BISHOP ROBINSON’S BOOK

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, retired Auxiliary Bishop of the Sydney Archdiocese, is not the kind of person who sets out to shock or be disruptive. His book, however, published last August and entitled Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church. Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus (John Garrett Publishing, Mulgrave, Victoria. ISBN 978 1 920721 473), is classified under ‘Catholic Church—Controversial literature’.

The main message of the book is that the scandals of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy and religious, together with what he declares to have been the inadequate response to these scandals from the leadership of the Church at the highest levels—Rome—raise deep issues concerning the Church institution as we have it. The author sets out to identify those issues and to suggest ways forward according to the sub-title of the book: ‘Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus’.

Bishop Robinson was given special responsibilities in this whole area when he was elected in 1994 by the Australian bishops to the National Committee for Professional Standards, the committee that co-ordinates the response of the Catholic Church in Australia to revelations of sexual abuse. Between 1997 and 2003 he was co-chairman of that committee.

He felt that the Roman authorities, including the pope, showed insufficient leadership on this matter. As he relates, when in a public meeting—with a journalist present—he answered a question from a victim of sexual abuse by candidly admitting that he was not happy with the level of support being received from ‘Rome’ (which the journalist reported as ‘the pope’), he received an official letter from the Congregation of Bishops expressing ‘ongoing concern’ that he had ‘expressed views that are seriously critical of the magisterial teaching and discipline of the Church’, that the ‘Holy Father [has shown] serious preoccupation in your regard’. This letter was followed by another informing him that the relevant documentation was being forwarded to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, implying that he was suspected of heresy.

If these are indeed a full enough account of the events, one is left to wonder at the heavy-handed response from Rome. If Bishop Robinson has not done justice to Rome’s efforts, we and the Church at large would like to hear the other side of the story. Otherwise, we are left with the impression that the Roman authorities have been found wanting and are covering up their failings with bluster.

Bishop Robinson reflects on how different he believes things could have been if the papacy had given leadership:

In this book I have criticised the pope’s lack of an adequate response to sexual abuse. And yet, if the pope had responded immediately and forcefully, speaking directly to victims and demanding a humble, honest and compassionate response from all members of the church, the power of the rock [the Petrine Ministry] is so great that the response of the Catholic Church could have been a model (p.139).

Such is the main message of the book. From some of the publicity surrounding its appearance one might get the impression that this is yet another demolition job on what Catholics hold dear. Far from it. I do have some criticisms on theological matters that I will get to later, but overall this is a most edifying read.

The chapters are a series of clear, elegant and original presentations of central themes, the most fundamental being that God is all about growth, and so must be God’s Church. The Kingdom—Reign—of God is the transformation of the whole world. The Bible is the story of a journey towards a deeper un-
understanding and a higher morality. The Church is an offer of life to the whole world, not primarily an institution for itself and for its members. Tradition is precious, transmitting as it does the fruits of the journey of the Church down the centuries—but tradition is in need of discernment as the legacy of the past is not all good.

Bishop Robinson urges the need for a more satisfactory presentation of the Church’s moral teaching—every pastor and moral theologian and most Catholics would agree. He provides very good material in that chapter. He reflects on the widespread lack of trust of authority, and yet the need for authority. If the Church’s teaching on sexual morality comes across as ‘nothing goes’, then people are tempted to accept the ‘everything goes’ of the surrounding culture. How true!

As one might expect in a book on this subject, Bishop Robinson gives a fine presentation of the healing process.

At the end of each chapter the reader is provided with ‘Meditations’ composed of points that summarise the chapter and stimulate reflection. Often these are suitable for group reflection and discussion.

All of this is stimulating reading. I see no reason to disagree with any of it. It is when Bishop Robinson moves into a more fundamental level of doctrine, especially ecclesiology, that I find myself unable to follow him all the way.

For instance, he links the question of Jesus’ knowledge—Son of God but truly man, so what did Jesus know?—with the question of Jesus’ intention to found the Church. I do not see the two as linked. I also place more importance on the symbolism of ‘The Twelve’: the Twelve chosen disciples correspond to the twelve tribes of the Old People of God, and are chosen to be the foundation apostles of the Church institution that Jesus intended to establish. I consider the lists of the names of the Twelve are very significant, with their groupings into three lots of four, with Peter always first—evidently derived from the primitive catechesis. For me, Peter’s infidelities and betrayal only strengthen the doctrine of the Petrine ministry as the Rock established by Christ.

In Chapter 12 Bishop Robinson makes a strong case for the reality of ‘The Prison of the Past’, which is described as a culture that makes Church representatives, priests included, feel a need to be right at all times and on all matters. This is clearly a culture that perpetuates the over-clericalisation of the Church that was in principle rejected in Vatican II. In the post-Vatican II Church all, clergy included, need to be more accountable to the Church community. Hence the value of appraisals, as Bishop Robinson points out. They are beginning to be accepted more as ideal standard practice in the Church—certainly for parish priests.

But Bishop Robinson links ‘The Prison of the Past’ with doctrines, and here I part company with him. A lot of powerful language surrounds doctrines: they are dogmas, definitions of doctrines solemnly promulgated to the whole Church to be believed as ‘of the faith’, essential to the ‘integrity of the faith’, essential to the correct communication of the Gospel, and ‘irreformable’. Most importantly, dogmas are signposts. Their primary function is not the communication of information, of new truth, but the setting up of markers from which we are to take our bearings as we seek to explore the riches of the mysteries of the faith. They are springboards—not last words but first words. They can never be contradicted by new enunciations of the mysteries, but they intend to indicate a direction along which we can appropriately explore the deposit of faith. They are liberating, not imprisoning.

Most certainly I am not saying anything of which Bishop Robinson is not fully aware. But it seems to me that he lays too heavy a burden on dogmas and definitions in the course of his discussion. As a result, in his argument, they become part of the structure of the prison of the past.

In an earlier chapter he writes about the
sensus fidei, or instinct for discerning what is of the faith. He attributes the following statement to Henry Newman: ‘While the multitude may falter in its judgment’, we have certainty when the whole Church ‘in due course rests and acquiesces in a deliberate judgment’. That being so, and well said, I would like the sensus fidei to have been given more consideration in his discussion of the promulgation of the doctrine of Papal Infallibility. Bishop Robinson complains that the arguments in Pastor Aeternus, the document in which the doctrine was formulated, do not satisfy as a proof of the doctrine of infallibility. I do not see that as being particularly relevant, since the arguments offered in the document are not claimed to be infallible, only the solemn definition which is recorded in one paragraph. The only proof that an infallible doctrine needs is consistency with the faith of the entire Church, to which faith the sensus fidei attests. Further, we have the safeguard of the providential oversight of the Holy Spirit: the successor of Peter could never solemnly and definitively—ex cathedra—impose an error in faith to be believed by the entire Church—the Holy Spirit would not allow it.

In fact, of course, infallible definitions are extremely rare. And certainly, one might argue that the definition of the Assumption was not really urgent. But the definition has a function: we know now not to waste our efforts with theories that in some way contradict the fact of the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven; also, the doctrine speaks to us of the sanctification of the whole human reality by Christ.

I do not share Bishop Robinson’s concerns about ‘ascended into heaven’ in the Creed. We all surely know by now that this is imagery—theology, not history in some literalist understanding of history—and therefore, I believe, quite in place in an ancient statement of belief. We would not be likely to put it that way now, of course.

As with all institutions, the Church is continually prone to rigidity—to becoming frozen in the past. The ‘Prison of the Past’, I agree, is very real and causes untold harm in the Church and to the Church’s mission. But I claim that it is a psychological, sociological and cultural prison, not a doctrinal one. It will not be doctrinal if we know that we need to sit loosely, intellectually speaking, with the ‘symbols’ of the faith. Bishop Robinson’s book helps us to identify—‘name’—a number of the continuing negative influences of our Church’s past. For me, I consider it unfortunate that he ventured more deeply into doctrinal questions than he needed to in order to support his case.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

As children grow up, their parents must gradually stand back and allow them to make their own mistakes and learn from these mistakes. If the children abuse their freedom, the parents can only hope that the day will come when they will see that their actions are not contributing to their growth, health and happiness, and will want to change. Through all of this process, however long it takes, the most important thing for the parents is to keep their relationship with their children and continually show them that they love them, so that the children will want to turn to them when they experience the need. A church should act in the same way.

—Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church. Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus, p.171.
I am a senior lecturer in the school of Theology at the Australian Catholic University. Last year, I was invited to teach a group of Karen refugee students living in a camp on the Thai-Burma border, in a place called ‘Mae Sot.’ I had the opportunity before to teach immigrant students. When I taught at St. Thomas University in Miami, for example, I had many students from the Bahamas, Jamaica, Haiti, South America and Mexico. I grew to love these students, most especially as I listened to their stories and their hopes for new opportunities and brighter futures in the United States. However, I have never before taught students living in a refugee camp, students with only rudimentary facilities, students who did not know English well, students who were displaced and without a home, students who bore enormous human suffering. I wondered how this could be possible.

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the Refugee Tertiary Education Committee (RTEC) combined their energies to offer Certificate and Diploma courses to the Karen refugee people. Through online education and face-to-face tutoring, 16 students graduated in 2005 with a Diploma in Business. The program was so successful that many students expressed a keen interest to continue their studies. With RTEC’s support, ACU is now offering a Certificate in Theology, and I recently taught the first subject in this program with the Karen students.

In what follows, I would like to offer a few reflections on this educational project with the Karen people. Personally, as an academic and an educator, I have found it a unique and inspiring experience. I didn’t think it would be possible for a university to act in such concrete ways, reaching out to offer education to a group of students suffering such displacement and hardship in their lives. I recall my time at St. Thomas University in Miami, when our Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. Joseph Iannone, began many of our meetings with the following quote:

A Christian university must take into account the Gospel preference for the poor. This does not mean that only the poor study at the university; it does not mean that the university should abdicate its mission of academic excellence—excellence needed in order to solve complex social problems. It does mean that the university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those who have no science; to provide skills for the unskilled; to be a voice for those who have no voice; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to promote and legitimate their rights. (Fr. Ignacio
I wondered at the time how this statement could be translated into a modern, Western, privileged university context. However, from my experience of ACU and RTEC’s commitment to providing education for the Karen refugees, I now know a little more about the ways that this statement can be made real, and the ways in which universities can make a real difference to people’s lives in the world, even to those in refugee camps.

Just a few months ago, I had little awareness of the Karen people, nor of their plight and their struggle. Today, I am very pleased to introduce you to Saw Francis Eh Ler Wah—a real person of flesh and blood who yearns for a brighter future and the hope of an education. Saw Francis and the other Karen students have given me permission to cite their words.

‘I am Saw Francis Eh Ler Wah’

I am Saw Francis Eh Ler Wah. I am a Karen and single. I was born of Saw Shwe Pyu Htoo Wah and Naw Elsic Kyaw Sein on 7th April in 1979, inside Burma in the Karen state Pa Pu district. My U.N. number is 003722. I come from a family that is very poor. My village was very beautiful, full of flowers and other lovely plants. It had one Catholic Church and one middle school. Every Sunday I went to church and prayed together with my parents and five brothers. I am a Catholic Christian and was baptized by Catechist Saw Pah Ku. My parents are still alive and they are living in the refugee camp.

I left my country, Burma, because it was no longer safe for me or my family. Every little thing I possessed has been destroyed by the Burmese soldiers. I lost everything there. We would move to a new place to start over, growing crops of rice, but each time the soldiers would return and destroy everything. All my life I have been on the run, often hiding in the jungle, fighting to survive and struggling to live each new day, not knowing what the future holds. In Burma there is no hope for my future. It holds only destruction, discrimination and persecution.

I crossed the Thai-Burma border and came illegally to the Karen refugee camp. I had no identification or anything that could identify me. I came across the jungle through the valleys without any transportation. My family and I made our trip on foot, little by little, to the refugee camp.

In the camp where I am now living, we have ‘illegal’ schools that neither the Burmese nor the Thai government will recognize. When the students of these schools complete their secondary education, they very rarely have the means to continue their studies. In the past, education was seen as unimportant and insignificant and there were very few teachers. However, now we can see the value of education. The more people who are educated and dedicated to helping build a better country, the easier it will be for our people. My concrete desire or goal is to obtain the necessary skills, education and knowledge and to be an educated person for my country.

A Very Brief Background on Burma

Burma has a population of 48 - 50 million people, of which there are at least fifteen major ethnic groups, with different languages, cultures and histories. The Karen people form one of the largest of these ethnic groups, with an estimated population of 6 - 7 million, living mostly in the hilly, eastern border region of Burma.

Burma gained independence from British rule in 1948. However, various ethnic tensions continued and in the early sixties, under Gen.
Ne Win, the army seized the government and established a full military dictatorship. In 1988, after stepping down, Ne Win’s hand-picked junta took power and called itself the State Law & Order Restoration Council (SLORC).

In order to gain international support, the regime announced democratic elections in 1990, thinking that it could control the outcome. It was at this time that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Burma from England to be with her sick mother, and found herself suddenly thrust into the leadership of a new opposition party (the National League for Democracy or NLD). Though her party won 82% of the parliamentary seats, the ruling junta placed her under house arrest and ignored the election result.

In late 1997, the regime changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and, though it attracts only 2% of the population’s support, the power-obsessed regime keeps an iron-fisted control: squashing all opposition, forcibly removing or torturing and executing many villagers, imposing forced labour, extorting money or crops from local farmers, closing universities, denying all freedom of expression and association, forbidding unauthorized access to foreign radio or the internet, instigating corrupt money-making deals. The economy is bankrupt, the currency is worthless, inflation is spiraling out of control, and billions in foreign debt has gone into building up the military. A background report from the Karen Human Rights Group writes:

The population has largely lost hope and sees almost no way out of the present situation…Anywhere from 2 to 4 million people are internally displaced in Burma, surviving by hiding in the forests or as beggars in the towns. Approximately 120,000 Karen refugees are registered in camps in Thailand, with more arriving each week...The entire situation in Burma is clearly unsustainable, but the regime absolutely refuses to lessen its grip on power in any way and there is no way of knowing for how long this situation can continue. (retrieved from the Karen Human Rights Group website: www.khrg.org)

‘One of the Best Classrooms Ever’

Twelve Karen refugee students recently completed their first subject in the Certificate in Theology with the Australian Catholic University. The unit was available online, although internet access is not always easy for the students. The text I chose for the subject was my own work, Practical Theology: On Earth as It Is in Heaven. My editor at Orbis books, Robert Ellsberg, kindly donated the books for the students. I prepared a Study Guide to accompany the text, utilising as plain and simple English as I could. This itself was a great learning exercise for myself, as I struggled to translate often complex concepts into relatively straightforward language (if you can’t say it simply, though not simplistically, then you probably don’t know it yourself—quite a testing maxim for any educator!). The students were asked to write weekly reflections as they read through the text, and to complete a final paper.

Undoubtedly the best part of the process, however, was the contribution made by Dr. Michael G. Michael, an Honorary Fellow at the University of Wollongong in Australia. Dr. Michael offered his time and expertise to visit the students for a period of three weeks, serving as a tutor and mentor to guide the students in their studies. This direct human contact and face-to-face interaction was a tremendous support to students and, I would say, a highlight of the whole experience. Their expressions of gratitude were so heartfelt and so touching—let me offer just one example: ‘I want to thank my tutor Dr. Michael for his love and concern for us and the time he spent with us. He gave himself fully to us, even when he got sick, he tried to enter the class everyday with us. A million thanks to ACU and to all who have worked for us and struggled in arranging this program. From your loving Karen refugee student.’ Dr. Michael and I received many such expressions of gratitude from these kind and gentle people.
**Dr Michael’s Reflection**

To help us gain some appreciation of ‘one of the best classrooms ever,’ Dr. Michael offers the following reflection on his time with the students:

Each morning (around 9.30) the leader of the group, Tawlwel, would ride over to my room on his motorbike and we would set-off for the ‘classroom’ about fifteen minutes away. There I would be greeted by the beautiful smiles and enthusiastic embraces of our students. It was one of the best classrooms ever—no walls, no doors, no windows—the ‘light’ came and went as it pleased.

The students would study a chapter the night before, address the questions of the Study Guide, and then they would present their reflections the next morning. We shared our responses, considered different approaches, corrected any discernable errors, read parts of the text aloud, and broadened our vocabulary. We made strong progress and found we had valuable time left over to spend some extra days working on essay structure, present some talks, and even to learn the *Kyrie Eleyson* chant… in Greek! All the students performed very well.

The final day with our students was one of the most memorable experiences of my life; it was a celebration of all that is good in people. I was profoundly humbled by their love and affection which they expressed in testimony, poetry, and song.

To offer tangible hope to people who have lost almost everything is, I would think, one of the great lessons of the Gospel.

**Testimonials: ‘My Life on the Run’**

Over recent weeks, I have been reading the reflections and papers sent to me by the Karen students. I found myself totally absorbed by their writing, especially with the earnestness and dedication they expressed in their desire to seek new learning and to engage with the reading material. They gave themselves wholeheartedly to entering ‘the world of the text’ that was assigned for their study. While reading their papers, however, there were many times when I suddenly found myself entering *their own world*. The oft-quoted maxim that education is a two-way process between student and teacher now became more real than ever. I decided to note some of the ‘testimonials’ offered by the students in their papers. This seemed like a good way to hear their own voices, and to learn something of the struggles faced by these young students whose lives are caught in the conflict and inhumanity of a troubled world.

* * *

My life up till now has been ‘on the run.’ We are still running and trying to escape from social injustice… In the camp, I see that many people are like me, some worse than me. People have lost everything they owned. Some have even lost their parents, their daughters, their sons. In the refugee camp, we have some safety but we are not free. We are like fish in a pond. Unable to see the sea, unable to see the big ocean, unable to have the taste of fresh water. We cannot see much. We cannot move fast to achieve our goals. We are unwelcome wherever we go. (Albert July Moo)

* * *

The camp is like a ‘prison without bars.’ I have had many difficulties chasing me along in my life. When I was in my homeland, ever since I was a child, I had to flee many times to the forest. Our enemy exercised genocide killing, therefore, we had to flee to the forest for survival. When I arrived at the refugee camp, I was able to finish my high school and now I have an opportunity to study through the Australian Catholic University. We are lucky to have this opportunity of learning practical theology. It is a wonderful chance for refugees. We can practice the way of God in any place and at any time—even though we are refugees, even though we are migrants, even though we
are illegal persons. The world is so large but in reality there is no space or place for us to stay or to live at the moment. For refugees and immigrants on the Thai-Burma border, practical theology tries to bring hope, good news and the message of the gospel. (Tawlwel Heh and Saw Der Lwen Htoo)

* * *

I was arrested by the army in 1999 when I visited my parents. They tied up my hands and neck and they led me back to their headquarters. As they led me on the way, my mind moved my heart to the scripture when Jesus carried his cross to the mount of Calvary. I prayed along the way and when I reached their place they beat and killed two of my friends. I spent three days and three nights with them and then they let me go. I have been living my life on the run ever since. (Saw Henry Aye)

* * *

In my whole life experience, I have to suffer from many different kinds of poverty and trials. As I am a Karen, a small ethnic group in Burma, I have been suffering from the continuous attacks, persecutions, torture and killing carried out by the Burmese military regime. The Karen people have been systematically driven from their homes, farms and villages by the Burmese military in brutal campaigns of looting, rape, torture and murder. We, people of God, how will we reflect and respond to these things? This is a significant question for us. (Francis Eh Ler Wah)

* * *

Whether or not we consider ourselves ‘people of God’ or ‘people of humanity’ (and speaking as a Catholic theologian, I consider that the two are inseparable), there is a sense in which education, when done well and with generosity and commitment, can provide an enormous service to our fellow human beings—even, and perhaps especially, to those whose access to the gateways of education are unjustly blocked or impeded. I would like to thank the Australian Catholic University, the Refugee Tertiary Education Committee, Dr. Michael, Orbis Books and, most especially, the Karen students, for helping to facilitate one of ‘the best classrooms ever’—devoid of barriers and walls—yet that is how the light gets in.

RELEVANT WEB-SITES
Karen Human Rights Group: www.khrg.org
KarenPeople.org: www.karenpeople.org
Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/index.htm
Orbis Books: www.orbisbooks.com
Refugee Tertiary Education Committee: www.rtec.edu.au
Australian Catholic University: www.acu.edu.au
‘INTERNATIONAL PRIESTS’ AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

RICHARD LENNAN

IN RECENT YEARS, there has been a significant shift in both the demographics and role of priests who were ordained outside Australia, but who minister within the Catholic Church in Australia. The use of ‘shift’ in the previous sentence underscores the fact that overseas-ordained priests have always constituted an element of our local church. Indeed, present trends represent the third phase or mode of that presence.

Painting with broad strokes, we could say that the first phase began with priests who ministered to convicts, includes the pioneering English Benedictine monks, and extends to the large contingent of Irish clergy, whose considerable influence on the development of Australian parochial life ranged from the nineteenth century through to the 1960s. At the heart of the second phase, are ‘migrant chaplains’, the priests who accompanied or followed the waves of immigrants who came to Australia after the Second World War. While the presence of ‘expat’ priests serving particular ethnic groups was not unknown in earlier years—witness the Austrian Jesuits who accompanied winegrowers to the Clare Valley in the 1850s—and continues even today, the introduction to Australia of congregations such as the Scalabrinians has an intimate association with post-war immigration.

Inseparable from the third phase, which began, perhaps, no more than a decade ago, is a phrase that is also of comparatively recent origin: ‘the shortage of priests’. The invocation of that phrase helps to identify a general assumption about the third phase: that priests from overseas who are ministering in Australian parishes today are meeting a need produced by the decline in the number of ‘local’ clergy. There is, then, a widespread conviction that inviting priests from overseas to minister in Australia is necessary in order to maintain the priestly presence in parishes at a level equal to what has been customary in the lived memory of older Catholics.

In addition to that new rationale, this latest period also differs from the previous two eras in the origin of the priests involved. Thus, many of the new wave of priests come from India or from nations within Asia or Africa. While these countries have begun to be a source of immigrants to Australia, the priests are not working exclusively, even primarily, with ethnic communities, but in ‘mainstream’ parishes in dioceses across Australia.

While it is too early to propose a definitive account of this new phenomenon, both the numbers involved, which are increasing, and the challenges that the experience raises make the topic one that already invites theological reflection. For this paper, the key hermeneutic principle guiding that reflection is ‘mission’.

Since the Australian experience has similarities with what is happening in parts of Europe and North America, it is likely that reflection from another context might cast some light on our own. Accordingly, the next sec-
tion of this paper will summarise the findings of International Priests in America: Challenges and Opportunities (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2006). This book, written by Dean Hoge and Aniedi Okure, is both a qualitative and quantitative study of priests from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, referred to collectively as ‘international priests’, who have moved to the United States in recent years. The number of such priests ministering in American parishes is so significant, that the authors claim: ‘In this new century, Nigeria and India will be the equivalent of Ireland in the early twentieth century as a provider of priests. We are entering a new era in world Catholicism’ [International Priests, 32].

The study canvasses the response that the priests have received from parishioners and fellow-priests, as well as the international priests’ perception of that response. The study also identifies questions that this new phenomenon raises for the church at large. While there are differences between the American and Australian trends, especially the vast number and particular needs of Hispanic Catholics in America, the following section will indicate resonances that Hoge and Okure’s work has with the Australian story.

II

One of the noteworthy aspects of the American study is the authors’ exegesis of ‘the shortage of priests’. That phrase, they argue, is susceptible of at least three interpretations: first, a statistical one that indicates the number of Catholics per priests; secondly, the perception, even feeling, of Catholics in one area that a shortage exists, which reflects the experience of a past situation of more priests; thirdly, not having enough priests to do what is required [International Priests, 34]. Ironically, under the first criterion, the shortage of priests is far more significant in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, areas that are sources of the international priests, than in the United States and Europe. Similarly, under the third criterion, Nigeria, Ghana, and India, have a greater shortage than does the United States because the possibilities for evangelisation are far more significant in those countries than in America. That leaves, then, the second criterion, subjective feelings, as the one that exerts most influence on American Catholics to fuel their sense of a shortage [International Priests, 34]. It is likely that this situation has an exact parallel with what applies in Australia.

Another background issue that the study addresses is the language used to refer to the priests coming to work in America. The authors note that the priests themselves find offensive references to ‘importing priests’, which can suggest either that they are second-rate when compared to ‘home-grown’ clergy or that they are drawn by the desire for money. At the other end of the scale in terms of language is the description of the priests as ‘missionaries’, who have come to spread the Gospel from countries that previously received missionaries. A focus on the latter term suggests that any reluctance to accept the ministry of the international priests is likely to express xenophobia, even racism [International Priests, 36-7]. The use of ‘international priests’ has the advantage of being neutral in terms of motive, while identifying the origin of the priests. In Australian usage, the most common term seems to be ‘priests from overseas’, which, like the American term, puts the emphasis on geographical origin and implies no evaluation of motives or abilities.

At the heart of Hoge and Okure’s analysis is the recognition that cultural issues exert the
most significant impact on both the perception that the international priests have of themselves and on the reception of their ministry in America by parishioners and other priests. The authors note that those Americans, including priests, who approached the advent of an international priest with the attitude ‘a priest is a priest is a priest’, especially when considered primarily in the context of providing opportunities for the celebration of the Eucharist, came to realise that the impact of cultural differences was greater than they had anticipated (International Priests, 44-5). While such differences were significant, assessments of them were often positive:

Bringing in an international priest introduces the possibility of breathing new spirit into parish life. The priest may preach differently, teach differently, introduce new music, experiment with new programs, or portray a different spirituality (International Priests, 47).

Although the book acknowledges the enrichment that can flow from the presence of the international priests, the authors also list a considerable number of difficulties experienced in parishes where the priests minister. Briefly summarised, those difficulties involve language, cultural misunderstandings, conflicting ecclesiologies, concerns about fundraising by international priests, and the shyness of the international priests in mixing with other priests. Of a different order was the claim that bringing priests to America was an irrational deployment of the world’s priestly resources in an age when there were more urgent needs elsewhere. From yet another framework came the objection that bringing in priests in significant numbers postpones both the needed restructuring of existing forms of parish leadership and efforts to develop more vocations at the local level (International Priests, 51-8).

For the international priests themselves, equality of treatment, or, to phrase it more accurately, inequality of treatment, aroused particular concern. A key issue was appointments: the priests often reported a sense that they were assigned where no-one else was willing to go, that their qualifications were not respected, and that there was no expectation that their ministry would be effective (International Priests, 87-91).

A consistent finding of the book’s surveys is that the likelihood of a positive response to the experience of international priests working in America depended on the development of cultural sensitivity by both the priests themselves and by those among whom they minister. The authors suggest that the introduction of the international priests is most likely to go well when there has been extensive preparation, especially in language, before the priests left their home country and substantial orientation to their new situation. Similar extensive preparation must also take place with those who are to receive the priests. In addition, clear protocols guiding the action of bishops at both ends of the process, and the willingness by American dioceses to support the priests’ local church of origin were also important to convey the sense that the process of bringing in international priests was not simply a business transaction (International Priests, 81-3; 123-24).

A further issue that the book canvases is whether it is preferable for American dioceses to sponsor seminarians, who would study in the United States prior to ordination, rather than priests. Most of those surveyed indicate a preference for the seminarian option, on the grounds of long-term inculturation. There was, however, a widespread recognition that the drop-out rate in American seminaries for students who were not born in America is double that of locally-born seminarians (International Priests, 103). Underpinning that fact seems to be both a lack of acceptance of the foreign-born students and the difficulties that those students have in making the requisite cultural adjustments to their new situation.

Despite the advantages of having seminarians study in situ, the book notes that the American bishops prefer to engage foreign-born priests rather than seminarians. The rea-
son given for that preference is instructive:

The bishops simply cannot wait! They need priests now, and they cannot wait four or more years while the seminarians are studying. The haste solves one problem but brings another: the priests brought here hurriedly often suffer from a too-quick orientation (International Priests, 103).

One of the book’s conclusions is that, although the presence of international priests has always aroused tensions in the American church, even when the priests came primarily from Ireland, contemporary tensions have a unique character:

...the international priests today are more visible and more exotic...the priests come from developing nations that are now experiencing rapid Catholic growth—nations poor economically, but, from one perspective, rich spiritually. Americans today take pride in their national wealth and leadership, and as a result wonder, often subconsciously, if Africans or Asians really have anything worthwhile to say to them. This is a subtle ethnocentricity that irritates priests from the developing world. The international priests, in turn, take pride in the Catholic growth in their homelands and subconsciously feel that they have a deeper spirituality (International Priests, 122).

A further conclusion is that the issues of culture are abiding ones. One such issue is whether it is legitimate to expect that the international priests should approximate as far as possible to ‘American’ ways of doing things, including the style of liturgical celebration, or whether inculturation allows for variety rather than uniformity. In other words, could the liturgy be celebrated in American parishes in ways that reflect the culture of origin of the priests as much as the expectations of American parishioners that they will see themselves and their culture reflected in the liturgy? For the priests themselves, the right to hold on to what had shaped their identity, including their liturgical experience, was a significant matter (International Priests, 122).

In addition to canvassing the issues that influence the reception and effectiveness of international priests, the authors also make a determination about the degree to which the presence of the international priests can affect what many Americans regard as their major pastoral need:

The priest shortage in the United States (defined in terms of lay expectations about priests) cannot be solved through bringing in international priests. The numbers are too low and the difficulties too great. International priests provide only a partial alleviation (International Priests, 123).

III

As will be clear from the Hoge-Okure study, there are many points of contention around the phenomenon of international priests. From a theological perspective, a key question is whether ‘mission’ represents the most appropriate caption under which to consider international priests. This section of the paper will explore that question, noting the complexities that are inseparable from it.

The international priests themselves are likely to endorse the aptness of ‘mission’: the priests have left their own country for the insecurity of a new environment and have done so to exercise their ministry among people whom they hope will welcome and benefit from that ministry. Understandably, therefore, the priests might well see themselves as missionaries, have an expectation that the particular traditions of spirituality, liturgy, and pastoral practice that they bring will enrich those who receive them, and expect that their generosity and commitment in coming to a new country will be respected and valued. As a corollary, the priests are also likely to resent any questioning of either their motives or capacities, and to find offensive any tendency to treat them as second-class members of the presbyterate.

For those who receive the priests, on the other hand, it might be puzzling to find that ‘mission’ is regarded as an appropriate category to apply to their situation. ‘After all’, so the argument might go, ‘are not the priests
coming into a stable diocesan and parish environment? Are they doing anything other than continuing what a ‘local’ priest would do, if there were enough of the latter to meet our needs? Surely ‘mission’, which suggests the need for the Gospel to be preached where it has not been heard previously, does not apply to us? All we need is someone to ensure that we can still have 10.00am Mass every Sunday’.

That style of response not only indicates why there can be tensions between the expectations of the international priests and the people who are to receive them, it also helps to locate the fabled ‘elephant in the living room’ that affects this discussion. It is difficult to consider international priests under the caption ‘mission’, or to see the phenomenon as an expression of the ‘world-church’, while there remains the perception that they are engaged only to compensate for the ‘shortage of priests’.

Buttressing this perception in the American context, as the Hoge-Okure study notes, is the fact that most of the international priests who go to the United States are diocesan clergy, not religious and certainly not from explicitly missionary congregations. In other words, the priests involved are not only familiar with stable structures, rather than the more ‘frontier’ forms of ministry in which religious priests often engage, but they are also recruited to work in established American parishes. This suggests that the bishops who invite the international priests are seeking to maintain the status quo as closely as possible (International Priests, 37). It is likely that a similar comment could apply to the Australian context.

There is, then, an urgent need to clarify why dioceses seek to attract international priests. While it might be valid to claim that the priestly ministry of Word and sacrament is always missionary in a broad sense, that it never lacks an evangelical dimension, it would be disingenuous of local churches to underscore the missionary element if ‘numbers’ alone provided the primary motivation for the decision to invite international priests.

Mission and meeting needs can, of course, be mutually inclusive: the ministry of an international priest in a parish can be a catalyst for a renewed reception of the Gospel and commitment to mission by the parish as a whole. For such an outcome to be a realistic possibility, rather than a pious velleity, it must be explicitly adopted and pursued. It also requires ‘conscientisation’ about the universal call to mission that is inherent in baptism and about the connection between that call and the sacramental and pastoral life of a parish. None of that will happen, however, if bishops and parishioners perceive the priest as someone who is plugging a gap.

The advent of an international priest, then, ought not to be regarded as simply ensuring the maintenance of ‘business as usual’, unless, of course, the ‘usual’ is already understood in terms of the primacy of mission. Indeed, there is a danger that, without a renewed sense of mission, dioceses and parishes will, at least implicitly, fall into the trap of consumerism in regard to the international priests: we can afford to bring priests from overseas and we use them not only to ensure that we have what we need, but that we are left undisturbed in the process. In that environment, the language of ‘mission’ becomes meaningless.

Even the willingness to focus on ‘mission’, however, is not sufficient to ensure that the introduction of international priests is a blessing for all involved. As the American study reveals, sensitivity and the willingness to learn are also required, from both the priests themselves and those who are to receive them.

For the priests, it is important to understand that both the civil and ecclesial culture into which they are moving can be a source of enrichment and learning for them, can reveal that the inculturation of faith has many faces. In other words, as contemporary writing on missiology emphasises, mission does not involve the missionary writing on blank sheets. Applied to Australia, this would suggest that Australian culture, the challenges of secular-
ism not withstanding, is not necessarily ‘godless’ when compared to other nations, even when the latter display more obvious and traditional forms of religiosity.

Similarly, the fact that the structures of ministry in the church in Australia embrace women and men who are not ordained, that the ordained are subject to high standards of accountability, and that the members of the church at large have an expectation of involvement in decisions that affect their lives, does not necessarily amount to either a lack of respect for the ordained ministry or to the corruption of the church by ‘the evils of liberal democracy’. Unless, therefore, the international priests are able to value the possible gifts in such circumstances, there is a danger that they will not ‘meet’ the people who are to receive them. This generates forms of resentment that parallel what the priests themselves can feel when they believe that their background and experience are neither respected nor valued.

As already noted, those who are to receive international priests might be surprised, even shocked, to learn that anyone could regard them as a mission field. Nonetheless, the advent of an international priest can be an opportunity for parishes to recognise anew the centrality of mission. To do so, however, does require the willingness to open our own cultural narrowness to conversion, to accept that other forms of spirituality and understandings of ecclesial life can challenge and enrich us. In short, as a commentator notes in the Hoge-Okure study, those among whom the international priests work might learn that to be a missionary church is not only to send, but also to receive (*International Priests*, 126).

In addition, if the local churches that receive international priests wish to indicate that by so doing they are manifesting a commitment to the missionary nature of the church, there are a number of possibilities open to them. One way, prominent, as noted, in the Hoge-Okure study, is to support the international priests’ church of origin in its local work of mission and evangelisation. While so doing could remain merely an impersonal dispersal of funds, it could also offer an opportunity to become aware of the needs of other local churches and to share a sense of mission. Indeed, it could even be that ‘the receiving church’ might decide to share some of its own priests with the international priests’ church of origin. Such an action would be the ultimate proclamation that the reception of international priests intends something more than bolstering numbers.

**IV**

The phenomenon of international priests will surely continue to be a feature of the church in Australia and other countries. In order for it to be an experience that enriches all those involved, local churches must continue both to be alert to the questions that it raises and to discern, communally, responses to those questions.

This paper has focused on the theme of ‘mission’ as the most important of those questions. A more exhaustive treatment of ‘mission’ in the context of local churches in Australia would need to emphasise also the promotion of local vocations to both ordained and other forms of ministry. In short, it is important to underscore that international priests can be an aspect of the local church’s response to contemporary pastoral challenges, not a ‘magic bullet’.

OUR WORLD is awash with words and images competing for our attention and our money. Advertising is the name of the game and, whether we like it or not, we all play it in some form or other. People may condemn it and may campaign for laws to control it but to do so they will need to use words and/or images to try and get people’s attention—in other words, advertise.

Perhaps more than anything else, advertising reveals our fascination with, and reliance upon, language. It enables us to be creative but it is also limited. There is no perfect language and our description of something can never be perfect. That’s why we keep returning to it to try and catch what we missed last time. The angle from which I view something affects my selection of words and it may not be the best selection. My desire to convince an audience to do something or buy something will also shape my selection of words and the way I present them. If we add to this mix the crucial ingredient of competition—my product against others—then my need to sell my product can turn description into distortion.

One could say that all descriptions are distortions because they don’t give the full picture. I am more likely to distort things when my primary aim is to tempt others to buy my product; this in turn can affect people’s perception of the product and their decision to buy.

We should not think that advertising is exclusively a phenomenon or curse of the modern world: it may not have been called advertising but the art of persuading others via the skilful—and at times devious—use of words has been around from ancient times. It is hardly surprising therefore to find that the Bible also deals with it.

In fact, the first story in the Bible is about the human struggle to relate the world to the world of words. Before examining the so-called ‘garden story’ in Genesis 2-3 I should say that I follow the western, critical view that this story is a myth. Not a myth in the pejorative sense (as Paul uses the term in 1 Tim 4:7) but in the technical sense that it is a particular kind of story favoured by ancient peoples who were great storytellers. It was their way of tackling the great questions and challenges of life before the emergence of Greek philosophical discourse, where arguments are set out and debated in a systematic fashion. Instead, one told a dramatic story about creation or one’s own race and its place in the scheme of things. Within such a story, the human characters are not historical figures although storytellers no doubt drew on their experience of people around them (how else does one create a character for a story?). Rather, the characters represent humanity or a nation in its various guises: loving, hating, fearful, devious, noble, etc. In their own way, these ancient stories can be just as subtle and probing as philosophy.

The subtlety of the garden story is no more evident than in the exchange between the woman and the serpent (who is not the devil but one of the creatures ‘of the field’ whom God makes in 2:19). The serpent’s opening question in 3:1 looks innocuous enough and the phrase translated ‘from any tree in the garden’ repeats exactly in Hebrew what God says in 2:16. But the serpent adds the word ‘not’, which is not in God’s permission in 2:16. Via this one addition the serpent changes God’s permission into a prohibition. The serpent is also a clever manipulator of Hebrew (or we should say the narrator casts it as a clever manipulator to serve the plot of the story). The other little Hebrew word translated ‘every’ in 2:16 can also mean ‘any’, which is what it has to mean in the negative formulation of 3:1.
serpent is thus able to quote God’s words yet at the same time change their meaning by changing the context ever so slightly—and, as we know, context is everything when it comes to communication. The overall effect is to distort God’s words in 2:16 and make a generous God look mean.

Once a subtle trap like this has been set, it can be hard to counter it effectively, even with the best of intentions. The woman’s response in vv. 2-3 looks like an attempt to set the serpent straight but she is not seeing things quite right herself. She restores the plural to what God allows them to eat (‘we may eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden’) but does not identify correctly the one tree that God prohibits. In 2:17, God forbids the man to eat from the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ but the woman identifies it as the one ‘in the middle of the garden’. According to 2:9, this is the tree of life. She also claims that God forbids them to touch it (which God does not) and that if they do touch it, they will die (again not what God says in 2:17). This brings her dangerously close to the serpent’s implication that God is mean and restrictive. As I read this carefully crafted text, the narrator portrays the woman with a partly distorted perception of reality, prompted by the serpent’s clever question. In the world of advertising, the opening question is often crucial. You not only have to encourage the person to question their view of things (the chink in the armour) but you also have to try and get him or her to see things from your perspective—once this is done you can deliver your sales pitch. And this is what the serpent does in the following verses.

In v. 4, the serpent says with supreme confidence ‘you shall not die’, and it’s right. God never says that they will die if they touch the tree in the middle of the garden. But there is a hidden agenda: the reassurance conceals God’s warning in 2:17 that if the man (and the woman is presumably included) eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then he will die. The serpent can now go on to present the core of any advertising blurb: if you eat this you will be divine (if you buy this you will look divine; if you wear this you will be irresistible). And, like many a political party during election campaigns, the serpent now casts the rival (God) in a wholly negative light—God has in effect been keeping them at a disadvantage whereas if they swallow the serpent’s propaganda it is all to their advantage.

Finally, in another innocuous looking aside, the serpent refers to the one thing that the woman must do if the sale is to go through; she (and the man) must eat from the right tree, not the tree of life (this is the last thing the serpent wants them to do) but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The reference to the tree is put in the most appealing way: ‘you will be like God, knowing good and evil’. The narrative in v. 6 shows that the woman—and the man who according to the story is with her through it all—now has a completely distorted view of the correct tree (a nice ironic touch) thanks to the serpent’s advertising blurb. They cannot see beyond their perception that the fruit of the tree is good to eat. They have become what we would nowadays call consummate consumers. Wisdom in itself is a desirable and good thing but how does one use it wisely? I have bought this powerful and highly desirable sports car but can I drive it responsibly? Given that the woman and man stand for all human beings, the implication is that when we seek by our own efforts to become wise like God we cannot handle it. We end up with a completely distorted perception of reality: seeing good as evil and evil as good. So, the woman and the man, before naked and
unashamed, now hide from each other behind fig leaves; they also hide from God who is now seen as someone to be feared. Same couple, same God, but now seen in an entirely different light.

Even though the text is not explicit, one may presume that the serpent anticipates with relish the immediate intervention of God followed by the death penalty, leaving it, ‘the most cunning of God’s creatures’, to claim the prize—the garden. A bit like those loan sharks who fleece people and disappear with the loot, leaving their victims in ruins. Fortunately, the Bible does not follow this tragic script: its convictions about a just and merciful God require that neither the serpent nor the couple get away with the wrong they have done. The serpent is cursed (the story never lets it rise above the status of an animal) while the couple experience both the justice and the mercy of God.

Justice and mercy are two key images of God that run throughout the Bible and their relationship is never neatly resolved. Given the mystery that is God, how could it be? It is fair to say that few of us would follow a God who is soft on evil (unjust) and few of us could relate to a God who is not loving and merciful. The text of 3:15-19 weaves these two images together in its portrayal of God’s relationship to the troubled couple. So, they do not die ‘on that day’ but death now looms as an eventual and unavoidable dissolution. Their lives will still bear fruit (children, produce of the earth) but it will be accompanied by pain and anxiety. The just God has, in all justice, to confront the couple about their failure but God is also merciful and protective of their humanity (notice how God ensures in 3:15 that the woman will never again be seduced by the serpent).

A particular value of this story is that it brings us down to earth: it challenges us to see our marvellous modern world as just another example of the human condition that we share with all generations. We like to think we see things clearly but this is a dangerous presumption, exposed by our repeated failure to deal with the distorted presentation of reality (the serpent’s role in the story). A variety of subjective factors (desire, fear, presumption) can make us vulnerable to the seduction that so often lies behind the distorted presentation of reality (the woman’s role); this in turn leads us to willingly accept a distorted perception of reality for our own gain. When confronted about it, we take the coward’s way out and ‘blame the other’ (the man’s role in 3:10-13). The story also reminds us of the destructive consequences that our desires can unleash: those whom beforehand we saw as good and lovable, are now seen as rivals to be feared or eliminated.

The following story of Cain and Abel illustrates in graphic fashion the destructive consequences of the distorted perception of reality. What is intriguing about this story is that it does not tell us why God favoured Abel’s offering and not Cain’s. One may speculate but my impression is that this is a signal from the narrator that the point of the story lies elsewhere. The narrator needs the theme of divine favour or something like it to create the complicating factor that is characteristic of storytelling; otherwise there is nothing to drive the story forward. But the point the narrator wants us to focus on is God’s ‘torah’ or teaching in 4:6 about how to confront temptation. Whereas the garden story tells about human failure to reject a bad word, this story tells about human failure—in the figure of Cain—to heed a good word. Jealousy leads to a distorted perception of his brother Abel who must be eliminated even though he has only done a good thing. We see something similar in the New Testament where Jesus will heal someone or tell a parable (a torah): some in the audience will proclaim that a great prophet and teacher is among them; others will proclaim that it is the work of the devil. In the end those who are filled with hatred or jealousy of Jesus (the crowds flocked to him) must eliminate him. Good is seen as evil, evil (killing Jesus) is seen as good.
What remedy does the Bible offer for our tendency to see things the wrong way? For Christians of course, the key remedy is discipleship of Jesus. But Jesus was a Jew and followed the Torah (the word has a much wider reach than our term ‘law’); hence it is worthwhile asking what remedy the Old Testament itself offers.

The short answer is the Torah—the five books of the Pentateuch that occupy the preeminent place in the Old Testament canon or list of sacred books. The Torah includes law texts like ours, but it also has many stories and some songs. In fact, the overarching literary form for the Torah is narrative or story—the story of Israel from its beginnings with the ancestors to its arrival on the edge of the land in Deuteronomy. The fascinating thing about the Torah is that in it Israel, the chosen people, holds itself up for public scrutiny in a brutally honest way. It tells the story of how it was chosen by God in the distant ancestors, rescued from slavery in Egypt, invited into a covenant relationship with God at Sinai and given instructions that would enable it to be God’s faithful people. And what did it do, according to its own testimony? It failed and failed repeatedly. It even goes so far as to say it deserved to be destroyed for its rotten behaviour and that it was only through God’s mercy that it eventually made it to the land. When one realises that the Torah was most likely finalised in the post-exilic period after Israel found itself once again outside the land, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that those responsible for the final product identified completely with the failures of their ancestors. The way that this story is linked to the troubled portrait of humanity in Genesis 1-11 indicates that Israel did not in any way see itself as superior to the rest of humanity. It believed that it had been chosen by God to bring the light of the Torah to the nations and one has the impression that its trenchant self-criticism may have been designed, in part at least, to focus attention on the thing that mattered most—the Torah, not Israel.

There is a problem with this of course: if you cast yourself in too negative a fashion in relation to your product the audience may conclude that it is too demanding to take on board. A bit of good old advertising is needed to sell the product and God, who inspired Israel to develop the Torah, knows this only too well. Hence, two glimpses of fidelity to the Torah and its consequences are presented. One involves the generation that succeeded the Exodus generation that disobeyed God and, according to chapter 26 in the book of Numbers, perished in the wilderness. Their ‘little ones’, whom they thought would die in the wilderness, become the new generation that, in Numbers 27-36, displays fidelity to God. They get things right and are promised an inheritance in the land in the book of Deuteronomy.

The second one involves Moses who is told by God that he is not to enter the Promised Land. Two reasons are given in the Torah. According to Numbers 20, he failed to trust God in the crisis at the waters of Meribah. According to book of Deuteronomy the problem was the burden of the people. Deuteronomy is strangely coy about the details of this burden and how it affected Moses; this may be due to a reluctance to blame the great man himself. Moses looms large in deuteronomic theology which, according to contemporary critical theory, most likely reflects a reform movement of the late monarchical period—a kind of ‘back to basics’ response to the decline of the monarchy. Moses is its model leader. For a person of Moses’ stature to be told he cannot enter the land is a bitter blow and in Deut 3:25 he is portrayed pleading with God to be allowed to ‘cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan’. But God will have nothing of it and instructs him to anoint Joshua as his successor. The narrator who constructed this exchange does not describe any reaction from his character Moses. Unlike our favoured mode of storytelling—the movie—which loves lavish and even graphic portrayals of characters, Israelite storytellers preferred the art of reticence. Much
is left to an audience’s imagination to fill in details. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to imagine the challenge that God’s prohibition and the promotion of Joshua presented to Moses.

But, as Deuteronomy portrays him, Moses rises to the challenge and, in contrast to Cain, heeds God’s word and obeys it. He delivers his farewell address to Israel about the importance of unswerving loyalty to God according to the Torah and then, in chapter 31, expresses complete confidence in Joshua as the one on whom God’s favour rests and installs him as his successor. In the final scene of the book, chapter 34, Moses goes up the mountain to meet God as he did at Sinai. This time God shows him all the land promised to Israel’s ancestors. God grants Moses’ request back in 3:25 to see the good land and he sees it now, as it were, through God’s eyes. Indeed, Deuteronomy implies that this is the right and only way to ‘see’ the land: Moses now has the right perception of it. Moses showed that fidelity to God’s command is more important than the satisfaction of entering the land as Israel’s leader; the people will need to remember that fidelity to God’s command in the Torah is more important than their life in the land.

A wise colleague of mine says that the Bible is not the imposition of thought but an invitation, a challenge, to think. When one thinks about it, for the Bible to impose thought would be to impugn its own proclamation about God who desires that we become perfect, and that involves the responsible exercise of freedom. The Bible does not take away our right and responsibility to make decisions; what it does is provide some principles and guidelines that it hopes will guide our decisions. It also tells stories of Israel and key figures such as Moses to provide examples of how these principles and guidelines were, or were not, lived up to.

...we can say that the Scriptures, in a way that is both infinitely varied and yet forms a unity, express three inseparable poles: faith in Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour; confession of God as one, Father of Jesus and Father of all humanity; and the observance of a law of life that is summed up in the twofold commandment of love. These three poles are animated by the grace of the Holy Spirit sent by God and are found in a delicate balance of continuity and change with regard to the revelation which God alone has worked throughout Israel’s history, in the many literary texts and historical forms it has taken in time. They can be considered the reference points we need in order to understand the development of the understanding of faith—which is not yet finished, by the way—in the long course of the centuries of God’s dealings with humanity.

EVOLUTION, GOD AND JOB’S OSTRICH

MARIE TURNER

When Biblical interpreters reflect on the God of evolution, it is understandably to texts of the Bible dealing with creation that they turn. These texts need to be acknowledged as representative of the ancient biblical writer’s worldview and they cannot simply be used as commentary on contemporary understandings of the world. At the same time the texts offer a fruitful meeting-place for a dialogue between our own perceptions of the created world and the theologies of creation emerging from the ancient texts. One concept that impinges upon both the world of the ancient texts and our own is chaos, connected as it is with its oppositional pair, order. Order is generally seen as desirable both in society and in the natural world, yet chaos intrudes into both. In science this is not necessarily a bad thing, as I will argue.

It is to the wisdom literature and, more specifically, to God’s Speech from the Whirlwind in the Book of Job 38-41 that I turn to engage in a dialogue between order and chaos. In the speech God reminds Job that the ostrich does not behave in a seemingly rational manner:

The ostrich’s wings flap wildly, though its pinions lack plumage. For it leaves its eggs to the earth, and lets them be warmed on the ground, forgetting that a foot may crush them, and that a wild animal may trample them. It deals cruelly with its young, as if they were not its own; though its labor should be in vain, yet it has no fear; because God has made it forget wisdom, and given it no share in understanding (39:13-17).

The implication from the above lines is that this behaviour is not the expected pattern of an ordered world. The ostrich behaves as it does because it has forgotten wisdom, the principle of order. But the text says more than this. It claims that God has deliberately made the ostrich forget wisdom and has made it a senseless bird.

When people of faith seek to articulate a theology of creation relevant for the contemporary world, inevitably they must come to terms with the God who creates through Darwinian evolution. Side-by-side with the biblical God of beauteous creation stands the God who seemingly allows, if not actively wills, suffering as a natural part of creation. As Mary Catherine Hilkert has pointed out, it is a ‘romantic reading of the story of the universe that fails to deal with the ambiguity and violence within nature ‘red in tooth and claw’”.

The faults of humankind in the destruction of the things of Earth are easily acknowledged. As creatures, we are not all-seeing or all-wise. We cannot predict the outcomes or ripples of every action we take. We acknowledge guilt in the face of the disastrous outcomes our actions have caused, and seek to avert total disaster through a more ethical environmental consciousness.

A more difficult issue to resolve is the challenge which contemporary scientific understanding proffers to the God who creates in the way unfolding through evolution. Scientists quite properly say that science does not seek God in the day-to-day workings of evolution, but the theologian who deals in theologies of creation must ask pertinent questions about God and the created world. One of these
questions concerns creation, order and chaos. The establishment of order from chaos is seen in the Old Testament as the quintessential creative act of God. What can a contemporary theology of creation say about a God whose creation comprises chaos? Behind this question are two understandings of God. One is the God to whom the Bible gives witness. The other is the God upon whom the person of faith reflects in relation to contemporary scientific understandings of the world.

I approach this question of theodicy from the point of view of my work as a biblical interpreter rather than from the point of view of science, but as a biblical interpreter engaged with the world of science. The Bible is not a compendium of answers to life’s deepest questions. The Bible knows the problems, it offers some answers but it leaves many matters unresolved. This is as it should be. As our understanding of the world changes, the dialogue between science and the Bible remains dynamic, challenging and stimulating.

The world of the Bible and the scientific world have subtly different views of chaos. In contemporary scientific thought, the concept of chaos does not imply a value judgement, but refers to unpredictability within a system. It is an objective concept. In the Bible chaos is associated with disorder, with the abyss, with death. God creates by bringing order out of disorder. In Genesis 1:1-3 before God’s creative act the earth is ‘formless’. In Genesis 1:2 the priestly source refers to tohu wabohu, the ‘formless void’ from which God brings forth the created order, and the darkness which covers the face of the deep wehoshek al-pene tihom. In the LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the words are abussos and aoratos, translated as ‘the bottomless pit’ and ‘the invisible’. That is, God makes visible the invisible, and brings order from the abyss or the bottomless pit. Walther Zimmerli’s 1971 work describes the creative process in Genesis as analogous to the work of an architect:

[T]he priestly account of the beginning of creation is by no means lacking in elements of order. Like the work of an architect, the whole is built from the foundations up. This world structure, so carefully constructed from its ground plan, is ever more richly furnished in what follows. It proceeds through the beasts and the plants to man [sic ET]. This notion of development, according to which the world is gradually built up from its beginnings to a richly articulated whole, is to be strictly respected. The carefully constructed edifice, the abundant fullness, remains subordinate to God’s command and call.2

In Genesis 6-9, the P (priestly) account of the flood is seen as God’s ‘uncreation’, or the act of returning the cosmos to disorder. God observes the world, judges it to be absolutely evil, and regrets creating it:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of human-kind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

And the Lord was sorry that he had made mankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them…..

For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die (Gen 6:5-7; 17).

Of course, we know that God goes on to save the world through Noah, but the point remains. Chaos in the biblical world is the pre-creation state.
The biblical wisdom literature is rife with references to order in creation. In Job 28 wisdom is either the divine order implanted by God in creation or the agent discovered and employed by God in the ordering of the universe. Either way, wisdom is again associated with bringing order to the created world. In Job 38:32 God asks Job if he knows ‘the ordinances of the heavens to establish their rule on the earth’, implying, of course, that God alone can regulate and order matters on earth. In Proverbs 8:22-31 wisdom refers to herself as being present with God at creation as God was assigning borders to the sea and marking out earth’s foundations, in the manner of an architect following the blueprint. God separates the waters above and below, giving each its proper place and not allowing the abyss to encroach on the established order. The notion of the interrelation between creation and order is again present in the claim of Sophia in the Wisdom of Solomon 8:1 that she ‘orders all things well’.

In the ancient world chaos was symbolic of evil because it spoke to the human fear of lack of control over natural forces. The God of Job 38-41 appears to act arbitrarily, but the overall thrust of the speech is the power of God to control nature, at times a nature that threatens humankind. God reduces Behemoth and Leviathan to manageable creatures (40:15ff) and keeps nature’s elements within bounds (38:10-11). The speech is full of paradox. The power of death is balanced by the annual cycle of birth and life (38:16-17; 39:1-4). God has established a universe with laws governing location and movement of natural phenomena, yet has freedom to direct the dawn and the hail and lightning as God wills. God is free to act and is not bound by the limits of a perceived created order. Job connects the apparent arbitrariness of God with the power to send suffering upon human beings, yet the speech in the long run presents a God who has everything under control. This is a God who sends food for the wild creatures in the remotest corners of the earth:

‘Who has let the wild ass go free? Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass, to which I have given the steppe for its home, the salt land for its dwelling place? It scorns the tumult of the city; it does not hear the shouts of the driver. It ranges the mountains as its pasture, and it searches after every green thing (Job 39:5-8).

The implication here is that God assigns to the wild ass a barren place, yet not so barren that it cannot find food. At the same time, Job’s God is not a sentimental one, but the creator of birds of prey:

Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes its nest on high? It lives on the rock and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag. From there it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.’ (Job 39:27-30)

In any credible theology of creation we must ask questions of the God involved in natural processes. Carl Zimmer observes what he calls biological warfare in nature:

The constant menace of a predator may drive animals to evolve faster legs or harder shells or better camouflage. In response, their predators are free to evolve faster legs of their own, or stronger jaws or stronger eyes. Predator and prey can thus get locked in a biological version of an arms race, each opponent developing some new adaptation, only to be outstripped by its enemy’s evolution.

Here lie the wonder and the horror of creation. We cannot help but be fascinated at the ability of creatures to transcend danger, but this ability is developed because of the workings of the food chain and the need for creatures to be the fittest or the fastest or the smartest if they are to survive being eaten. The God of evolution is not one for the squeamish. How then can we create a credible dialogue between the biblical God and the God of Darwinian evolution?
The Mysteries of Creation

The concept of the ‘mysteries of God’ offers possibilities for integrating the theological concept of the goodness of God and the seeming unpredictability of the cosmos. The term ‘mysteries’ is used in several places in the Bible to indicate the workings of creation. In the Wisdom of Solomon 6:22 the sage refers to the mysteries of creation as he traces Wisdom’s course from the beginning of creation. Celia Deutsch writes on the concept of mystery at Qumran and points out that the term ‘mystery’ referred to the principle of order behind the phenomena of weather and heavenly bodies, to the creation of humankind and to principles of poetry and music. According to Deutsch’s study of the Qumran texts, these mysteries are the work of God’s wisdom (1QH1:7, 14, 19) and are understood through insight.

Because the wisdom tradition is specifically interested in the created world, it is in the mysteries of the created world that the wise person encounters God. The term ‘mysteries’ does not indicate a willingness to abandon the search for scientific understanding. It is rather an acknowledgement that science is unable to explain everything but that the search is an ongoing one and new knowledge adds to our understanding of the creator. The biblical wisdom tradition expects human beings to go out into the world and establish the facts of reality. If we transfer the biblical concept of insight to contemporary understanding of the world, insight is available to us through scientific knowledge. Scientific understanding is not inimical to the wisdom strand of biblical thought, but indeed demanded by it.

In scientific understanding, the term ‘chaos’ is used to indicate apparently random events in a deterministic system, that is, events whose movement and outcome are not able to be predicted. The questions posed about God in a contingent world need to be addressed, but the interface between science and theology reminds us that in our search we will encounter a God who is not easily labelled. We can expect an ordered world, but we cannot count on it, because it is a constantly changing complex system. Contemporary science reminds us that particular species come into being through apparent random chance and successful adaptation to the environment. God’s creation is to some extent random, but always dynamic in its generative forces.

If we return to Job’s ostrich, evolutionary biology teaches us that if we trace the evolution of this particular ostrich we might understand that its behaviour, though irrational by human standards of nurture, is in fact the best means it has to survive as a species. But that knowledge was outside the ken of a pre-Darwinian world. Job, therefore, explains it as the deliberate act of a God who can confer or withhold wisdom from a particular species. In our twenty-first century context, we do not see the apparently senseless act of the ostrich as being deliberately willed by God. We rather see it as inbuilt into, or an outcome of, the natural processes of evolutionary biology.

Conclusion

When chaos is seen as an integral part of natural processes it need not have negative overtones. Contemporary science tells us that chaos can lead to new life in surprising ways. Indeed, chaos theory has long played a part in non-Western understandings of the cosmos:

Chaos theory and complexity are tools for understanding. But these new sciences contain understanding that has been indigenous to non-Western societies...the insights of chaos and complexity can be found in most non-Western cultures. Humility before nature, richness and diversity of life, generation of complexity from simplicity, the need to understand the whole to understand a part—these are the things that the non-West has not only believed but acted upon. They are intrinsic in most non-Western worldviews.

The biblical world was aware of chaos and associated it with disorder and death, but believed it was under the control of God. Indeed,
the respect the biblical writers showed in the face of chaos in creation is evident in the celebration of the awesome power of Leviathan in Job 41.7 When we use the bible in dialogue with contemporary science rather than as a manual for reading the mind of God, we can celebrate the God of chaos as well as the God of order. This claim does not mean that the person of faith sees the direct action of God in every event of creation, but it does mean that an acceptance of the findings of science is not incompatible with a belief in God. In fact, I have claimed that the wisdom tradition demands that the person who seeks to encounter God in the world must use insight gained from the best of the intellectual, scientific and biblical traditions.

Earlier in this article I suggested that the dialogue between science and the bible remains dynamic, challenging and stimulating. Long before Darwin saw the Galapagos tortoise, Job sat on his dung-heap and pondered the ostrich’s apparently senseless ways. It is the task of the scientist to observe the tortoise and the ostrich. It is the task and the privilege of the theologian to reflect on the question, ‘Who has given understanding to the mind to work out the ways of creation?’ (Job 38:36). Darwin and Job, the scientist and the theologian, are impoverished without each other. In an echo of the biblical God’s words, to acknowledge that truth is the beginning of wisdom (Job 28:28).

NOTES


BIBLIOGRAPHY

When you pray go to your room (Mt 6:6)

BECOONING US to enter through the door of silence, beyond the literal into symbolic mystery, these words of Jesus, ‘when you pray go to your room’ draw us to enter the room within the depths of our selves that is sacred and of God. We call this room the heart. Beyond the confines of the physiological heart, this ‘room where we pray’ identifies the soul-place within. It has no differentiation between body and soul. This heart is where eternal, divine love creatively touches us and holds us in being. It is the inner chamber of the core of our being, where we are absolutely one with God. If we gather all our thoughts together and bring the gaze of our spirit to enter into the inner room of our heart, become sensitive to the language of the heart, and are present with contemplative awareness, we discover that we participate in Trinitarian love. We encounter the heart of God. The heart is the place where we enjoy that ultimately we are one with God.

A Spirituality of the Heart

In celebration of the anniversary of the death of Jules Chevalier, the Founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and Co-Founder of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, I wish to show in this article how a spirituality of a heart is foundational for what it means to be human. Through drawing on examples of mystical literature and iconography of the sacred heart from both the Christian East and West, I will explore prayer ‘of’ the heart and ‘in’ the heart. I will focus on essential elements of heart spirituality: the yearning of the heart, entering the heart, dwelling in the heart and living from the heart. We will see how the discovery of God’s presence within the depths of our heart is intimately linked to the discovery of infinite divine presence in each human being and in all creation.

The Heart of God

A foundational portrayal of the heart of God occurs in the Jewish lyric love poems of the Song of Songs. The Song presents a passionate dialogue between two lovers, interpreted to be God and the soul. God says to the soul: ‘You have wounded my heart my sister, my bride, you have wounded my heart with one glance of your eye.’ (Sg 4:9). The poet presents an image of a relational God, who is so life giving, so generous, so infinite in compassion that a single glance with the eye of love from a human being wounds God’s heart. The wounded heart, the poet portrays is open, vulnerable, seeking union with human nature. The dialogue between the lovers discloses how looking, gazing, contemplating with the love of our heart takes us into the heart of God.

This imagery of the divine heart wounded evolves in the gospel of John, with the focus on Jesus. Eternally with God, Jesus is the word of God who becomes flesh and dwells among us (Jn 1:14). Poignantly, at the beginning of the gospel, John identifies Jesus as the one close to the heart of God (Jn 1:18). To be close is to be intimate with, to be in constant contact, to be en-closed in a way that fosters transforming union. Jesus is so close to God that he makes the heart of God known. In the middle of the gospel, Jesus invites his followers to make a home in his heart, (Jn 15:4) and to be one in him, as he is one in his Father (Jn 17:21). At the end of the gospel this one who
COMPASS reveals and makes us one in the heart of God is pierced in the side with a lance. Immediately there flows out blood and water (Jn 19:34). With mysterious paradox, the piercing marks a moment of cosmic and eternal significance. It tears through time and space. It creates a wound, a channel of infinite love that when entered and lived into draws us into the heart of Jesus. John’s portrayal of a wounded Jesus shows how the way into the heart of God is through the wound in Christ. When we look on the one whom they have pierced (Jn 19:37) with intense intention, we see divine love. We see the heart of Jesus, the sacred heart inviting our whole being, body, soul and spirit to come home to this ground of infinite self-giving love. Meditating on the heart of Jesus leads us to discover that his heart holds our own human heart.

From the Divine Heart to the Human Heart
From the earliest days of Christianity, followers of Jesus prayed with these scriptural icons, entering the text in a heart-felt way. Through meditating on the word, they entered the room of their heart. They experienced at the core of their being, a transformation from ‘a heart of stone to a heart of flesh’ (Ezek 36:26-27). The interior movement from reading or listening to the source of the word of God from outside the body, to internalizing the word and being drawn into their hearts, transformed their whole understanding of what it meant to be human. Literal details of the visual evolved into the allegorical. Allegory then faded, as the slow pondering of the texts transformed the meaning from head-knowing to heart-loving. Once the path from head to heart flowed freely, their only desire was to linger for long periods in the presence of God, ever receptive, in a heart-to-heart encounter. Through this way of prayer that became known as lectio divina, scriptural scenes that were originally strikingly visual (lectio), when pondered over (meditatio), and taken into the heart (oratio) faded in an illuminating darkness that drew the love of the one praying into the heart of God (contemplatio). Meditation transformed into contemplation.

Mystical Literature and Iconography of the Sacred Heart
The Tradition of the East: Prayer of the Heart
Powerful expressions of heart spirituality occurred in the East, particularly in the writings of the desert fathers and mothers of the fourth and fifth century. These men and women desired to live as one in Christ by cultivating a heart engaged in intense listening for the beloved’s voice. They sought to nurture a wise and compassionate heart able to yield to the ebbs and flows of the movement of Christ in their hearts. They yearned to cultivate inner freedom so they could listen to the delicate intersection between the human heart, with its desires and dreams, and the vast and silent mystery that is God. These founding lovers of God created a life style that would enable them to ‘Pray without ceasing’ (Thess 1:7). With an intentional desire to mature in a pure love of Christ, and be true to the beatitude ‘Happy are the pure in heart, they shall see God’ (Mt 5:8), they fostered a way of entering the room of the heart through the practice of ‘prayer of the heart’.

‘Prayer of the heart’ creates a habitual level of awareness and presence to God by concentrating all our attention on reciting a version of the simple mantra: ‘Lord Jesus, mercy’. The repetition of this plea of the blind man (Lk18:39), quietens the mind so that aware-
ness may descend into the heart. Reciting the mantra frees the one praying of preoccupations and distractions that are stumbling blocks to centering on the presence of God in the heart. The simple repetition stills our wandering thoughts as it expands our consciousness of divine love, who is not only the one in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28), but is also friend and lover (Sg 5:10). The prayer creates deep silence and stillness, as in the Song of Songs: ‘I sleep, but my heart is awake’ (Sg 5:2).

Theophan the Recluse (1815-1894) in translating the Philokalia, the great classic of Eastern prayer describes how this prayer transforms the one who prays:

Into the heart he descends into his natural heart first, and from there into the ‘deep’ heart-into the ‘inner closet’ of the heart which is no longer flesh. Here in the depths of the heart, he discovers first the ‘godlike spirit’ which the Holy Trinity planted in man at creation, and with this spirit he comes to know the spirit of God…(The Art of Prayer, 1966, 20).

Theophan continues to describe how anyone who wants to enter this inner closet of the heart must “return to himself” finding the kingdom of God that is within, and so passing across the mysterious frontier between created and uncreated. (The Art of Prayer, 21) In this prayer of the heart, our consciousness becomes so deeply immersed in God that all we can do is contemplate God in loving awareness that is beyond all cognitive knowing. Prayer of the heart creates hesychia, deep, silent, still presence. It reveals irrevocably how God is present in the heart. It fosters theosis or deification, freeing us to acclaim ‘I no longer live but Christ lives in me’ (Gal 2:20). The prayer draws us to rest in union with God, to abide tranquil in the still point, where all is one.

Iconography of the Heart

“Come’, my heart says, ‘Seek God’s face!’” (Ps 27:8-9), the Psalmist cries, yearning for the presence of the living God. This desire to come home to the heart, to see the face of God is also nurtured by the beauty of painted icons. The splendour of the icon, whose faces shine with the transfiguring uncreated light of grace, creates a focus for prayer. Icons impart how Jesus is ‘the icon of God’ (Col 1:15), and yet at the same time ‘no one can see God’s face and live’ (Ex 17:13-23). An icon creates a meeting point between the divine and human heart. In the East, icons of the sacred heart of Jesus were subtle, alluding to the underlying reality of infinite love, rather than visibly depicting a physical heart.

The most frequent example of heart iconography, Christ Pantokrator, emphasises how the human face of Jesus opens us to the vision of the face of God. Gloriously, the icon imparts how, in Jesus, God really shares our human condition. Christ opens for us the possibility of seeing God with the eyes of love. Traditionally, Christ Pantokrator; is dressed in a regal cloak, holding his right hand over his heart. He blesses and draws our attention to his heart. He has a pensive face, slender features and wide open eyes. With transcendent dignity Christ caresses an open book with the words exposed for meditation: ‘Come to me all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls…’ (Mt11:28-30). The beholder is drawn to rest in the heart of God. The face of Jesus oozes with compassion. He draws us into his mercy. The open receptivity of his penetrating eyes pierces into the depths of our hearts and draws us into divine embrace. The icon becomes the window to the sacred closing the gap between the human and divine heart. Our hearts become one.

The Tradition of the West: Prayer in the Heart

A more flamboyant expression of heart spirituality occurred in the West. Influenced by Augustine of Hippo’s (354-430) seminal prayer:
‘our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee’ (The Confessions of St Augustine, 1949, 1:1), and his passionate longing for God to open to us ‘the sea of the sacred heart’ and of the divine ‘eternal delights’ (Soliloquies of St Augustine, 1912, XXIII,106), and fill a heart consumed by thirst (Soliloquie, XXXV, 169), the journey into the room of the heart was nurtured through more explicitly imaginative heart-felt prayer. Awareness of God’s relational presence in the heart was fostered by sensitizing the spiritual or mystical senses of the heart that express deep within the heart how ‘in the inmost self we dearly love God’ (Rom 7:22), because ‘God has made a home in us’ (Rom 8:9).4

These spiritual senses are found where the deepest roots of our interiority lie. They describe an awareness that occurs when we enter into our heart and the light of consciousness emerges out of the thick darkness of insensibility. Helping us give expression to insights beyond body soul dualism, the spiritual senses are soul language discovered in the prayer of oratio. More than mere metaphor, these senses that are felt in our spirit, flow from the heart. They draw us into a deeper awareness that we can feel, listen, see, taste, touch the meeting point between God and us. They describe how we can respond to the presence of divine love that is ever present in our heart. The spiritual senses provide a language that describes the experience of entering in loving awareness to traverse the hidden terrain of the heart, and dwell at home in the heart.

Powerful expressions of the language that has its source in the heart occurred in the Medieval period, particularly in the writings of Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) and the women mystics Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1302), and Julian of Norwich (1346-c.1420). Mechthild of Magdeburg (c1208-1282) a beguine author from the low country of middle Europe gives a representative example in The Flowing Light of the Godhead of how a more expressively visual image of the sacred heart evolved in personal prayer. Composed in Middle Low German, this text is a dialogue between Mechthild and Jesus. Mechthild shares her experience only because Jesus asks her. ‘Truly…in this book [my] heart’s blood is written’ (V 34) he says.5 He tells her that this book is ‘a flowing light of the Godhead into all hearts…’ (Mechthild of Magdeburg, The Flowing Light of the Godhead, 1998, I:1). This flowing light from the divine heart is so munificent that if ‘a small spark alights on the cold soul, she receives so much that her heart will begin to glow, her soul to melt, and her eyes flow…’ (VI:13). Mechthild describes how the divine heart longs to make the human heart glow with the light of divine love. She meticulously describes how, when we enter into the room of the heart, we discover a meeting place with the divine heart.

In a poignant passage that is consistent with the imagery of the wounded lover in the Song of Songs and the wounded Jesus in John’s Gospel, Mechthild records her conversation with Jesus. With a comfortable familiarity she acclaims:

Lord you are constantly lovesick for me. That you have clearly shown personally. ‘You have written me into the book of the Godhead; You have painted me in your humanity; You have buried me in your side in your hands and your feet Ah allow me, my dear one, to pour balm upon you.’ (III:2)

This exchange is not something that happens external to Mechthild, but rather takes place in the inner room of her heart. The language is intimate. It is love language, the idiom of the mystical senses experienced beyond body-soul dualism. With an amazing confidence, Mechthild displays no reserve in acknowledging and receiving the gift that Jesus is ‘lovesick for her’. She accepts the truth of his desire, because she knows that she is written into the book of the Godhead and is painted in his humanity. This evocative way of describing humanity originating from and participating in the Trinity as like being written into the book of the Godhead, identifies how human beings belong in the Godhead, just as a word becomes
part of the page on which it is scribed. Furthermore, the alluring portrayal of human nature painted in the humanity of Jesus affirms how human beings can become an icon of Christ. To be human is holy.

As the flowing light of the Godhead penetrates into Mechthild’s heart, she reflects the desire of Jesus for her and longs to bring him comforting balsam. Jesus responds playfully: ‘O One dear to my heart, where shall you find the balsam?’ Mechthild responds fiercely: ‘O Lord, I was going to tear the heart of my soul in two and intend to put you in it,’ (III: 2). Jesus delights in her heart-wrenching response saying: ‘You could never give me a more soothing balsam than to let me unceasingly lie weightlessly in your soul.’ Mechthild continues: ‘Lord if you would take me home with you I would be your physician forever.’ (III: 2) The vigorous dialogue that is an expression of oratio, prayer in the heart, points to an intimacy that is beyond words. It is so real that it is consuming and transforming. Yet, as in the less sensual ‘prayer of the heart’, the mutual indwelling of Jesus lying weightlessly in her soul, and Mechthild at home in Jesus evolves into silent still presence to one another. A ‘blissful abiding’ (II: 6) Mechthild calls it. Ultimately, all activity in the prayer ceases and the silent stillness of union teaches her to respond: ‘Lord, heavenly Father, you are my heart. Lord Jesus Christ, you are my body, Lord Holy Spirit you are my breath. Lord Holy Trinity you are my only refuge and my eternal rest!’ (V: 7).

**Iconography of the Heart**

At the same time as people felt freer to express their personal experience of the beauty of the heart of Jesus sharing love in a way that unites humanity with divinity, artists began to be more expressive in portraying the pathos of the divine heart. The transcendence of Christ Pantokrator evolved into the immanent compassion of the Man of Sorrows who visibly expresses emotion and suffers. Frequently, in these renditions of a very human Jesus, his head lies to the side, his eyes are lowered, his skin is deathlike and contagious, grief seeps into the surrounding atmosphere. Sensitively, he holds his wounded hands crossed over his heart, drawing the eye of the beholder to penetrate beyond the confines of the canvas into his heart. Soaked in compassion, his deathlike, bare fleshy body exposes the wound into his heart from the lance thrust into his side. The sombre tones of these icons encourage the viewer to enter into the emotion of the picture, to long to share in Christ’s experience of suffering to such an extent that the eye of the beholder enters into the wound and lives the experience from within the heart of Jesus. Like Mechthild the beholder is led to place balsam on the body of this suffering man. Yet, the icon discloses how pain taken into the heart of God looses its bitter quality and becomes transformed in healing divine love.

**Missionary of the Sacred Heart**

In a culture comfortable with visual imagery and expressive affectivity as a way of expressing the compassionate nature of the heart of Jesus, a French priest, Jules Chevalier (1824-1907) gathered around him people of the heart who would be Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. A man of the heart, who had a profound sense of the centrality of a way of the heart for all who seek God, Chevalier inspired a renewed appreciation of the rich symbolic nature of the heart of God experienced in Jesus. Ordained a diocesan priest, he saw reflected in the face of those around him, the scars of Jansenism that instilled fear, and distorted the holiness of physical nature of humanity. With a desire to respond to fractured human hearts, he chose to draw around himself people of the heart, whose spirits were close to the heart of Jesus, to tend to the heart of those in their care. ‘The heart of Jesus is the love of God, God himself incarnate. God is love’, he wrote in 1887 (Constitutions and Statutes of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, 2000, xiv). He encouraged his followers to go to the room of their heart and to gaze at icons of the sacred heart envisaging how ‘in devotion to the sa-
The spirituality of the heart, that he fostered, is a way of coming home to the heart by way of the heart. It is a spirituality that is profoundly graceful and human. It is graceful because, relying radically on God’s desire for human divine intimacy it seeks to be present to the presence of grace in the heart and to respond in love to that presence. It is human because it requires the response of our whole heart, perceiving, feeling and loving in a way that engages the total person.

Chevalier delighted, praised and wondered at the myriad of natural ways in which God reveals God’s self to us through this heart. He encouraged his followers to make the heart of Jesus the centre of their lives. ‘The heart of the divine master is the centre, it embraces everything,’ he said (Constitutions, 10). Be attentive as it ‘pours out the secrets of love’ (Annals, 1, 8). Uncompromisingly, he fostered the expression of intense desire to participate in the heart of Jesus, always living from this centre. ‘Develop an intense devotion to the sacred heart,’ he said. To be devoted intensely is to be intent on creating a relational presence that nurtures transforming union.

Encouraged by his experience on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Margaret Mary Alacoque (1673-1675), Chevalier recalled Margaret Mary’s encounter with the heart of Jesus where she held his heart in her hand as Jesus said: ‘behold the heart that has so loved the world’ (Annals 1, 8). This way of holding and be-holding imparts an image of a vulnerable God who can be touched in divine fleshiness. This is a heart that can be held in a human hand, that touches human experience and hears the cries of the poor. Jesus is close. Jesus is tender. Jesus seeks union with human beings. Chevalier’s Instructions on the Sacred Heart affirms this desire for union.

He even seeks us running over mountains and over hills saying to his friend and to the angels: ‘Have you not seen this soul whom I love’? … Because I come to you in love, not just with a father’s love but with a mother’s love. That is enough: I come with the invincible love of God. (Neuvaine d’Instructions sur le Sacre-Coeur de Jesus, 219 translation from Father Chevalier: Some New Texts, 1).

With the love of a father and mother seeking out a beloved child, Jesus seeks union with our soul until his heart is the centre of our vision, of our loving and of our being. This way of prayer draws us beyond the visual into the mystical, into infinite mystery, where the human and divine are one.

In a ground breaking book, A Man with a Mission: Jules Chevalier, E.J. Cuskelley elaborated in 1975 on what this devotion to the sacred heart means: ‘We have to go down to the depths of our own soul in realization of our profound personal needs of life, of love and of meaning,’ he says and urges us to delve deeply and find ‘the answer to our questions in the heart of Christ in the depth of his personality’. It is only when our yearning for God and the heart of God meet, and we malleably allow ourselves to be ‘fashioned by these forces’ that our own heart will be ‘an understanding heart, open to, feeling for, and giving to our brothers and sisters in Christ.’ (Cuskelley, Man with a Mission, 128). To go down to the depths of our soul is to go into the room of the heart, deeper and deeper into its centre. It is only from this palace of union that we can be the heart of God on earth.

Iconography of the Heart

Congruent with the evocatively visual imagery of the heart of Jesus, in Chevalier’s day, iconography of the sacred heart became more explicit, with a stylized heart superimposed over his body. The fleshy heart is red and flaming. Encircled in thorns it bleeds. Like all iconography these images of the sacred heart invite the viewer to enter into sacred mystery, to behold the compassionate love of God expressed in Jesus. The images emphasise the goodness of matter. They express how God’s grace comes to human beings in the flesh of Jesus bridging the gulf between infinity and
invisibility and finitude and the visible. Unfortunately, a lack of appreciation of visual imagery, the scourge of literalism and the denigration of soul language has led to a superficial understanding of these icons of the heart, and the spirituality of the sacred heart. The rediscovery of the gift of contemplative prayer is now revealing how the journey to the heart, by way of the heart is foundational for all prayer. Jules Chevalier recognized this more than a century ago. We will never find true rest and peace until we come home to our own heart that is one in the heart of Jesus, in the heart of God.

*When You Pray, Go To Your Heart*

‘Heart’ then, is what Karl Rahner identifies as a primordial word. Primordial words are essential to our understanding of the God-human mystery, because they express what is primal, sacramental and non negotiable. The ‘heart’ expresses what is infinite, carrying us into the very union with divine love we are seeking. The word is always, Rahner says:

...as though filled with the soft music of infinity. No matter what it is [heart] speaks of, [it] always whispers something about everything. If one tries to pace out [its] boundaries, one always becomes lost in the infinite....[It] possesses something of the luminous darkness of the Father. (Lehmann and Raffelt, The Content of Faith 1993, 161).

Heart is a sacred word. It names the place in us that is of the divine. When we speak the word heart, and whisper the language of the heart, it softly plays the tune of infinity. It transports us into the illuminating darkness that is the dwelling place of Love. ‘Heart’ evokes the mystery of which it speaks. Even when our heart feels barren, dry, tuneless, loveless, Mechthild reminds us: ‘The impotence of the heart rings in song so beautifully before God that God loves the notes that sing deep in the heart. Then God’s sweet gift shall flow into their hearts’ (VII: 36). Even when love feels impotent, God knows there is an unsung song deep within. The gift of love is there waiting for us to surrender to be filled with the divine sweetness that is eternally ours. The only way to discover this gift is by going to our own room, and our God who waits there in secret will be with us.

Although each of us will have a preferential way of going to the heart the ‘prayer of the heart’ of the desert seekers and the prayer in the heart of Mechthild, give classic examples of ways of prayer that take us to the heart. Prayer of the heart gives an example of how the simplicity of meditative prayer pierces through to the centre of the heart. This practice is what the tradition describes as the *apophatic* or the ‘negative way’, prayer that closes the mind and senses and brings them to rest in a unitive darkness.

The example of prayer in the heart that Mechthild encapsulates, illustrates a way of prayer that engages our affections and draws us towards the centre of the heart by engaging the imagination and spiritual senses of the heart. This style of prayer known as *kataphatic* or the ‘affirmative way’ draws on imagery from the creative world that is familiar and inspirational, to express what is felt at the edge of consciousness in our heart. Both ways of prayer are beautiful and help us express what is most important to us. They should never be compared in a way that distinguishes one with a hierarchic preference to the other. Ultimately each way of prayer takes us into the room of the heart to rest in the heart of God.

In the interest of becoming more aware of how we can support the journey of the heart, to the heart today, I will highlight a fourfold unfolding that is integral to both these ways of prayer: the yearning of the heart, entering the heart, dwelling in the heart and living from the heart.

*The Yearning of the Heart*

Attending to the yearning of our heart, reaching out to God in love, being responsive to our longing, is the beginning of contemplative prayer. It is the desert wanderer’s desire to ‘pray without ceasing’ that motivates them
to seek God in their heart. They long to sink into their heart, to become rid of distracting thoughts, to bring their mind into the heart and rest their attention there. They seek to listen intently, to become the prayer. They are prepared to go to any lengths to have this insatiable longing satisfied. For Mechthild, it was her desire to tend Jesus, to share in his experience, to be one with him that motivated her. And as we get to know her we see how this desire is but a faint reflection of the desire and longing Jesus has for her. Being attentive to our yearning for God, our innate desire to be true to our origins and come home to our source of infinite love, incites the desire to enter the room of our heart.

**Entering the Heart**

Ultimately, the freedom and ability to seek God by going to our room and closing the door, by entering our heart and staying attentive to the presence of God within is the gift of grace God gives us. But there are ways in which we can prepare ourselves to be responsively present to the touch of the Spirit’s leading and surrender to this prompting. The desert dwellers begin the discipline of reciting the mantra, which becomes a continuous act of surrender. Mechthild does not practice a prayer method as such, but makes her prayer time a rendezvous. She becomes present to Jesus through conversation, feels her feelings, reverencing what she experiences and allowing her feelings to lead her to Christ. She forgets about everything but him. Grounded in attentive listening, the conversation becomes a real encounter of heart to heart. Finding what gives natural expression to our desire for God and is conducive to our personality and life style is essential. Pray as you can and not as you can’t is the traditional saying. But, committing ourselves to faithful practice, whether we feel drawn to prayer, or are restless, is at the heart of contemplative prayer.

**Dwelling in the Heart**

Once we enter the heart we cease to relate to God as outside ourselves. We discern the graced emergence of a contemplative way of knowing and dwelling in God who is an indwelling presence. We realize that God is the deepest subject of our experiencing, inseparately identified with our centre, or the point of our deepest self that is the image of God in us. In this ground of the heart that is our centre, we see through God’s eyes and love with God’s own love. We come to know that we can trust this heart place. It is the only source that brings true rest and peace. The desert pilgrims call this experience of union in the heart ‘hesichia’, the experience of silent still presence. Mechthild calls it ‘blissful abiding’. Ultimately all our ways of prayer are at the service of enabling us to dwell with our God, to abide, to stay centered in this all-embracing heart, one in the heart of Jesus, in the heart of God.

**Living from the Heart**

This way of the heart is indeed ‘the pearl of great price’ (Mt 13:45-46). It enlivens us, calling us to live truly, always singing from the song of silence whose tune comes from the heart of God. The inner journey to the centre of the heart leads us to return to the world, not scattered and fractured and self-centered, but in an abundant outpouring of creativity, service and mission from the source of the centre of love. This is the love that each era in the Church has sought to be and live. It is the love that Chevalier knew. God loves the notes that sing deep in the heart, and gives us the grace to sing them out loud. In the words of the Australian mystic, Noel Davis:

The silence
that wakes in the heart
is a sensuous lover
For at heart
is not life a graceful seduction
for union with the beloved.”
SACRED HEART

NOTES

2. The Art of Prayer, 21.
4. Although the spiritual senses were first developed by Origin’s (185-254) exposition of the Song of Songs imagery, in the East, they were also integrated into Western thought through Augustine.
5. Mechthild’s confessor and spiritual advisor, a Dominican, Heinrich of Halle encouraged her to write and edited the first six books before he died. Books I-IV were translated into Latin, probably by Dominicans.

BOSTON COLLEGE
INSTITUTE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

SUMMER 2008

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Jesus the Christ: Who Do You Say I Am?

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Richard Gaillardetz
Foundations of Theology: A Pastoral Perspective

Thomas Groome
Sharing Faith in Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry

Richard Gula, SS
The Moral Dimension of the Christian Life

Hosffman Ospino
Hispanic Ministry Seminar I: Theological Foundations

Katharine Doob Sakenfield
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Philip Sheldrake
Historical Resources for a Contemporary Spirituality

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Evelyn Underhill Lecture in Spirituality and IREPM Alumni/ae Day
A Spirituality for the Second Half of Life: Featuring Kathleen Fischer

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The Church and Its Law

& James Nickoloff
Church of the Poor

Gustavo Gutierrez, OP
Practice of Ministry with Youth and Young Adults

Theresa O’Keefe
Ecclesiology

Michael Himes
Introduction to the New Testament

Daniel Harrington, SJ
Basic Dimensions of Pastoral Care and Counseling

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AND TWO-WEEK COURSE – JULY 14-18
Robert Ellsberg
Saints for Today (July 7-11) Evening Course 6:00-9:00 pm

& Joyce Rupp, OSM
A Spirituality for Our Time (July 14-18) Evening Course 6:00-9:00 pm

SESSION THREE: JULY 21 — AUGUST 1
John Baldwin, SJ
Sacramental/Liturgical Theology

Maryanne Confoy, RSC
Toward Effective Christian Ministry in the Twenty-First Century

John McDargh
Sexuality and Spirituality

Shawn Copeland
Chnstology

Jane Regan
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Counsellor: Welcome. You look a little upset.
Client: Upset? Indeed I am.
Counsellor: Can you tell me what you think causes it?
Client: Well, I am marginalized by the entire village and my friends said I need some counselling. So here I am.
Counsellor: Marginalized?
Client: You might not understand, but there is great enmity between the Jews and us Samaritans. It’s all about whether we ought to worship on Mount Gerizim or on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. And about how we should interpret the Sacred Book, or deeper still about who is a real Israelite.
Counsellor: It sounds very complicated. Can you help me to understand why this makes you feel so bad?
Client: Well, first of all I’m not a very religious man and all this disagreement about places to worship and how to understand books is well beyond me.
Counsellor: This seems to a serious matter for the religious people in your village? Why had it affected you?
Client: Well, I have to tell you more about our village. Well, you see, most go to the synagogue every Saturday and I go occasionally myself. That nomadic preacher—Jesus, I think they call him—came to the village but they would not receive him. And he seemed to be a good man to me. I think that goodness is goodness even if it comes from Jerusalem Anyway, they chased him out of the village.
Counsellor: But how are you caught up in all this?
Client: Yes, I’m a bit confused about it all. I have thought of moving to Sychar where a woman who gave Jesus a drink convinced the people to listen to him. But not our village. It’s too religious. Of course he should not have been speaking to the woman. His religious forbids to men—especially rabbis—to talk to women in public and especially to Samaritan women, but he seemed to help her in some way. The religious people say she is a bad woman because she married more than once.
Counsellor: What has all this to do with you?
Client: There is a rumour too that this Jesus cured ten lepers, And that only one of them thanked him—one of ours.
Counsellor: Of course you understand that I cannot fix religious divisions or make moral judgements. But perhaps I can help you with your feelings. Tell me about these.
Client: Well, this is how it all started. I was riding my donkey down that very steep road from Jerusalem to Jericho. I stopped to give the donkey a rest and to have a drink. As I sat there, all the passing Samaritans said ‘Shalom’ but the Jews just glanced at me. A priest and a Levite passed too without even looking at me. But I understand; they were probably in a hurry to worship up in Jerusalem. After resting my donkey I continued downwards on my journey.
Counsellor: And?
Client: Just a short distance further down the road I saw a man lying naked just off the roadside. The priest and the Levite must have seen him too. He had obviously been attacked by bandits and stripped of everything. Maybe they were Samaritan bandits who attacked him. He must have resisted because he was bleeding, so my first inclination was to pass on. The religious teaching of my childhood spoke
about hating strangers and about becoming impure from touching blood. It all came back to me saying, ‘Don’t’…… (long pause). Besides that I had an appointment in Jericho.

Counsellor: And?

Client: I was torn between my head and my heart. No…. (long pause) it was even deeper than my heart; it was in the pit of my stomach that I felt the pain for the unfortunate man. I knew that the priest and the Levite passed the man for religious reasons. Their religion forbids them also to touch blood or corpses. And like myself they were not sure if he was a Samaritan or a Jew. But I could not walk away; my deepest feeling would not let me….. (long pause)….. I somehow felt the man’s pain inside myself. There was a voice inside me.

Counsellor: What sort of a feeling was it?

Client: Well, first of all I felt fear that the bandits would come back to get me also. But I was really churned up between what my traditions told me and my feeling of compassion for the injured man. Anyway I poured some healing oil on his wounds, tore some old clothing from my bag into strips, and I bandaged him to stop the bleeding.

Counsellor: I suppose you just hoped that he would survive.

Client: No, I lifted him on my donkey and brought him to the inn where I left him until the following day. You remember I had that appointment. The innkeeper charged two days’ wages but it made me very happy to see the improvement.

Counsellor: Very happy?

Client: Yes, but then the innkeeper told the villagers and they now reject me because the injured man worships in Jerusalem.

Counsellor: Are you sorry that you did all this? Do you regret it?

Client: Not really, but I feel the pain of rejection by some friends.

Counsellor: Any other feeling?

Client: I am a little sad for these friends who cannot feel the way I felt about someone, anyone in trouble.

Counsellor: Any deeper feelings?

Client: Yes. After talking to you there’s a growing feeling good about myself. I think I really moved out of a prison of prejudice. I also escaped from being controlled by negative feelings of discomfort when my better, deeper feelings tell me to show love to anyone in need. It’s a feeling of freedom. Yes, freedom to love.

Counsellor: A religious feeling?

Client: Not really, just a human feeling, unless being religious means helping your enemies.

Counsellor: If you need another appointment, please ring me.

Client: Thank you.
As I read this fine book it struck me that here is a good biblical scholar at work. And an Australian at that! Drawing on the best of Johannine scholarship, especially from another Johannine scholar, Francis Moloney, Coloe’s central aim is to explore the meaning of the image of the household in the Gospel according to John. Mary presumes the benefits that have come from gospel study through the judicious use of historical and social criticism. She draws upon her previous work (*God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001]) and offers a fresh reading of John’s gospel with a careful analysis of the gospel’s narrative technique (narrative criticism). Her focus is on the evangelist’s use of the symbol of household in selected scenes: Jesus’ initial invitation in Jn 1 to the first disciples to come and stay with him; the wedding in Cana (Jn 2); the narrative and conversation about birth between Jesus and Nicodemus (Jn 3); the events that occur in the household of Lazarus, Martha and Mary (Jn 11 and 12); and the disciples’ experience of the risen Jesus in the Jerusalem household (Jn 20). Through these scenes Mary unravels the household image that permeates them. It is an image, she suggests, that reflects the situation of John’s post-Easter household community. On a deeper level, Mary shows how these household narratives enable the evangelist to reflect on faith, spiritual and theological identity.

A word or two about each of these nominated scenes that compose the body of Mary’s work might help to offer a taste of the richness of her scholarship.

An introductory chapter presents Mary’s central thesis which builds upon her previous book and contemporary biblical, Johannine and household scholarship.

The second Chapter takes up the focus on Jn 1 and explores the way that John witnesses to and is shown as friend of the ‘bridegroom’ Jesus. Nuptial imagery and allusions the gospel’s narrative memory in this opening chapter and continue into the gospel’s next two chapters. John’s direction to his disciples about Jesus and the disciple’s following of Jesus to stay with him underscores the theme of fecundity and prepares for the ‘initial betrothal and formation of God’s household’ (p. 37).

Chapter Three continues to unravel how these marital and household images are present in Jn 1:19-51. John’s disciples gather with Jesus at Pentecost, a celebratory harvest feast. Significantly they also gather at the ‘tenth hour, the conventional time of a wedding in the Jewish world. These disciples are the first fruits of Jesus’ mission and they anticipate the fruitfulness of Jesus’ post-Easter community. The household is beginning to form.

The nature of this household’s life is the concern of Chapter Four which explores the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in Jn 3. The Nicodemus episode, saturated by an overt wisdom appreciation (of Sophia) and eschatology, reveals the necessity of being born anew to access God’s presence. This is a birth generated by God’s Spirit through which one enters into God’s life and eternity. It is a future realized in the present through this birth anew. The implications of this birth are further unraveled in Jesus’ engagement with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4) where he is revealed as the true bridegroom seeking to draw the Samaritan community into God’s covenantal fidelity.

Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus raises issues of birth and life which link to Jn 11, a major episode concerned about household. This is the Bethany household of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Here the reader is permitted to know intimately the evangelist’s appreciation of life,
eternal life, death and resurrection. Mary further considers that Jn 11 reveals all the features of a miracle story. But of more significance is the language that Martha and Mary use in their encounter with Jesus. Rather than a Johannine high-point of Christological expression, their address to Jesus (as ‘the Christ, the Son of God’) is not extraordinary, nor does it illustrate a depth of faith any different from the conventional Jewish titles already ascribed to Jesus in the gospel. Rather their encounter invites the two to move into the present and away from a fixation on a limited understanding of end-time restoration of life in resurrection. The power of resurrected life is now and Jesus invites the sisters (and John’s audience) to consider the present reality of this end-time resurrection. Thus, narrative time blurs ‘future events [that] impinge on the present’ (p. 89). This realized eschatology borrowed from the wisdom literature also links with John’s corporeal theology and the recognition of the central truth of the ‘Word became flesh.’ Through the flesh of the Word, all flesh now participates in the communion of God’s trine life. Martha and Mary also offer an opportunity for John’s post-Easter audience to appreciate that even members of God’s household are not immune from sorrow, pain and death.

Chapter Six reviews Mary’s insights into the temple symbolism in John’s gospel: Jesus is the ‘tabernacle’ presence of the divine Logos of which the temple is gospel’s narrative symbol. This primary Christological symbol is transferred to those who believe in him. They, too, become God’s temple. This transference becomes the focus of Mary’s remaining chapters. As Jesus gathers with his own (Jn 13) he washes his disciples’ feet, illustrating the way of household service reflective of Jesus’ love for them. A centerpiece of the discourse of Jn 14:1-15:17 (Chapter Eight) is the image of the vine and branches, emphasizing the intimate relationship between Jesus and his disciples (called to ‘remain’ in him). The intimacy of this language underscores the indwelling of the Spirit in Jesus and those with them. Participation in the Johnannine household brings salvation, the experience of life now that grounds faith and praxis. This quality of the divine abiding in every believer becomes reinforced in Jn 20 and the gospel’s Easter story. The risen Jesus’ encounter with the disciples and Thomas in particular speaks to future believers who seek to ‘stretch out their hand in a physical act of faith’ (p. 189).

In a final chapter, Mary draws together her household study on John’s gospel by offering four possible trajectories for future reflection: the household symbolized in John’s gospel critiques and deconstructs the household established on patriarchy; John’s household encourages inclusion of all and invites us to reclaim women’s liturgical leadership; the gospel is about a love story, which embraces humanity and creation. John’s gospel also encourages an ecological sensitivity; finally, John’s vision of reciprocal indwelling is the primary quality emphasized in the gospel. This lies at the heart of every household.

In what already is a long review, it is difficult to do justice to the intricacy of Mary’s narrative study. Nor is it possible to describe adequately the depth of her scholarship present here. This book is important for the way it advances Johannine scholarship. But it is also important for its exploration of a central theme in early Christian writing—the necessity of a household of disciples characterized by friendship, openness and intimacy. The disenchantment which many seem to have with the Christian church reinforces the necessity of reclaiming such a household for contemporary disciples. Dwelling in the Household of God allows us to hear the voice of one early Christian community in addressing this need.

—Michael Trainor


In 2004 Gerard Moore published his Why the Mass Matters. A Guide to Praying the Mass (Strathfield: St Pauls). Having found this book to be very helpful for myself as a celebrant and for work with parish liturgy groups I looked
forward to the author’s second publication focusing on *Understanding the ‘General Instruction of the Roman Missal’*. This second text is a useful, timely and informative contribution to the liturgical apostolate. Clergy and liturgy coordinators will be the primary beneficiaries of what is principally a work of liturgical theology. The author has been sensitive to the needs of his readers by incorporating most of the references within the text, an approach that enables the reader to follow more easily the main elements of his presentation. The ‘*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*’ (variously referred to at GIRM, the *Instruction*, or by its Latin title *Institutio*) is the primary reference. The work is particularly relevant at this time as English speaking Catholic dioceses await the revised sacramentary and lectionary.

The text of the *Instruction* sits at the front of the Roman Missal ‘often unread and little understood’ (ix). As an exercise in liturgical theology Moore attempts ‘to explore the inner dynamics and theological streams at the heart of the *Instruction*’ (ix). The author is convinced that the document is ‘one of the most underrated documents of the renewal of the liturgy and the Church. It is a guide to the reform of the Mass and its proper celebration. It offers a broad and rich understanding of the Eucharist, challenging many of our presuppositions and practices.’ (xi) I approached the text from the position of one who has presided at parish Masses for thirty-seven years and with only a hazy memory of the *Instruction* studied during my seminary days in the late 1960s. At the end of a close reading it is possible to congratulate the author on achieving his stated aims and, furthermore, of enabling the reader to appreciate the significance of the GIRM for ongoing liturgical renewal in the church. It is not an easy read mainly because each of the five chapters is presented concisely and in some depth. The division of the material into chapters assists the reader as do the sub-headings and conclusions provided at the end of each chapter.

Chapter 1 grounds the theological approach of the book in five significant liturgical principles which assist us to understand the *Instruction* and interpret its provisions. The pastoral effectiveness of each celebration of the Eucharist heads the list of principles. Three considerations ensure pastoral effectiveness: the needs of the participants, their spiritual well-being and preparation, and their capacity. For the celebration of the Eucharist to be pastorally effective it is necessary to encourage full, active, and conscious participation by all present. The author makes the obvious, but often overlooked, point that the ‘Roman Mass…is not a finished work. Rather, it seeks to be responsive to the actual participants so as to draw them further into the paschal mystery being celebrated.’ (11) The role of genre and function in our worship constitute the third principle which applies to the rites, texts, music, gestures, posture, ministries, architecture, furnishings, and vestments. Genre and function provides us with a critical tool for appraising both our performance of the liturgy as well as the integrity of the liturgy itself. It also allows us to ask what is to happen when a particular liturgical genre is unsuited to a culture or idiom or language. The fourth principle presented concerns the dignity, beauty, and solemnity that should be present in all liturgical celebrations. Traditionally the Roman liturgy has a preference for nobility and simplicity in all things. As a consequence the aesthetics of liturgical practice must be firmly attached to the paschal mystery, not to the canons of art alone. The spirit of the celebration is the fifth and final principle and is located in the very reason for our worship. Since our eucharistic liturgy is an action of Christ and the Church, his body, it is the celebration of the salvation that God continues to work for us through the paschal mystery and the gift of the Spirit. This necessitates a certain liturgical spirituality. It also poses two significant challenges for worship. First, it means we have to ask what sort of Church we make manifest in the liturgy and, second, it makes obvious that each act of worship is more than a ritualised performance. It is primarily an experience of faith and conversion.

Chapter 2 explores a number of explicitly theological themes in the Instruction: how the document understands ‘tradition’, the relation-
ship of the Mass from Vatican II to that from the Council of Trent, the contribution of the GIRM to the discussion of unity, the adequacy of its theology of symbol and the sense it accords to the liturgical expression *lex orandi lex credendi*. Moore’s discussion of symbols points to a tension between two very different understandings of sacraments and grace. It parallels his later consideration of priesthood. The rites within the Mass are seen to be symbolic in that they allow the Church to be made manifest and enable faith to come to expression. One emphasis on sacraments as conferring grace derives from medieval and tridentine concerns regarding the efficacious nature of the sacraments. This was frequently almost without regard for the actual manner of celebration. The patristic concern for the fruitful celebration of the sacraments, on the other hand, emphasises the experience of the paschal mystery itself. This accords with contemporary theological reflection which points to the fact that reality and truth are only known to us in and through the symbols that mediate them. Moore further elaborates this tension in a discussion of the symbolic aspects of the gifts of bread and wine, the rite of peace and the rite of communion. This leads him to conclude that ‘our practices and their underpinning theologies work to inhibit our rites being fully signs and symbols of the heavenly realities.’ (38) A similar tension is to be found in the way worship relates to doctrine. Early Church tradition affirmed, however, that the law of prayer governed the law of belief. This did not mean that the law of prayer was reduced to the content of prayers. Rather, the law of prayer had three levels. First, it had to be based on scripture. Second, it had to be attested to by practice across the churches. Only then could the content of prayers be examined for their theological value. It was in this way that the living tradition of prayer had something to offer the development and formulation of doctrine.

The celebration of the Eucharist reveals the mystery of the Church. This topic is explored in detail in Chapter 3. There is no single theology of Church to be found in the GIRM. Throughout the document there are allusions to the Church as bride, as holy people of God, as body of Christ, and as the community of the baptised. These biblical references are set alongside the Church as apostolic and the Church as foretaste of the reign of God. Ultimately the document makes no attempt at a systematic theology of Church. How the Instruction understands the actual historical reality of the current Church is indicated by the interconnected range of structures considered implicitly and explicitly in the document. The principal ecclesial concern is with the Church as hierarchical organisation. Chapter 4 takes this up when it considers the people of God arrayed hierarchically especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. The author outlines clearly a number of tensions and unresolved questions embedded in this discussion. One is the role of the diocesan bishop and the differentiation of his office from others who are also ordained sacerdos. As mentioned above, the document functions with two understandings of the celebrating priest—as ‘acting in the person of Christ’ and as ‘president of the assembly’. Furthermore, the place of the deacon and the rights and obligations of the faithful in the celebration of the Mass merit ongoing detailed reflection. Moore concludes his study of the hierarchical community at worship by wondering what impression someone might have of the Mass should they walk in off the street. He asks: Would they be struck by the diverse modes of the presence of Christ in the celebration and at the same time feel something of the mystery of the Church and the wonder of salvation? Without doubt important questions!

Chapter 6 takes up the Eucharistic celebration itself. As the action of Christ and the people of God it necessarily invites us to consider the trinitarian dimensions of our worship and the nature of the action we are undertaking. ‘Christian liturgical prayer is God centered, Spirit inspired, and Christ joined.’ (117) While our prayer is addressed to God it is Christ who is at the centre of eucharistic worship. The tra-
ditional rule has been that in eucharistic celebration prayer is addressed to God, through Christ, in the Spirit. The author observes that there is too exclusive an emphasis on the place of Christ and a corresponding underplaying of the roles of the Father and the Spirit in the GIRM. In focusing on Christ’s paschal mystery and our sacramental celebration and memorial of the mystery of the Last Supper, the cross, and resurrection the Instruction gives emphasis to the interconnection of sacrifice, sacrament, meal, and memorial. This ‘constantly reminds us of the richness of the mystery, the strengths of each particular focal point, and the need to keep all these in play in a single act of worship around the ‘table’ of God’s word and Christ’s Body and Blood’. (117-118)

Gerard Moore has provided the reader with an informed yet critical reading of the GIRM. He has respected the integrity of the liturgical text and yet has indicated a number of tension points, inadequacies and possibilities for greater flexibility all in the service of a liturgy that should encourage full, active, and conscious participation.

—Laurence J. McNamara CM


My experience of a ‘first-round’ of reactions to this work of Denis Edwards resulted in queries raised by theological students concerning the title: How can ecology be at the heart of faith? Surely the Trinity, or Jesus, or the Eucharist should constitute the heart of faith? It is always good when an apparently startling title invites curiosity. Edwards’ sub-title invites exploration: The Change of Heart That Leads to a New Way of Living – an exploration that immediately catches the reader in a contextual web of ‘grace’ by virtue of a poem by Peter Edwards (1951–1994).

Readers familiar with Edwards’ work in recent years will appreciate how this deliberately designed ‘user-friendly’ book brings together and builds upon his earlier works that focus upon ecological theology. Readers who may not be familiar, for example, with Jesus and the Cosmos (1991), Made from Stardust (1992), Jesus and the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology (1995) or The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology (1999) or with Edwards’ articles in theological journals, will find in this work a beautifully constructed synthesis of what it means to be people of religious, and especially Christian, faith in times of global crisis. They will recognise the potential for an ‘overflow’ from this book into other traditions (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Confucian) as their faiths seek also to address the conversion of heart and ecological commitment needed in Earth’s global community now.

All chapters converge into the final Chapter 8 (carrying the title of the book) where arguments for the appropriateness of Edwards’ title are fully substantiated. It is here that aspects discussed in previous chapters come to most satisfactory resolution: the role of human beings made imago Dei within evolutionary processes and in kinship with the whole of creation (Ch 2); the dynamic and intimate presence of the Creator Spirit both in the Christ-event and as ‘midwife’ in the birth of all that is ‘new’ (Ch 3); how the mystery of the Incarnation and the following of Jesus must involve ecological commitment (Ch 4); how the great Eastern and Western Traditions of the Trinity with respect to God as Communion are expressed in the diversity of a relational universe (Ch 5); how theologies of the final transformation of all things in Christ may impel an ecological spirituality (Ch 6); and how an ecological theology of the Eucharist as sacrament of the Cosmic Christ includes the participation of all God’s creatures in divine Trinitarian communion, and can lead one into ‘a mysticism of ecological praxis’ (Ch 7).

This work reveals the passionately held convictions of Denis Edwards. It is recommended for theological students, for adult discussion groups and for everyone who wants to ‘catch the Fire’ of divine Love gracing creation.

—Marie Farrell rsm
NEW RELIGIOUS BOOKS BY AUSTRALASIAN AUTHORS

KEVIN MARK

Anglicans in Australia; Tom Frame; University of New South Wales Press; PB $39.95 [9780868408309]; 303pp; 235x155mm; 2007

Study of the Anglican Church in Australia by one of its bishops. First section is primarily historical, considering the Church’s origins in England and its evolution in Australia since European settlement. Section two is a survey of contemporary issues, focusing on four crises: belief, belonging, behaviour, and international. Final section considers future prospects and possibilities, including what the author considers the 10 most pressing challenges for the Anglican Church in the next decade, observations on what the Church may look like it 20 years hence, and a commendation of what is called ‘Consensus Anglicanism’ or ‘Reformed Catholicism’. Endnotes; bibliography; index. Author served in the Royal Australian Navy prior to training for the Anglican priesthood and being appointed to parishes in Australian and England. He was Bishop to the Australian Defence Force 2001-2007 and is now Director of St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Canberra, and Head of Charles Sturt University’s School of Theology. He is author or editor of 20 books, including Church and State: Australia’s Imaginary Wall (2006) and Anglicanism in Australia: A History (co-editor, 2002).

Australian Religious Diary 2008: A tribute to John Coburn; David Lovell (editor); David Lovell Publishing; HB $32.00 [9781863551199]; 132pp; 240x175mm; 2007

Religious diary for Australian use from 2 December 2007 (First Sunday of Advent) until 3 January 2009. Each week-to-an-opening indicates Catholic feast days and daily lectionary readings, as well as the major feasts and holy days of Eastern Rite Catholics, the Anglican, Uniting, Lutheran and Orthodox churches, and of the Jewish and Muslim religions. Liturgical colours for each Sunday are indicated. The diary has been published annually since 1993. This edition is a tribute to the Australian artist John Coburn (1925–2006). In addition to use of his painting ‘Canticle of the Sun’ on the cover, colour reproductions appear in the diary and there is an introductory essay on Coburn by Rev. Rod Pattenden, Chairperson of the Blake Society.

The De La Salle Brothers in Australia: 100 years of presence: A centenary essay; Gerard Rummery fsc; Lasallian Education Centre, c/- De La Salle Provincial Office, 26 Meredith St, Bankstown 2200; PB $15 [0975114816]; 23pp; 230x150mm; 2006

Essay on the influence of the French-founded Brothers of the Christian Schools (or De La Salle Brothers), especially through the texts attributed to Saint John Baptist de La Salle, including ‘The Conduct of Christian Schools’. Sections discuss the adaptation by women’s congregations, the influence of Lasallian texts on education in 19th-century Ireland, and the importance of these translations in countries other than Ireland, including Australia. Author is a member of the De La Salle Order.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal: Interim text for Australia; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Disciple of the Sacraments; Australian Catholic Bishops Conference; St Pauls; PB $14.95 [9781921032783]; 142pp; 215x140mm; 2007

Interim translation of The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM, 2002 edition) approved for study use in Australia. Final edition is to be published to when the third edition of the Roman Missal is released in English.
The Gift of Mary MacKillop; Colleen O’Sullivan RSJ; Lynne Muir (illustrator); John Garratt Publishing; HB $22.95 [9781920721480]; 128pp; 155x155mm; 2007
Giftbook presentation of the life and spirituality of Blessed Mary MacKillop (1842–1909). Illustrated throughout with original colour illustrations and calligraphy by artist Muir, who also illustrated previous books in this series, including The Gift of Saint Benedict (Verna A. Holyhead, 2002) and The Gift of Saint Francis (John Davis & Don McMonigle, 2003). Timeline; pilgrimage suggestions; further reading list. Author is a Josephite sister who recently completed a doctorate examining literature and spirituality in the work of Thomas Merton and is a spiritual director at St Joseph’s Centre for Reflective Living at Baulkham Hills, Sydney.

God and Caesar: Selected essays on religion, politics, and society; George Pell; M. A. Casey (editor); Connor Court/Catholic University of America Press; PB $29.95 [9780980293685]; 199pp; 215x140mm; 2006
Collection of writings by Cardinal George Pell, that addresses issues related to the engagement of Christianity, and especially the Catholic Church, in western democratic societies such as Australia. The ten essays are based on addresses given by Pell between 1997 and 2003 in Melbourne, Sydney, the University of Cambridge, and in the United States. Some have been revised and updated for publication. The first five essays deal with issues related to Catholicism within democratic societies. The second section considers topics related to ‘Faith, Reason, and Life’. These include a discussion of the relationship between religious belief and science, the place of theology in universities, and ‘The Role of the Bishop in Promoting the Gospel of Life’, which includes Pell’s analysis of the Australian situation regarding abortion and attitudes of Australian’s to life issues. His controversial objection to arguments for the primary of conscience is another focus of that essay, as well as the final essay, ‘Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Moral Responsibility’. Footnotes; bibliography; index. Co-published with the Catholic University of America Press. Author is Archbishop of Sydney and holds a licentiate in theology from the Urban University, Rome, and a doctorate in church history from the University of Oxford. Editor is Pell’s private secretary and a permanent fellow in sociology and politics at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family, Melbourne.

The Little Gift of Mary MacKillop; Colleen O’Sullivan RSJ; Lynne Muir (illustrator); John Garratt Publishing; HB $9.95 [9781920721497]; 8pp; 105x105mm; 2007
Giftbook that reproduces selected texts and artwork from The Gift of Mary MacKillop (2007). One of ‘The Little Gift’ series. The covers separate to reveal seven panels with three brief texts by MacKillop in calligraphy and four colour illustrations by artist Muir. Includes panel on
which a gift recipient can be written.

The Lord’s Prayer; Gerald O’Collins SJ; Darton, Longman and Todd, UK, dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB $29.95 [9780232526844]; 146pp; 215x135mm; 2006

Popular study of the Lord’s Prayer by a biblical scholar and theologian. Examines each section of the prayer with respect to its original meaning in the New Testament, as well as how it has been understood historically and its relevance in our time. Part 1 focuses on aspects of the address of the prayer to Abba, Our Father. Part 2 examines the ‘You’ petitions of the prayer. Part 3 considers the ‘We’ petitions. The prayer is only found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, but Part 4 discusses parallel texts in the Gospels of Mark and John, as well as the doxology that follows the biblical prayer in the Didache and the liturgy. Endnotes; bibliography; index of names. Australian-born Jesuit author is the former Professor of Systematic Theology at the Gregorian University, Rome. He was made a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2006. His numerous works include Has Dogma a Future? (1975) and The Tripersonal God (1999).

Morris West: Literary maverick; Maryanne Confoy; John Wiley & Sons Australia; PB $29.95 [1740311191]; 384pp; 230x155mm; 2005

Biography of one of Australia’s high-selling authors. Morris West (1916–99) gained international acclaim with the novel The Devil’s Advocate (1959), and his more than 30 books and plays have sold over 70 million copies. He was best known for his novels related to the Catholic Church, including The Shoes of the Fisherman and The Clowns of God, but wrote more widely than this, generally combining popular fiction with moral questioning. Confoy presents West’s life chronologically, believing he was tormented by internal division, and considers his ambivalent relationship with the Catholic Church. Photos; endnotes; references; index. Author graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne and a PhD in theology and education at Boston College, USA. She lectures in practical theology at Jesuit Theological College, Melbourne, and is visiting professor at the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, Boston College. Previous books include the study Morris West: A writer and a spirituality (1997) and she was a contributing editor to Freedom and Entrapment: Women Thinking Theology (1995).

Pope John Paul II: A reader; Gerald O’Collins SJ, Daniel Kendall SJ & Jeffrey Labelle SJ (editors); Paulist Press, dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB $33.95 [9780809144792]; 272pp; 230x150mm; 2007

Collection of texts by Pope John Paul II, grouped into 12 sections, based on major themes: Revelation, Faith, Tradition, and Scripture; Faith and Reason; The Triune God and Jesus Christ; The Human Condition; Present Grace and Future Glory; The Sacraments and Worship; The Church and Her Mission; Other Christians and Other Religions; Principles for Human and Christian Life; The Social Doctrine of the Church; Respect for Life; and Christian Spirituality. Texts range in length from single paragraphs to several pages, and range from encyclopaedic to addresses. Includes brief introductions by the editors to each section, and to some individual texts. Details of sources; alphabetical and chronological lists of all documents quoted (incorporating a brief summary of the content of each document); indexes of documents, persons and subjects. Authors are all Jesuit scholars, including Australian O’Collins, who taught for 33 years at the Gregorian University, Rome, and is now a research professor at St Mary’s College, University of Surrey, England.

Prayers for the Journey; James M. FitzPatrick OMI; St Pauls Publications; HB $19.95 [9781921032790];
160pp; 170x120mm; 2007
Collection of brief original prayers, one for each day of the year. A theme (and brief scripture quotation) is presented for each week, though not all prayers relate specifically to those themes. The prayers are intended as a springboard for the reader in their time spent with God. The days are not dated, so the book can be used in any year. Book is hardcover, printed in two colours (black and another colour that changes from month to month), and includes illustrations by Dorothy Woodward RSJ, suggesting its suitability as a gift. Author is an Australian Oblate of Mary Immaculate priest who was National Director of the Catholic Enquiry Centre for ten years, and later worked on 31 causes of canonisation at the Oblate General Administration in Rome.

Sacred Space: The prayer book 2008; Jesuit Communication Centre, Ireland; Michelle Anderson Publishing, dist. by John Garratt Publishing; PB $32.95 [0855723742]; 379pp; 210x135mm; 2007
Daily prayer book for the 2007–2008 liturgical year. It is based on the website www.sacredspace.ie, established in 1999 by Alan McGuckian SJ and Peter Scally SJ of the Jesuit Communication Centre, Ireland. The book presents the same process of prayer: each week begins with ‘Something to think and pray about each day this week’, then six brief ‘stages of prayer’, which include a scripture reading that differs each day (and is reproduced in full, along with brief pointers for reflection). First edition of the prayer book was published 2004. The Australian connection is that local publisher Michelle Anderson produced the book, publishes it here, and licenses it to other publishers for international release, including Ave Maria Press in the USA.

St Paul Sunday Missal 2008; St Pauls; PB $17.95 [9781921032639]; 400pp; 170x110mm; 2007
Sunday missal for Australian use in the 2007–2008 liturgical year. Includes the full text of the Order of the Mass, along with a separate section giving the people’s parts in Latin. Following section, and body of the book, presents all biblical passages, prayers and other texts for each Sunday. Each Sunday includes an introduction and concluding reflection by Gearard Ó Floinn. Two-colour printing throughout.

Sundays Under the Southern Cross: Gospel reflections, Year A, Matthew; Mary Coloe PBVM; John Garratt Publishing; PB $9.95 [1920721355]; 88pp; 135x100mm; 2007
Pocket-sized series of reflections on the Gospel readings for the Sunday Eucharist for Year A of the Catholic liturgical cycle. Most are from the Gospel of Matthew, which is also briefly introduced by the author. For each Sunday the author provides the Gospel reference, a brief quote from it, and a short reflection based on the biblical text. Author’s companion volumes, for Year B - Mark and Year C - Luke, were published in 2005 and 2006, respectively. Author is a Presentation Sister with a Doctorate in Theology from the Melbourne College of Divinity. She teaches New Testament at Australian Catholic University and at St Paul’s Seminary, Brisbane. Other books are God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel (2001) and Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality (2007).

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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

JANUARY—APRIL

From the Feast of the Epiphany to the Sixth Sunday of Easter of Year A

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed while this issue of Compass is current. It focuses on the readings for Sundays between January and April 2008, from the Feast of the Epiphany to the Sixth Sunday of Easter of Year A. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

1. The First readings before Easter are important opportunities to celebrate the sacred story of Israel’s relationship with God as witnessed through its Scriptures. There is no need to ‘Christianise’ them. They were the Bible readings which Jesus himself would have listened to. The First Testament readings in February and March during Lent are chosen to illustrate and reflect upon some of the most important religious stories and moments that formed God’s people: The mythological story that deals with the cause of evil (Lent 1), the call of Abram (Lent 2), Israel’s wandering in the desert (Lent 3), the anointment of King David (Lent 4) and God’s promise to bring Israel back from Exile (Lent 5).

In Easter the first readings focus on the story of the early Christian community, as portrayed through Luke in the Book of Acts. Each of the selections picks up important stories enabling a Christian community today to reflect on the centrality of the Easter event. This emerges across the Sundays, from when we consider the style of the Jerusalem Christian community life (Easter 2), to the selection of those called to minister in an ethically diverse Christian community in Jerusalem (Easter 5).

2. The Second Reading over Lent allows the community to celebrate essential truths about our relationship with Jesus (Lent 1 and 2), God (Lent 3 and 4), and the Spirit (Lent 5) taken from the Pauline literature. Lent 1, 3 and 5 come from Paul’s important letter to the Romans. The other Lent Sundays are letters written by Paul’s disciples (2 Tim, Eph). Each of the selections is relevant for the respective Lenten theme celebrated.

• In the Easter Season, the second reading is from 1 Peter, written by one (not the historical Peter) assuming a pastoral role for the Christian churches in Asia Minor, to people experiencing turmoil and confusion in their religious practice. The writer seeks to encourage his addressees and remind them of their baptismal life. Selections from 1 Peter throughout Easter invite us to identify the joy and delight the springs from our Christian faith and how this faith is to be lived, despite difficulties.

3. The Gospel readings during the Lenten period are either from Matthew (a Jewish-Christian gospel written in the late first century) or from John’s gospel (composed in the late first and early second centuries to diverse community with a rich religious history).
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• Lent 1 and 2 conventionally look at the stories of Jesus’ temptation and transfiguration. In both stories in Mt, Jesus is portrayed as a faithful Jew, committed to God in the midst of temptation and struggle. The highlight of Mt’s gospel proclamation comes on Passion Sunday and Easter, with the story of Jesus passion, death and resurrection. Jesus dies as king, and God raises him to life.

• Lent 3-5 pick up John’s Gospel and stories the enable us to reflect on the journey of faith. These readings, each year, raise the key themes and questions of our Christian lives:

January 6—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; there are eyes 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 enrealised) in the heart of every human being. Can we identify some of the ways this happens today?

January 13—Baptism of Jesus: Is 42:1-4, 6-7. God delights in the Servant, who will bring liberation to the disconsolate. Acts 10:34-38. Peter acclaims to a Roman household of Cornelius that Jesus is God’s baptised and anointed one. All people, irrespective of background, belong to God. Mt 3:13-17 Jesus is baptised and declared ‘beloved.’ Theme—Being Beloved. In a world of struggle, this celebration offers an opportunity for the baptised community to remember and celebrate its ‘belovedness.’ God delights in us. This is an important moment to name who God is for us, and we for God, especially when contrary voices seem to dominate.

January 20—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. The beginning of a famous letter, in which the Corinthian Christians are reminded of their call to sainthood, and their relationship to God and Jesus. Jn 1:29-34. John the Baptist recognises Jesus as the chosen one and possessor of God’s Spirit. Theme—Spirit Possessed: Our communion with Jesus through baptism and Eucharist confirms us as those who are possessed with the Spirit of God. We are called, like the Servant, to proclaim restoration and hope to people.

January 27—Ordinary Time 3: Is 9:1-4. A beautiful poem of God’s overwhelming vision for humanity: light, peace and freedom in the midst of oppression. 1 Cor 1:10-13,17-18. Paul addresses the problem at Corinth of division. The true source of unity is Jesus, the Good News. Mt 4:12-23. Jesus’ presence and ministry echoes the Is reading of liberation, and the first community of disciples is called. Theme—Liberation and Hope: The hope expressed in the vision of Isaiah in the first reading is always desired. Mt’s Jesus expresses this as he calls his first disciples. How is this community today an expression of that hope and liberty, of Isaiah’s vision?

February 3—Ordinary Time 4: Zep 2:3-3:
12-13. The prophet encourages the people to seek God. In return God will form a truth and sacred people. 1 Cor 1: 26-31. Those attracted to God are regarded by others as ‘foolish.’ They have a wisdom which is from God. Mt 5: 1-12a Jesus teaches the heart of discipleship in this list of attributes that reveal God’s blessedness of people. Theme—Openness to God. Living a life focused on God permeates membership in the Christian community. This Eucharistic community illustrates how this is tangibly expressed. This is what makes today’s reading relevant.

February 10—Lent 1: Gm 2: 7-9; 3: 1-7. An ancient story that reflects on the mystery of evil and human’s cooperation with it. Everyone gets blamed! Rom 5:12-19. The role of Jesus as God’s obedient and righteous one in the plan for human liberation. This reading is heard in the light of the first reading. Mt 4:1-11 Jesus is tempted by the devil and remains faithful to God. Theme—Evil & Fidelity. Powerful experiences of suffering and misery are the focus for this first Sun of Lent. The invitation at this start of Lent to repentance and fidelity to God might typify today’s Eucharist.

February 17—Lent 2: Gen 12:1-4. God calls Abram and the story of Israel begins. 2 Tim 1:8-10. The writer’s invites us to bring our struggles into communion with Jesus, relying always on God’s power. Mt 17:1-9. Jesus is transfigured. Theme—Change: Abram and Jesus are both theological models of sacred change…open to God and God’s call. Church renewal invites us to an openness to change and a confidence in the future. Gloom and doom are far from today’s liturgy.

February 24—Lent 3: Ex 17:3-7. The desert wandering people of Israel’s tribes complain about their thirst Rom 5:1-2,5-8. Paul affirms God’s love for us. This becomes the cause of hope. Jn 4:5-42. The great story of the woman at the well who meets the source of living water, Jesus. Theme—Thirst Quenching: For what do we thirst? What are our deepest desires? for our world? for this community? Our readings invite us to renew our relationship with the source of Living Water, who can deeply satisfy us.

March 2—Lent 4: 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13 The shepherd boy, David, the most unexpected, unrecognised and youngest of Jesse’s sons, is anointed as king. Eph 5:8-14. We are invited to live in God’s light. Jn 9. Story of the gradual insight into Jesus of the man born blind. Theme—Light & seeing: Who or what enables us to see deeply and understand our lives and world? The readings encourage us to draw closer to the source of true light, Jesus.


March 20—Holy Thursday. Ex 12:1-8,11-14. The Passover meal of deliverance. 1 Cor 11:23-26 Paul remembers Jesus’ last meal with his friends before death. Jn 13:1-15. Jesus’ act of foot-washing is a symbol of service and solidarity. Theme—Leadership: Jesus is the one who leads us to God. Leadership is the cry of our Church, world, community. Who reveals to us the most authentic values of human existence? What qualities of lead-
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ership or needed for our nation, our Church, this community?

March 21—Good Friday. Is 52:13-53:12. This is another servant song that reflects on God’s servant who is innocent and suffers for others. Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Jesus, the compassionate one, suffers with us. Jn 18:1-19:42 Jesus, the exalted one, suffers, and dies as innocent lamb acclaimed as king. The moment of death is also one of exaltation and victory. It is the source of the church’s sacramental life (‘blood’ = Eucharist; ‘water’ = baptism). Theme—Victory. God’s solidarity revealed through Jesus with the cries of suffering emitted by creation and human beings. God is victorious over death.

March 22 & 23—Easter. Mt 28:1-10. The Risen Jesus brings joy to the women who come to the tomb Theme—Joy. In a world and among people that seem so sad and preoccupied with survival, the Easter message is central, offering an encouraging vision for us all: He is Risen.


April 13—Easter 4 Acts 2:14,36-41. As Peter preaches, Luke shows him appealing to his audience for a spirit of conversion to God. 1 Pet 2:20-25. Jesus is the model of how to be with God in the midst of life’s suffering. Jn 10:1-10. Jesus is the sheep-fold gate who allows access to God and protection for his community. Theme—Jesus, the Gate: We seek safety, security and protection. Jesus offers us a community where we can be at ease with God. What are some of the ways in which this happens in today’s Eucharistic community?

April 20—Easter 5 Acts 6:1-7. Seven are appointed to minister to the practical needs of the Jerusalem Christian community. Ministry is flexible, inclusive and respectful of the needs of the community. 1 Pet 2:4-9. The baptised are members of a spiritual household are truly a holy priesthood. Jn 14:1-12. Jesus is the way, truth and life for people who feel troubled. Theme—Royal Priesthood. Our community that gathers each Sunday is precious. It is God’s ‘royal priesthood.’ It is blessed and beloved by God. This can be named and celebrated. It is the heart of future ministry in a time when our focus shifts from a church dependent on the ordained to lay ecclesial leadership.

April 27—Easter 6. Acts 8:5-8, 14-17. Philip preaches to the Samaritans. Peter and John visit them and pray that the Samaritan will receive the Holy Spirit. A second Pentecost takes place! 1 Pet 3:15-18. Reverence for God is at the heart of the Christian life. This enables the believer to act with integrity especially in times of difficulty or false-accusation. Jn 14:15-21. Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit, his Advocate, who will be with his disciples. Theme—Release of God’s Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit permeates every atom of creation and fibre of our being. What a delight our world and lives are because of this.