'straining towards ecstasy', for isn't that what we catch glimpses of in bird-song and Beethoven, in self-sacrificing love, in forgiveness and new beginnings? The ecstasy doesn't merely follow on from the agony; it emerges from within the depths of the agony, and gradually transforms it.

It is the meaning of 'gradualness' that I want to explore, because it calls for different ways of contributing to peace. Failure to recognize the implications of gradualness results in debates unhelpfully polarized between 'war' and 'non-violence', or results in mere repetition of the less sophisticated, more dialectic, wisdom of an earlier era: '...there is a time for killing, a time for healing; … a time for war, a time for peace...' (Eccles. 3:2)

Pope Francis speaks of 'time' and the importance of process; Lonergan and others speak of shifting horizons, conversion and transformation when describing what happens to ourselves as we grow in knowledge; Pope John Paul II and moral theologians have spoken of 'gradualness' in the journey of personal development and moral growth. And if Jesus could speak of evils that 'must happen,' this could only be because He did not expect the fullness of peace until the end of the ages: 'You will hear of wars and rumours of war; do not be alarmed, this is something that must happen, but the end will not be yet'. (Mt 24:6ff) What is the meaning of peace-making in that context? It has many forms, and they all point to the end-time when peace will be God's gift. The long wait serves to increase our longing and our capacity for it. It is also the only time available to us in which to become instruments of peace, which is at the core of every calling.

I confess to feeling weighed down by the terrible conflicts and cruelties depicted in documentaries on the History channel and Al Jazeera. But I suspect the long-term cumulative effect of quicker communication and wider awareness of what is happening will be good. By uncovering skullduggery in any of its guises, good investigative journalism deserves recognition for its contribution to truth, justice and peace-making, (just as shonky journalism contributes to injustice and conflict.)

When we look to the causes of the world's
COMPASS

conflicts, colonialism shows up as a prime culprit, both in its older form of 'empire', and in the still current ways that big-business, munitions dealers and financiers exploit and plunder, sometimes even with help from their home countries' special forces. Moreover, the experience of being governed by outsiders, or by puppet dictators, did not help colonized people to gradually learn the skills and responsibilities of freedom. So, when liberated, many self-destructed from tribal rivalries or political corruption. Properly directed development aid to exploited or repressed peoples is not charity; it is owed as reparation, and as contributions to reconciliation and peace. And those who owe it are all who have benefited by the spoils of colonization.

It is well known, of course, that religions have played a part in many violent conflicts. This is what happens when religion is turned into ideology, with its impulse to impose and dominate. Faith, by contrast, respects the dignity and freedom of persons, human and civil rights, and the primacy of conscience. Christians, Muslims and Jews are among those who have taken a long time to fully realize this. They did not always see that it was incompatible with the nature of faith and the dignity of persons to impose the truth they wanted to share.

Some still don't. Some Christians, especially of a fundamentalist disposition, still display an intolerance that falls short of full respect for human dignity and rightful freedom. (Fundamentalists have yet to learn that what sacred texts actually teach is not necessarily the same as what they merely presuppose.) Echoes of ideologized religion also surfaced at the Second Vatican Council, but now live on only in groups that didn't accept the Council's teaching on ecumenism, inter-faith relations, and religious liberty.

Islam's experience is ambiguous: The Ottoman Empire was Islamist, yet even though sharia was the law of the land, the Ottoman system did not impose Islamic culture on the Empire's Jewish, Christian or other minority communities. (Later clashes were reprisals against nationalist and separatist movements during the break-up of the empire.) There, and in other parts of the world, Jews. Christians and Muslims have lived harmoniously together, even under Islamic rule. But freedom of religion and of conscience vanishes wherever Islam has tried, or still tries, to impose its culture. There are human and civil rights that have emerged in humankind's consciousness where the Enlightenment has been experienced and its values critically assimilated. Much of the Islamic world has not had that experience—or is in shock at how the Western world has abused freedom.

People responsible for political judgments may wonder whether a State can claim to be acting in self-defence when it has blatantlly provoked the frustration and reprisals of the people it oppresses. Whatever about any political judgment, there is also a religious dimension to the modern State of Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people: at the core of Hebrew faith was the discovery of God's great and unmerited mercy, and the resulting need to show mercy (in ways that never occurred to ancient Israel's pagan neighbours). Today, whatever about the trappings of faith, it is the core of Hebrew faith that the State of Israel has lost.

Secularism itself is repressive in an inverse way when, acting out of its denial of faith, it moves in the direction of denying religious freedom and freedom of conscience. The impulse to impose and dominate is common to all ideologies, religious and secular.

Bishop Peter Cullinane was the first bishop of the Diocese of Palmerston North, N.Z. He was president of the N.Z. Bishops’ Conference 1997-2003, a member of the Episcopal Board of ICEL 1983-2003. He was awarded Companion of the N.Z Order of Merit.
The Judeo-Christian tradition predicts a time when nations 'will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles, and not lift sword against other nations nor train for war any more' (Isaiah 2:4). There are those who would turn such a prophecy into a moral principle for immediate and universal application. They telescope the end-time into the present. But real time is needed for moral growth and human development. In this meantime, peace-makers include those who promote disarmament, 'truth and reconciliation', restorative justice, medecins sans frontiers, etc. There is a down-to-earth realism in accepting that forgiveness presupposes acknowledgement of the offences that need to be forgiven. 'Only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing' (Archbishop Desmond Tutu).

There is realism also in the Catholic Church's treasury of Catholic Social Teaching—as well as in the commitment of people, of all faiths and none, who work to change the social and economic conditions that spawn injustices, resentments and wars. By the same token, these people are also 'prophets', because the deeds of justice, peace and reconciliation are experienced as reminders of what our hearts are made for, and intimations that what we hope for can really happen.

We cannot exclude from the title of 'peace-makers' those who risk their own lives to defend others against lethal attack. Citizens have a right to be defended, and governments a corresponding duty to defend them, by force if necessary, as well as a right to call on other governments for help, if needed. This is not different in principle from what we expect of our police forces, which sometimes have to use force, and call for back-up.

To leave others exposed and defenceless when we are in a position to help cannot be justified by invoking 'non-violence.' Members of peace movements rightly remind us of Jesus' sermon on the mount and his teaching on turning the other cheek. His teaching is to be taken seriously, but not superficially: it is not intended to encourage new acts of violence. Nor does it excuse us from restraining perpetrators of violence if we can. We are not being anti-war by allowing others to wage war. Pope Paul VI, even as he warned against revolutionary uprising, admitted that this cannot be absolutely excluded if there is no other way of liberating people from long-standing tyranny and on-going, deep injustice.

Nor does 'non-violence' in the sense adopted by Ghandi, Te Whiti and Tohu, Martin Luther-King and others fulfill our obligations in all situations. This is a noble philosophy and mechanism for promoting social and political change, but even where it makes use of passive resistance and civil disobedience, it simply does not apply, for example, when terrorists are attacking buses and trains in London, cafes and restaurants in Paris and Sydney, school children in Nigeria, holiday-makers in Libya, party-goers in a gay night-club in Orlando, religious and ethnic minorities on a hill-top surrounded by ISIS, etc.

The rights and duties relating to self-defence and defence of others are the basis for what has been unhelpfully nick-named the 'just war theory'. It seems strangely necessary to say that this 'theory' is not intended to argue the case for war: it is intended to limit the circumstances in which force may be used even for legitimate defence! And it is not just a 'theory'; when the Church identifies circumstances in which it would be morally wrong to use force, its teaching is to be taken seriously. It is sloppy thinking to say 'modern wars have made the just war theory obsolete'. On the contrary, it is that 'theory'—or 'the strict conditions for legitimate defence by military force' as the Catechism of the Catholic Church more correctly calls it—that outlaws modern warfare in many circumstances!

Comparison was made above with policing. I would argue that the concept of war needs to be replaced by the concept of policing, which seems to offer a more civilized way of
thinking about enforcement. I think this is also implied in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council when it said that a nation's right to use force in self-defence exists only so long as there is 'no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at international level' to defend them; (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 79). They too are peace-makers who work for a world order in which we can move beyond war to policing; beyond what is possible now to what might become possible yet. The temptation is to feel overwhelmed by the size of the task. But every small step in the right direction gradually shifts horizons, and in this way opens up new possibilities. It starts with where we put ourselves. Pope Paul VI was right to say: 'there can be no new world unless there are first of all new persons.'

Archbishop Tutu was also right to link it with forgiveness:

When I talk of forgiveness I mean the belief that you can come out the other side a better person; a better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person too.

Whatever makes for better persons makes for peace.

Does respect for gradualness risk being used as an excuse for doing too little, and acquiescing in how things are, instead of how they should be? The trouble is: asking too much too soon can produce the same result. This is the tension being played out in differences between Pope Francis and his critics. His critics insist on repeating and emphasizing the full ideal; they fear that not to do so is to compromise doctrine and moral standards. They have little to say to those who don't reach the full ideal, other than that they are guilty. Pope Francis starts instead from human experience, which is the experience of weakness, struggle, failure and limited success; it's about a journey in which every step in the right direction is good, and getting there gradually is better than feeling overwhelmed and not getting there at all.

Peace-making is like that: doing what you can, where you can, when you can, and believing that it all counts.

The strict conditions for legitimate defence 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 on 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. The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.

— Catechism of the Catholic Church, par 2309.
The intent behind this book is deeply constructive. It is arguing for a new ethical ideal: that people do the most good they can. The book is directed particularly at giving, to charities, most of which is emotion driven. Singer argues that if it were more thoughtful, it would be more effective. So we should check up on our charities. When people do that now, they usually enquire about what percentage of their gift goes to administration and what percentage to the ultimate recipient. But the really important question is how effective are the funds that get to the end of the line.

That question can now be answered by 'meta-charities' such as The Life You Can Save, Give Well, and Giving What We Can, which compare the results obtained in the field by different organisations. For example, what does the most good, organisations which train guide dogs, or organisations like the Fred Hollows Foundation which perform operations to cure common forms of blindness in developing countries? Your dollar does much more good in the latter cause. Fred Hollows can cure blindness for $25, but it takes about $5000 to train a guide dog.

Is it possible that effective altruists are moved by universal love? Not necessary, replies Singer, who seems to have reservations about that motive, and, in any case, there is something better: effective empathy, which is the ability to put oneself in the position of others and identify with their feelings or emotions. That is the cognitive aspect of empathy, but it has an emotional aspect as well, which is evoked by individuals and pictures of them. For example, in one study, people were shown a photo of a child, given her name and age, and told that to save her life, $300,000 needed to be raised, and they were asked to donate. Then another group was shown photos of eight children, given their names and ages, and told that $300,000 was needed to save all their lives, and they were asked to donate. The first group donated more. Effective altruists consider that absurd, and that it proves the inadequacy of emotional empathy. Cognitive empathy takes a longer view.

Someone remarked that empathy is the 'grand theme of our time.' Let us hope so. Are there any questions we should ask about it? The most obvious one is 'What is the greatest good?' Different cultural perspectives give different answers. In Compass, in 1990, an Indian sister, a Religious of The Sacred Heart, Vandana Matarji, wrote that it would have been much better if Christianity in India, instead of building schools and hospitals, had produced some genuine gurus. The function of a guru, is to transmit her experience of God to her pupil. [This journal. 1990.No.2.p20]

Singer’s position on intrinsic value is a little unusual. Instead of finding it in things like simplicity, peace, integrity, community, fairness, and so on, he locates it in 'positive experiences'—negative experiences are pains, nightmares, embarrassments, etc. Singer’s position lets in the guru’s experience. Singer does not intend that, since he is a long time campaigner for unbelief, but experiences of God are positive, if any are.

There is another question we might ask about, love. Is that the same as emotional empathy—feelings of warmth, compassion and concern? Singer is not enthusiastic about love, but some luminaries have thought it is more than empathy. The poet John Donne believed that love involves inter-subjectivity, 'She is all states and princes, I, nothing else is.' St John’s Gospel seems to say the same thing ‘I in thee and thou in me.' Inter-subjectivity re-appears in the writings of
Swedenborg. Pascal held that there are three distinct orders of existence—the orders of matter, thought, and charity [love].

Finally, it is worth remarking that Big Brother is now watching everyone—at work. That started about 60 years ago with time and motion studies of factory workers, and it has now spread everywhere. No policeman or professor is exempt. With respect to the latter, how many hours of teaching does she do, per week? How many publications has she had over the last five years? Are they in peer reviewed journals?

Now, ‘meta-charities’ are checking up on charities. What kind of performance are the meta-charities turning in? That question opens up the prospect, beloved of philosophers, of an infinite regress of checkers.

—Reg Naulty.

Michael White and Tom Corcoran, The Story of a Catholic Parish - REBUILT. Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, and Making Church Matter.

Winner of two 2014 Catholic Press Awards: Pastoral Ministry (First Place) and Design and Production (Honorable Mention).

Drawing on the wisdom gleaned from thriving mega-churches and innovative business leaders while anchoring their vision in the Eucharistic center of Catholic faith, Fr. Michael White and lay associate Tom Corcoran present the compelling and inspiring story to how they brought their parish back to life.

This is a story of stopping everything and changing focus. When their parish reached a breaking point, White and Corcoran asked themselves how they could make the Church matter to Catholics, and they realized the answer was at the heart of the Gospel.

Their faithful response not only tripled their weekend mass attendance, but also yielded increased giving, flourishing ministries, and a vibrant, solidly Catholic spiritual revival.

White and Corcoran invite all Catholic leaders to share the vision, borrow their strategies, and rebuild their own parishes. They offer a wealth of guidance for anyone with the courage to hear them.

This is quite an amazing story. It is about a parish in the United States that Michael and Tom walked into as PP and Pastoral Assistant that was somewhat dead and dysfunctional. They share the highs and the lows, the successes and the failures, what worked in revitalisation and what didn't, the welcome from some and the resistance to change from others…..

They set about rebuilding the parish with the goal of making disciples of all the parishioners who would then go out making disciples of others in the community.

I think this book is required reading for anyone in parish ministry and anyone interested in knowing how to get the best out of the parish community they are a member of.

Both Michael and Tom were out in Australia a couple of years ago speaking at a conference and running a number of workshops in some dioceses.

The book is an easy read and highly recommended.

God in the person of Jesus goes to the periphery, to the desert, and takes his place in the midst of sinful humanity; the messiah came and was to be found drawing close to the unclean. If that is where Jesus began his public ministry, and if Jesus was repeatedly criticized for eating and drinking with sinners throughout his public ministry, does it not provide an example of where and how we should be?

—Bishop John Stowe OFM
WHEN WE read the gospels it is not difficult to find ourselves at times suffering from a certain bewilderment. We are faced with writings that are ancient and they can appear complex. The gospels were written in Greek, the language of communication throughout the Roman Empire of the day. It is not always easy to translate from one language into another, especially when that language was spoken by people living in a culture so different from our own. Furthermore we can find learned scholars disagreeing in their interpretation of the meaning of certain passages, and we might wonder what chance we have of reading the material properly when the experts fail to agree.

It is important not to give in to this feeling of helplessness for it is not a matter of grasping all or grasping nothing. No one has a perfect understanding of parenthood, but we can learn and we can enjoy our children as we learn. No one has the last word on any work of art, yet we can enjoy art and we can grow in our appreciation of it.

Likewise, no one can claim to have a perfect understanding of this rich gospel material. We are all learning. Let us open our hearts to Jesus’ Spirit whom he promised would guide us to all truth (John 16:13). Paul assures us: ‘If you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you’ (Philippians 3:15)...

We cannot afford to be mistaken about the kind of writing that we are dealing with when we read a gospel. If we wanted to know something about Saint Francis of Assisi, for example, and we were given something to read about him, we would need to know whether we were reading something which he himself had written or something written by someone who lived with him and knew him well, or whether, on the other hand, we were reading something written centuries later by someone who was interested in him.

Furthermore, the author may have been interested in biographical details, or he may have reflected on Saint Francis and written a play about him, or a novel, or a poem. All of these kinds of literature can give us true insights into the real Saint Francis, but we cannot afford to confuse historical biography with drama or poetry.

If someone were to show us a portrait of Saint Francis, we would be interested to know how lifelike it was, or whether the artist was interested in Francis’ character rather than in how he appeared to the eye. If the colour of the eyes was a shade of purple, we would know that the portrait was giving us, not the colour of his irises, but a mood judged by the artist to be characteristic of Francis.

It will become obvious that the authors of the gospels were not interested in offering a careful, chronological record of the events of Jesus’ public life. They were interested, very interested, in the real Jesus of Nazareth, but they wanted to convey what they had come to know about his character, especially about what he revealed to them of God.

Their knowledge was based on what the real Jesus really did and really said, and sometimes they give us an accurate description of both. Their main interest, however, was in what Jesus meant to them. While this was the result of what Jesus’ contemporaries had seen and heard, it grew also out of what people had come to perceive and understand as a result of many years of reflection, and in the light of their own and other people’s experiences, both before and after Jesus’ death.

Initially this may come as a
disappointment. We might be tempted to want to know Jesus just as he was rather than see him through the eyes of others. But then, how do we get to know anyone? Would I know your mother better if I saw her momentarily in the street or if I were to come across a portrait by a skilled artist who knew and loved her? In the latter case I might have to live with many unanswered factual questions, but I would surely be in touch with your real mother and would be receiving from the artist the gift of privileged insights into who she really was.

As regards Jesus, unfortunately we do not have anything he wrote. We have his words and actions as remembered and shared by those who knew and loved him. We must immediately add that the records we have are those which the community chose to preserve. This gives us an extra guarantee that they do represent the real Jesus and that they were judged to do so accurately and beautifully. Furthermore, we can be sure that they tell us what the hearts of Jesus’ disciples were able to perceive through long years of contemplation, meditation and reflection.

The gospels can take us straight to the heart of the real Jesus as he was known and loved by those closest to him...

The author of the gospel according to Matthew was a second generation Christian. The same is true of the authors of the other three gospels.

Drawing on the experience of those who knew Jesus personally, the evangelists were inspired to communicate to their contemporaries the wonder of Jesus, with all the power of their faith-filled imaginations, as well as with complete fidelity to what they themselves had learned.

The accuracy of their portraits is guaranteed for us by the fact that the gospels were accepted and treasured by the communities which knew or had learned about Jesus. There were other writings about Jesus which the community refused to accept. They were judged to be inaccurate in their presentation of him.

Rather than imagine a gospel as a kind of photo-album which accurately records momentary glimpses into Jesus’ life, we would do better to think in terms of an art gallery, a repository of portraits which express the faith-delight of those who had a special inspiration to express the meaning Jesus came to have for his disciples.

* * *

Who is Matthew?

Of all the four gospels, the gospel of Matthew was the one most used and most quoted in the early centuries of the church. While each gospel has its own beauty and its own power, there is something quite special about Matthew that may account for its early popularity. This is the way Matthew presents the teaching of Jesus. This gives us many insights into the mind and heart of Jesus, and also into what it means to be Jesus’ disciple. Matthew’s gospel was particularly attractive as a handbook for instruction.

The gospel we have is written in Greek. Some verses are quoted in works by Christian writers of the second and third centuries. Also from the third century we have parts of Origen’s commentary on Matthew. Our earliest complete text, however, is found in two fourth century books, Codex Sinaiticus (so named because it was discovered in the nineteenth century in the monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai) and Codex Vaticanus (so named because it is preserved...
in the Vatican library).

They, and all subsequent manuscripts, refer to this gospel as being ‘according to Matthew’, thus linking it with the name of the disciple who was called by Jesus while sitting at the tax booth (Matthew 9:9). He is mentioned in all the lists of the apostles (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13). The same connection between this gospel and Matthew is made by all the early commentators.

However, the precise relationship between the apostle Matthew and the gospel associated with his name is, unfortunately, still not clear in spite of over a hundred years of intense scholarly research.

This is an important question as it has implications for determining the literary relationship between the three so-called Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. It also affects the dating of the gospel and, consequently, our understanding of the context within which it was written.

Papias, bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor early in the second century, has this to say about Matthew: ‘Matthew made an ordered arrangement of the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each translated it as he was able.’ (Quoted by Eusebius in his History of the Church III,39,16)

Irenaeus, writing about 180AD, says: ‘Matthew produced a gospel in written form among the Hebrews in their own language at the time when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel and founding the church in Rome.’ (Against the Heresies III,1,1, quoted by Eusebius in his History of the Church V,8,2)

Origen, early in the third century, adds some details: ‘The first gospel to be written was that according to Matthew, once a tax collector but later an apostle of Jesus Christ; he published it for those who had come to faith from Judaism, and it was composed in Hebrew.’ (Quoted by Eusebius in his History of the Church VI,25,4)

Finally, Jerome, the great biblical scholar of the late fourth century, writes: ‘Matthew, who is also called Levi, a former tax collector, then an apostle, first composed a gospel of Christ in Judea, for the sake of those who had come to faith from the circumcision, in Hebrew letters and words. It is not known with certainty who subsequently translated it into Greek. The Hebrew text itself is still preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea.’ (Of Illustrious Men, 3)

Unfortunately, the Semitic text to which Jerome refers has been lost, so that a comparison with our present Greek text is not possible. Prior to the nineteenth century, because of early witnesses such as the above, it was taken for granted that Matthew the apostle was the author of this gospel, which was understood to be a translation into Greek of his Semitic (either Hebrew or Aramaic) original. It was assumed that Matthew was the earliest of the gospels and that both Mark and Luke used it as one of their sources (see Clement of Alexandria in Eusebius HE 6.14).

Scientific research last century, however, led most scholars to the opinion that the Greek gospel according to Matthew may well have drawn on material from the first Aramaic gospel of the apostle Matthew, but that it used the gospel of Mark as one of its sources. The weight of current scholarly opinion lies in this direction. Since there are scholars who still consider that the traditional understanding is correct, the matter remains unresolved.

It would help if we were able to locate Matthew’s gospel in relation to two significant events that occurred in Palestine in the first century. The first is the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by the Roman army. The second is the reorganisation of Judaism by leading Pharisees in the wake of this destruction. This took place around 85AD at Yavneh (Jamnia), and included the official excommunication of Jewish Christians from the synagogue. Unfortunately, here, too, we have insufficient evidence to draw definite conclusions.

—Reprinted with permission from Michael Fallon msc, The Gospel according to Saint Matthew.
The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed while this issue of Compass is current. It focuses on the readings for Sundays between October 2016 to January 2017, from the Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C) to the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (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. However the first reading (usually from the Old (‘First’) Testament is not simply a precursor to the Gospel. It is important to allow the unique insights and celebration of these readings to be honoured in their unique context of the Israelite people who first heard them. The First Testament readings between November 2016 to January 2017 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 sixth century BCE Exile, and during or after the return from captivity. The Isaiah selections for Advent and Christmas are from First Isaiah written in the eighth 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. Jesus followers saw in Jesus the concrete expression of Isaiah’s earlier prophetic vision. The selections in the Sundays of Ordinary Time (OT) from Second Isaiah are songs about 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 national and international issues that preoccupy us: local political issues, 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. They come from letters of Paul himself (Romans during Advent, and 1 Corinthians on OT 2 to 3) or from one of his disciples writing in the name of Paul who has died (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 disciples 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 could 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 2017 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 20), 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 about asylum seekers and the movement of peoples in Europe and the tragedy that people experience in other parts of the world, compassion remains central for contemporary disciples. Again, Pope Francis’ words on this and related topics are relevant.
- The new liturgical year which begins on Advent 1 (Nov 27) also introduces us to Matthew’s gospel. This will be the principal gospel throughout the rest of the liturgical year in 2017. Written in the mid 80s of the first century to Jewish followers of Jesus, it presents Jesus as the authoritative presence of God and interpreter of 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 2—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 be a person of faith who acts authentically. Theme—Acting in Faith. In a world of violence, the disciple is encouraged to retain a perspective and trust centred on God. Local communities abound with living examples of such contemporary disciples.

**October 9—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 intimacy with 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 a reflection on the power of exclusion which suffering and illness bring. How does the local Christian community seek to include those who are excluded into its life? Who are the true healers in our community?

October 16—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 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 23—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?

October 30—Ordinary Time 31: Wis 11:22-12: 2. This is a song about God's wisdom, patience, love and forgiveness for humanity. 2 Thes 1:1 -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 readies us for the final weeks of the year as we turn our thoughts to the many ways God comes into our lives. Zacchaeus in today's Gospel expresses this openness in action which surprises everyone. Who in our faith or civic communities reveal a similar spirit?

November 6—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 13—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, poetic theological insights into God's presence, not literal descriptions or predications of what is to come.)

November 20—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 today's 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**

**November 27—Advent 1:** Is 2:1-5. God's vision for Jerusalem: a place of union and justice. **Rom 13:11-14.** Paul emboldens 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 4—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 revealed in 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 11—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 18—Advent 4:** Is 7:10-14. This reading is not predicting the birth of Jesus. Rather, within the historical situation in which Isaiah prophesies, 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 annunciation 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?

**January 1, 2017—Mary, Mother of God. New Year's Day:** Num 6:22-27. Through Moses, the great leader, God offers a blessing to Aaron and all the people. It is a blessing of God's
loving openness to the people. Gal 4.4-7. Paul reminds his listeners that Jesus was born as a human being, subject to the teachings of the Torah. We are possessors of his spirit that has made us God's daughters and sons. Lk 2.16-21. Mary ponders what she hears about Jesus and then she and Joseph have him circumcised, ensuring his covenantal fidelity to God. Theme—God's Blessing. The 'Aaronic blessing' from Numbers is God's blessing on all of us as this New Year begins. God's face is turned lovingly towards us, our families, those we love and all who struggle.

January 8—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 15—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 23—Ordinary Time 3: Is 9:1-4. This is 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 first reading's vision from Isaiah 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?

January 29—Ordinary Time 4: Zeph 2.3; 3.12-13. The prophet speaks of the anawim (Hebrew), the 'poor' and 'humble' open to God. 1 Cor 1.26-31. Paul reminds his audience that they are 'weak' and yet God's chosen ones. Mt 5.1-12a. Jesus proclaims the key characteristics of authentic discipleship. Theme—Openness: The readings invite us to reflect on who we are, limited, flawed, yet open to the action of God in our lives and world.

Fr Michael Trainor is senior lecturer in biblical studies with Adelaide's Australian Catholic University, and adjunct lecturer with Flinders University.