

EVOLUTION AND THEOLOGY

THE YEAR 2009 has been a year for celebrating the achievements of the natural sciences. The United Nations declared it the International Year of Astronomy to mark the 400th anniversary of Galileo's telescopic observations—observations that supported the Copernican system of the universe. 2009 has also been the Year of Darwin as it is the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species* and the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth.

Both these scientific developments—the switch from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican system of the universe and the abandonment of the biological theory of fixed species in favour of the theory of evolution—presented major challenges to theologians. The new scientific theories were so well supported by evidence and had such brilliant explanatory power that it was foolish for non-scientists to argue against them. Theologians were therefore forced to re-examine the bases of their own formulations of doctrine and develop presentations of doctrine that not only did not contradict the firm conclusions of the natural sciences but even incorporated those conclusions.

At this time I will by-pass the story of the impact of the Copernican revolution on theology and exegesis, and offer some reflections on the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution:

First of all theologians of the latter part of the nineteenth century, following the publication of *The Origin of Species* in November 1859, were forced to look again at the book of Genesis, especially Chapter 1 in which the sacred author narrates that creation was completed in seven days: on the third day God created plants and trees, on the fifth day the fish and the birds, on the sixth day all the animals and Adam and Eve.

Already before Darwin the historical accuracy of the Genesis account was under question because of developments in the earth sci-

ences, especially geology, which made it clear that the earth had a long history. Creation did not take place all at once a few thousand years ago. Hence the first chapter of Genesis could not be read as a literal historical account of the origins of the world.

One response from the theologians was to claim that the six days of creation were actually six ages spanning great periods of time—God rested on the seventh 'day', of course. That was a good try, but a better, and in the long run more acceptable, response was to examine the literary forms of the Genesis texts. The book of Genesis is not a text of science, and only in a special way is it to be taken as history, as Mark O'Brien explains in his article in this issue of *Compass*.

Fortunately, biblical archaeology was making progress in the latter half of the nineteenth century, enabling biblical scholars to arrive at a clearer understanding of the history of the biblical text. The Bible was not dictated by God to human scribes—rather it has its own history as a text or collection of texts that are nonetheless claimed to be inspired.

Thus theologians and biblical scholars learned to cope with evolution theory's landscape of an ancient earth and an emergence of biological species over great periods of geological time. After some resistance from philosophy they also came to terms with Darwin's explanation of how the vast variety of species emerged: Darwin's brilliantly simple theory of descent with modification in the context of competition for survival. From the most primitive life forms all the complexity and variety that we know today has evolved.

Having absorbed and eventually become comfortable with the account of a gradual evolution of sub-human species over vast tracts of time the next challenge for scripture scholars and theologians was the implications of evolution theory for the emergence (or crea-

tion) of humankind. Darwin did not, as was popularly believed, postulate the theory that humans were ‘descended from apes’. The theory of evolution postulated that present day primates and human beings have a common ancestry some time back in the evolutionary tree.

Nevertheless, theologians dug their heels in here, led by Pope Pius XII who declared in a speech to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on 30th November, 1941 that humans are superior to animals because each human being possesses an immortal soul, and he reiterated his teaching in his encyclical *Humani Generis (Of the Human Race)* in 1950 where he taught that there could be no question of the evolution of the human soul. Theologians began to speak of ‘an ontological leap’ from the animal kingdom to the human that cannot be explained in purely scientific terms. Humankind may have evolved bodily from lower species, but each human being is constituted as a spiritual being by the direct creative action of God.

Theologians insist that they are talking theology when they talk of the spiritual dimension of human beings, of the human soul, of human beings as created ‘in the image and likeness of God’. They are insisting that natural science is not enough to explain the mystery of the human person, and that the theological teaching on the nature of humankind is not an interference with natural science.

Evolution science further required that humankind emerged as a population (the theory called ‘polygenism’) rather than as a single couple (‘monogenism’). This was a further challenge to theologians. In his encyclical *Humani Generis* Pius XII stated that polygenism could not be accepted because it was in no way apparent how such a theory could be reconciled with the doctrine of Original Sin. Effectively the pope set a challenge to

theologians and scripture scholars to *make* it apparent how they could be reconciled.

The sticking point was St Paul’s teaching in Romans 5:12-21, reiterated in the Council of Trent, that just as sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and death reigned over all the descendents of Adam, so grace and life entered the world through one man, Christ. Polygenism was incompatible with that vision of the Original Sin committed by a single pair of first parents and transmitted to all their descendants.

Scholars pointed out that Paul’s whole purpose was to teach the universality of Christ’s redemption. The Adam and Eve story provided a convenient framework for that teaching—it was a literary device to help him make his point, not a teaching that Adam and Eve were a single couple (monogenism) rather than a ‘crowd’ (polygenism). Romans 5 makes no difference to the acceptability of the fact that the early chapters of Genesis are not to be read as literal historical accounts. Similar conclusions are to be drawn concerning the repetition of Paul’s parallelism by the Council of Trent: the Council fathers were quoting Paul in order to make their teaching on Original Sin clear, but were not teaching that Adam and Eve were a single historical couple.


Thus theologians can defend their doctrines in the face of contemporary biological science. They can also express them in ways that integrate evolution theory. They certainly do not seek to interfere in any way with natural science (though the same cannot be said about the practice of Creation Scientists and proponents of Intelligent Design).

Would that the militant scientific atheists who appeal to evolution—Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins for example—would treat theology with the same courtesy.

—**Barry Brundell MSC, Editor**

The latest findings of the International Theological Commission on these matters are published under the title, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, July 2004, accessible on the Vatican website (<http://www.vatican.va/>).

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THE PARAMETERS OF DIALOGUE IN A NEW MILLENNIUM

Some Comments

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THIS PAPER, drawing on the thought of Avery Dulles, looks at some of the issues that surround dialogue in contemporary Catholic discourse. It argues that cultural changes have necessitated some re-evaluation of the concept of dialogue as the basic expression of the Church's missionary stance. It argues that for dialogue, especially with the wider culture, to be fruitful it must be based on a recognition of certain basic commonly held assumptions. In terms of intraecclesial dialogue an important consideration is that dialogue can be limited. Some issues are not amenable to dialogue, such as those which involve well-defined, substantive beliefs.

Introduction

Dialogue means a conversation between two equals in which consensus regarding the truth is sought. Beinert and Schussler Fiorenza (2000, 174)

In this paper I would like to make some cautionary comments about the use of dialogue in contemporary Catholic discourse. I am aware that such comments could be misconstrued since the value of dialogue can, on occasion, be seen as one of the unchallenged leitmotifs of post-conciliar Catholicism. This brief and in many ways preliminary discussion is part of a growing literature which sees the Council and how it has been interpreted as a contested issue and one where a variety of voices can be heard. I am not suggesting that

dialogue be abandoned but that it must be seen in a historical and cultural context as one aspect of the Church's missionary outreach. Furthermore, dialogue relies on an acceptance of basic assumptions such as truth claims and, therefore, in some circumstances cannot be fruitfully undertaken. A much more pressing challenge is how to address the precursor to dialogue, namely nurturing religious commitment so that the desire and ability to engage in dialogue is evident.

Today, amongst young people especially, the religious quest is often marked by a widening disengagement with religious traditions. This results in a growing population cohort that does not see religious issues, classically conceived, as having much importance. As a result there is not a firm grounding in the language, practices, symbols and narratives of religious traditions. This disengagement is most evident in mainstream Protestant groups but is also a factor in the disposition of contemporary Catholicism. This has major implications for the place of dialogue in contemporary Catholic discourse. In order for religious dialogue to occur, both within communities and as outreach, there must be more than a passing acquaintance with religious language, belief and practice and some type of affective acceptance and acting out of belief.

To illustrate this point, let me use an historical example. I have recently been reviewing *The Golden Years*, a book which looks at, amongst other things, the Melbourne University student apostolate in the years that Fr

Jerry Golden S.J. was chaplain to the university. This period roughly translates to the fifteen years leading up to the Second Vatican Council. There is much to be said for this fine work of narrative history but the point I wish to make here is the extraordinary activity and fecundity that accompanied Catholic student life in this period. One of the questions that preoccupied the apostolate was how to make the Incarnation a reality in a university setting. The idea here was to enter into a closer dialogue with the wider world, especially the environs in which students lived. The apostolate was on the vanguard of a new mentality amongst Catholics that would be fully ushered in by the Council. The emancipation brought about by the Council occurred in an historic instance when many in the Catholic community were ready to go out and engage in an exchange with the world.

The Catholic culture of the era, for all its shortcomings, provided critical mass and was based on a clear sense of common beliefs, values and practices. It prepared people well for the task of dialogue. It was almost natural for those who were brought up in this era to seek to dialogue as they had something fairly well defined to contribute.

In terms of the apostolate, a dialogue with medical students or with those interested in engineering or in law reform could go ahead since those involved each shared something of a particular perspective. In terms of dialogue within the group this was also a purposeful endeavour as many of the common understandings on which dialogue within communities is based were firmly established.

I would argue that we cannot make the same assumptions in the cultural milieu of the new millennium. As a result there is a need to contextualize dialogue within a broader social analysis which begins to examine the preconditions on which genuine dialogue depends.

Dialogue and the New Cultural Reality

No theologian in the English speaking world



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better articulates the changing context in which Catholic theology operates than Avery Dulles. Dulles pointed out that in the preconciliar era the Church was not disposed to dialogue but rather saw itself in a triumphalistic sense pointing out the errors of others and the superiority of the Catholic position. This mentality quickly, and somewhat unexpectedly, collapsed. As Greeley and many others have pointed out, the tumult of the post-conciliar period was brought about not so much by change itself but by the rapidity of change. Dulles in a memorable commentary describes this era as one where dialogue replaced missionary proclamation as the fundamental expression of the Church's stance toward the world. Here he recognizes, perhaps following Sullivan, that dialogue, evangelization and proclamation are all aspects of the Church's missionary stance. Historical circumstances can privilege one of these aspects but this prioritization can change. Dulles would argue that in these times there is an increasing need for the Church to develop a more proclamatory stance. This is not in opposition to dialogue but recognizes that times change and that what was appropriate in earlier eras may need to be modified in later times.

One of the key reasons for this reconsideration of the relationship of proclamation and dialogue as aspects of mission was a bedrock change in Catholicism in the post-conciliar era. One significant factor was the collapse of religious socialization, which despite some misconceptions is a complex and multilayered phenomenon. One critical aspect of

socialization refers to what Berger and Luckman would call plausibility structures. These enable religious groups to nurture new members but also to provide, amongst other things, a space for religious questioning and mentoring to take place. Plausibility structures allow people to learn and rehearse what it means to be a member of that community. In the post conciliar era, within Catholic circles, plausibility structures were placed under severe strain. As a result, the common understandings that are so important in maintaining coherence were never successfully absorbed by many.

The impact of the Council was not limited to changes in missionary expression. Many Catholic institutions, for example, underwent profound structural and philosophical changes. To select one example, in the United States Catholic universities and colleges took on the critique of John Tracy Ellis who posited that Catholic higher education had become somewhat of a backwater and that the most urgent task facing colleges was to replicate the standards of secular institutions. One of the reasons for this was to enable Catholic educational institutions to enter into a proper dialogue with their secular peers on the basis of similar standards and professionalism. Gleason in a perceptive history of American Catholic institutes of higher learning points out that the colleges that were the target of Ellis' comments have been largely successful in bringing themselves up to the standards of secular institutions. In theory then, the situation should be ripe for a greater dialogue between Catholic and secular universities.

There have been, however, other changes in the era which have seriously compromised the ability of Catholics to engage in dialogue with the wider culture and with each other. The one which I wish to draw attention to here is what Gleason (1995, 320) calls the ideological crises facing many Catholic institutions:

The identity problem that persists is...not institutional or organizational, but ideological.

That is, it consists in a lack of consensus as to

the substantive content of the ensemble of religious beliefs, moral commitments, and academic assumptions that supposedly constitute Catholic identity, and a consequent inability to specify what identity entails for the practical functioning of Catholic colleges and universities. More briefly put, the crisis is not that Catholic colleges and universities do not want their institutions to remain Catholic, but that they are no longer sure what remaining Catholic means.

If coherence and ideological unity, within acceptance parameters, cannot be maintained then dialogue becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

Dialogue with the Wider Culture

Ideological confusion problematizes the whole notion of dialogue because the basic assumptions that underpin the Catholic position can no longer be taken for granted. To return to my earlier example, one of the factors that made the Catholic university apostolate of the 1950's so outward looking and prescient was that they had something to contribute to wider debates that were based on agreed foundational positions. What may have been overconfidence has been replaced today by a much more ambiguous sentiment which often masks fundamental disagreements amongst Catholics. This reduces dialogue to more of a monologue where the culturally dominant side berates the less well endowed and divided party. Let me illustrate this with a topical example. In May 2009 Barack Obama, whose legislative support of abortion, stem cell research and other life issues, is well known and unblemished was invited by Fr John Jenkins CSC, the President of the University of Notre Dame, to give the spring commencement address and to receive an honorary degree. One of the justifications for this was that it would contribute to greater dialogue. Even on the face of it, this claim seems disingenuous. How can an address to graduating students, with no opportunity for questions, be conceived of as a forum for the exchange of ideas?

The point I wish to stress, though, is a

deeper one and reflective of the ideological divide now very evident in Catholicism. What is the Catholic position on a life issue such as abortion? Is it the moral issue of the century or is it one of a range of teachings each of which has something to contribute to the common good? This is a simple dichotomy and in this paper I do not have the space to elaborate the nuances of the argument. I think my basic premise is sound, that is, on many issues, not just moral ones like abortion, there are a range of positions within the Catholic orbit that are very difficult to reconcile. So if President Obama and others were to be engaged in a dialogue, whom would they be dialoguing with? Dialogue depends, in the first instance, on having something to contribute that is both distinctive and informative. It must also have a certain commonality, especially if it is being conducted between communities. When a person speaks from a certain perspective her views need to be in accord with the community that is being represented; otherwise, it is a dialogue of individuals which is perfectly valid but is of a different nature. I would argue that one of the biggest challenges facing religious dialogue today is the lack of commonly agreed positions between members of religious communities. This is a problem that is certainly evident within the Catholic community.

In his later writings Dulles commented on the need for Catholic institutions now and in the future to focus on providing a clear and cogent message to a culture where religious affiliation was increasingly threatened not by a vigorous secularism but by a more diffuse one which pushed religion from the public square and into the private domain. In such a cultural matrix there is a strong tendency for the Catholic view to be further atomized and to be seen as a discretionary position and not one that is binding. The costs and benefits of such a fragmentation can be discussed at length, but the point that I return to is that genuine dialogue is very difficult if there are too many competing and disparate voices.

Dialogue within the Community

Dialogue is often rooted in an aspect of mission—*ad gentes* (or ‘to the nations’). To be sure, this idea of dialogue as an exchange between the culture of the Church and the wider culture is found in many of the documents of the Council and in later writings. There is, however, another aspect to dialogue that deserves some comment, and that is dialogue within the ecclesial community. In many ways, when the topic of dialogue is raised in contemporary Catholicism, this is the sense in which it is being used.

Dulles argued that one of the characteristic features of genuine dialogue is that it was restricted. For those especially who are coming from a religious perspective, there are some topics on which dialogue is fruitless. These include either defined positions or those which form the ideological basis of the community. The ongoing controversy surrounding Fr Peter Kennedy in Brisbane seems to be a good illustration of this point. Fr Kennedy appealed constantly in the early stages of the dispute for more dialogue, inviting the archbishop to visit his home and his congregation as a way of reconciling differences. At the same time Kennedy undermined the basis of dialogue, at least amongst Catholics, by announcing his unorthodox views on a number of seminal issues such as the Virgin Birth and the divinity of Christ. There is no need here to go into a theological discussion of the merits of these views. The point is that, as Archbishop Bathersby correctly pointed out, Kennedy seemed to be determined to put himself outside the Catholic communion. To put it another way, dialogue with Fr Kennedy, at least as it is understood as an intraecclesial phenomenon, was now impossible. This is because the common understandings on which intraecclesial dialogue is based were no longer operating.

Unless there is substantial agreement on basic terms, common meanings and shared beliefs, then, no amount of dialogue can ever bring about a consensus. If Catholics do not

share this common ideological position then dialogue can only be divisive as the groups do not share a fundamental unity of belief.

I would argue that one of the reasons for the zeal of the Melbourne University apostolate in the pre-conciliar period was that amongst its members there existed this commonality. This unravelled in the post-conciliar period for reasons that cannot be elaborated on here but without internal co-gency dialogue becomes a forum for disparate views that have little chance of being reconciled. Without a common ideology, dialogue is based on a false premise, namely, that what is being undertaken is an exchange between persons who share foundational positions. This view need not be taken to an extreme; rather it should be seen in a historical context. It could be argued that in the recent past too much of Catholicism was defined and commonly upheld. This could preclude a genuine diversity of views. At this time, however, the need is for what D'Antonio and his colleagues call a reestablishment of boundaries.

Conclusion

I have written in the past of a salient experience that, in my view, speaks well to the changed cultural context in which Catholicism operates. This was a project that I was approached to run in 2003 that was supposed to investigate various aspects of Catholic university student life. The project was never undertaken because in so many campuses there was no functioning Catholic student

group. The reasons for this are many but it does unequivocally underline the change in culture between the third millennium and the period just before and after the Council. The Melbourne University apostolate of the 1950's was quite understandably preoccupied with the need for a greater and more far-reaching dialogue both within the Church and with the wider culture. They were operating from a position that was reflective of strength from at least a sociological perspective. These groups had critical mass, a shared ideology, mechanisms for nurturing and maintaining religious commitment and a more benign general culture to operate in. Today the situation has changed. The more important issue is that of first identifying and then developing religious plausibility. This could be seen as a precursor for dialogue.

For dialogue to be productive it must arise from a strong communal sense of shared and deeply held beliefs, practices and actions. The challenge facing contemporary Catholicism is to find ways to nurture religious commitment to such a degree that those formed in this way are in a position to engage in purposeful dialogue with their religious contemporaries and with the wider culture. There is little danger in the present time of a return to the excesses of triumphalism. What is needed, though, are ways in which the faith community, especially youth and young adults, can be reinvigorated so that Catholicism has something that is powerful, life-shaping and genuinely emancipatory to contribute to dialogue in all its senses.

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INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Lessons from the Ecumenical Movement

ANNE HUNT

A COUPLE OF YEARS ago, a priest colleague told me of his recent experience of a neighbourhood interfaith dialogue event. Christians, most of them Catholics, had gathered for dialogue with members of other faiths, mostly Muslims. To my colleague's dismay, the Christians had commented that, in order to avoid embarrassment or offense to their Muslim dialogue partners, it would really be better to say nothing of the Christian doctrine that God is Trinity. Why not just set it aside, they suggested. Moreover, they had added, it is just too hard to explain the doctrine anyway.

Now for me, for whom the theology of the Trinity has been a major interest, not just in my academic work as a theologian but in my prayer and spiritual life, this was a cause of distress. But it is not just that the doctrine means a lot to *me*. It lies at the very heart of our Christian understanding of God. It is indeed one of the doctrines of the Christian faith that distinguishes Islam from Christianity. It grieves me to think that any fellow Christian could think of suggesting that we should set that doctrine aside or mute any mention of it, for fear of embarrassment or offence to our brothers and sisters of other faiths. What is more, I suspect that this incident is not particularly unusual, such is the paucity of many Christians' knowledge and understanding of their faith. But this incident caused me to ponder about what is going on, what confusion is at play, and what misguided notions are at work that this could occur.

Setting our sights for interfaith dialogue

The vignette begs reflection from a number of

perspectives. It firstly highlights a confusion, at least at grassroots level, concerning the aims of interfaith encounter, and thus underscores the importance of educating our communities, members young and old, about the nature and the goal of interfaith dialogue. The incident which my colleague related points to the need to be clear about the presuppositions that we bring to interreligious encounter. It is vital to articulate what it is that we seek to achieve, and what we do not—in other words, to set our sights for interfaith encounter. It is also very important to make clear that there is no sacrificing the doctrines which we hold dear in our particular faith tradition, be it Christian, Muslim, or any other, on the table of interfaith dialogue.

The goal of interfaith dialogue is not to achieve agreement on matters of doctrine. It is not about finding the lowest common doctrinal denominator to which we can both assent. Nor is it about striving to find correspondences between our faith traditions, though it may be that resonances might emerge.¹ There is certainly no place in interfaith encounter for any kind of false politeness which would reduce what we believe to what we hope the other finds unobjectionable or inoffensive. To fail to realise these things is actually to put at risk the very task we seek to undertake. It is to undermine the very possibility of the authentic dialogue we want to have and the genuine understanding of each other which we hope to foster and advance. The very integrity of our interfaith dialogue requires that there be no resiling from the mystery of God as our faith tradition has come to understand it for the sake of averting embarrassment, discomfort or offence. Genuine dialogue is not served

by insincerity, dishonesty or disrespect in regard to our own tradition or in regard to the traditions of other believers; nor is it served by glossing over differences and difficulties or by a misguided search for points of correspondence.

Genuine dialogue requires our *speaking* with integrity about ourselves and our faith. Even more importantly, it demands a deep *listening* to each other and, moreover, a listening, first and foremost, not to our explanations of the doctrines we hold, but to each others' stories and to what lies in each others' hearts. Indeed, our ultimate aim in encountering each other is possibly best expressed in terms of hearing through each others' ears and hearts. Perhaps, most of all, it is to hear and to better understand each others' pain and what it is that hurts each other, for there are the wounds of past injustices and, precisely there, the wounds from which new life can emerge.

Mystics, both Christian and Sufi, often speak in terms of the ears and the eyes of the heart. Indeed, the metaphor has a much esteemed place in Christian spirituality. In the Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes: 'I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the *eyes of your heart* enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power' (Eph 1:17-19). St Benedict, founder of the highly influential Benedictine school of Christian spirituality, instructed his monks to 'listen with the ears of your heart.' In fact, these are the very first words of the prologue in Benedict's Rule. Sufi mysticism also recognises the heart as the spiritual centre of intelligence and wisdom and urges the practice of 'opening of the heart' as the way to the truth.² The Sufi teacher, Hazrat Inayat Khan, for example, makes frequent reference to the 'ears of the heart.' In



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other words, instead of straining for agreement in matters of faith in interfaith dialogue, or searching for correspondences in our doctrines, we are looking for authentic personal connections, for deep encounter with each other, and for the truth, beauty and goodness in each other. Openness and reciprocity is clearly vital to the endeavour, as in any genuine conversation. Moreover, interfaith dialogue is furthered when we come to it with an attitude of magnanimity which is ever ready to give the benefit of the doubt to each other, especially in what confuses or perplexes us.

Where then to set our sights in interfaith dialogue? What is the aim of interfaith endeavours? It is to grow in mutual understanding, respect, empathy and tolerance. It is to break down barriers of suspicion and mistrust, resentment and misunderstanding. It is to expose and root out our own biases, blindspots and prejudices. It is to foster harmony in our communities, and to advance collaboration in nurturing human flourishing at both local and global levels. It is, moreover, not only to arrive at a deeper understanding of the other with whom we are in dialogue. It is also to arrive at a deeper understanding of *ourselves* and *our own* faith traditions, precisely in and through coming to a deeper understanding of the other.

Here is one of the exquisite paradoxes of interfaith dialogue. The goal of interfaith dialogue is not, as has too often been feared, particularly by adherents of non-Christian faiths on the basis of their previous experience of Christian missionary endeavours, to convert the other to the one's own faith. Nor

is it to mute or dilute the uniqueness of one's own faith tradition and to succumb to a relativism that reduces the world's religions to a mere collation of options for personal and private choice, as is sometimes feared by Christian church authorities, particularly in regard to secondary school religious education programs which seek to foster an understanding of other faiths. The aim of our interfaith endeavours is rather to develop a more profound sense, a deeper penetration, and a more acute appropriation of *our own* faith. It is an ever greater and deeper conversion of oneself to the faith which we brought to the table of interfaith dialogue, and ever deeper entry into the mysteries we profess. For it precisely is in and through ever deeper conversion to the faith that we hold, that the face of the other is newly and grace-fully disclosed to us, in all its beauty and goodness, and revealed to us as 'the glory of God,' created and loved by God, the one God whom we both profess.

The goals we strive for in interfaith dialogue are not unlike the lofty goals we set ourselves in the task of education. In fact, the two endeavours are not unrelated. The words spoken by the English philosopher of education, Richard Stanley Peters, resonate with profound meaning here: 'To be educated is not to arrive at a destination, it is to travel with a different view.'³ In this regard, interfaith dialogue bears much in common with our endeavours in education. It too is not a destination, but rather a journey, an encounter, a process of transformation, the goal of which is to travel with a different view, our eyes and our ears, our hearts and our minds, newly attuned to our brothers and sisters of other faiths. The different view we hope to emerge is one of respect, tolerance, empathy and appreciation, and the new vista one of harmony and peace, justice and reconciliation. Furthermore, as Vatican II's document, *Nostra Aetate*, expressed it, we do this for the sake of 'mutual understanding and to promote together for the benefit of all, social justice, moral values, peace and freedom' (*Nostra Aetate* 3).

Lessons from Ecumenical Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue, compared to ecumenical dialogue (*i.e.*, dialogue between the different Christian denominations), is a relatively recent newcomer in the history of Christianity. The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, for example, has roots as far back as mid-nineteenth century, though it was not until 1908 that it was officially established as a world-wide event in the Christian Churches, a year that is now taken as the commencement of the ecumenical movement.⁴ The experience of a century of concerted efforts in ecumenical relations offers lessons for reflection and helpful notions to bring to interfaith dialogue. In the course of recent decades, ecumenists have developed two notions in particular which have much to offer, notably 'spiritual ecumenism' and 'receptive ecumenism.'

Spiritual Ecumenism and a Focus on Personal Conversion

In ecumenical dialogue, the notion of 'spiritual ecumenism' has emerged as a particularly useful expression, indeed a core value.⁵ Spiritual ecumenism recognises that ecumenical encounter is a matter not just of the head but of the heart. Indeed, it acknowledges that genuine dialogue is first and foremost a matter of the heart, and only then, indeed much later, a matter of the head. It insists that it is only on the basis of a meeting of *hearts* that we can really appreciate—indeed even dare to think we have some understanding of—each others' faith and spirituality. This same principle applies just as surely to interfaith dialogue. It too is first and foremost a matter of a meeting of hearts, which involves a listening with the ears of the heart and a seeing with the eyes of the heart.

What is especially challenging and refreshing about the notion of 'spiritual ecumenism' is that it points to *conversion* as the critical factor upon which progress in the dialogue depends. It recognises that progress is really

only possible on the basis of a continual process of conversion, 'a change of heart and of holiness of life.'⁶ The expression 'spiritual ecumenism' thus throws *conversion* itself into sharp relief. But note that the conversion we speak of here is not a conversion of the other with whom I am in dialogue to the faith that I hold or to the doctrines and understandings in which I believe, but *my own change of heart, my own growth in holiness, my own conversion!* It is definitely not a matter of conversion to one or another particular faith, far from it, but rather of conversion to God as revealed to us, each in our own tradition. The focus of attention is thus shifted away from ourselves and our religious institutions toward God, the One in whom we place our faith. The issue, then, is not that the other may be converted to our view and to our particular faith understanding, but that we, each and all of us, may all be drawn closer to God, enter more deeply into the mystery of God, be converted and conformed ever more closely to God, thereby to become truer images of God in the world, to see the world as God sees it, and to see each other as God sees and loves us, all of us. Interfaith dialogue then is not simply an end in itself; in this sense too, it is not a destination. It is deeper entry into the mystery of God and into the mystery of God's love for the world and God's work in the world. In this way, spiritual ecumenism serves to focus our attention not on ourselves and on our religious institutions as such, but on giving ever *more effective and convincing witness* to God in and for the world, as we ourselves enter ever more deeply into the mystery we profess.

Receptive Ecumenism and the Focus of Reception of Each Other's Gifts

Another notion that is taking root and proving very helpful and constructive in ecumenical dialogue is the notion of 'receptive ecumenism.'⁷ While complementary to the notion of spiritual ecumenism, the two present quite different perspectives and emphases.

Where spiritual ecumenism points to the meeting of hearts and the conversion that is essential to genuine dialogue, receptive ecumenism points to an ethic and strategy for dialogue. It shifts the focus of the encounter away from our dialogue partner learning *from us*, to our learning and receiving, with integrity, *from the other* with whom we are in dialogue. Receptive ecumenism also throws into particularly sharp relief the need for *each faith tradition to accept responsibility* for receptivity, for learning from the other, and for receiving each other's particular gifts. In comparison with spiritual ecumenism, it places a particularly high stress on our responsibility in ecumenical encounter.

The notion of receptive ecumenism also underscores the critical importance of the virtues of humility, respect, and openness in ecumenical dialogue, an openness and humility which is necessarily matched by utmost integrity and respect for one's own faith. Again, there is no question of relinquishing one's own faith tradition nor of setting aside or muting the doctrines central to it, but the emphasis and the focus in receptive ecumenism is on listening and receiving from the other, rather than on speaking and giving to the other.

Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue

These two notions from ecumenical dialogue, appropriately transposed into the new context of endeavours in interfaith relations with due recognition of the differences that pertain there, offer helpful conceptual scaffolding to the task of interfaith dialogue. Together they shift the focus of attention from a search for consensus or correspondence in matters of doctrine toward a focus on a meeting of hearts and reception of each other's insights. They then prompt attention to the issue as to how best, at a practical and local level, to facilitate the meeting of hearts and the reception of each others' gifts.

The burgeoning interest and efforts in interfaith endeavours in recent years, with a

flourishing of neighbourhood groups and community networks committed to interfaith relations, offers many fine instances of creative and effective interfaith undertakings. Such efforts include initiating opportunities for sharing each others' stories, and listening to and learning from each other, as well as occasions for sharing each other's work and recreation, each other's joys and sorrows, pleasures and hurts. Pope John Paul II's momentous call to leaders of the world religions to a day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986 tangibly demonstrates the importance and potential for opportunities to pray together. Perhaps most important, because most basic, are the opportunities for eating together, enjoying each others' company, and developing friendships and collaborations. Hospitality, most of all, gives powerful tangible expression to receiving each others' gifts.

Australian indigenous leader, Pat Dodson, once famously commented in words to the effect that we in Australia would have made real progress in reconciliation when most Australians had at least one indigenous person's name and contact details in their address books. So too in interfaith relations; we too will have made real progress when most members of our community have the names and contact details of at least some believers of other faiths in their address books. In other words, the task of advancing interfaith relations is to facilitate and nurture the building of webs of interfaith friendships, and the trust and respect that are inherent in them.

* * *

To Live Religiously is to Live Interreligiously

One of the great challenges—and indeed a blessing—of our time is this new sense of urgency for interreligious dialogue. Never before has interfaith dialogue in the cause of peace been more urgent, given the development of the weapons of mass destruction of unparalleled capacity for devastation. On the other hand, perhaps never before have the possibilities for interfaith dialogue been as great, with unprecedented levels of globalisation and international migration, and consequently more of the world's population now living in culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse neighbourhoods.

In our time, to live religiously is to live interreligiously. To live religiously and interreligiously is to keep talking, keep learning from each other, keep opening our minds and our hearts to each other, and working ever more closely together to help build a better, more just, more hospitable and more peaceful world. The world needs us to enter wholeheartedly into interfaith dialogue. The world needs us to collaborate in the interests of peace, reconciliation, economic justice, political stability and a healthy and sustainable environment. None of us dares to presume that we have the full grasp of the mystery of God. Our God is so much greater and more mysterious than the limits of our meagre understanding. Similarly, the horizon of what God is doing in the world is boundless, way beyond our comprehension. We have so much to learn about our own faith, so much to learn from each other, and so many gifts to receive from each other.

NOTES

1. See Dan Madigan, 'Nostra Aetate and the Questions it Chose to Leave Open,' *Gregorianum* 87/4 (2006): 781-96, including Madigan's reference to difficulties in interfaith dialogue arising from a confusion in theological categories.
2. See Robert Frager, *Heart, Self, Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony* (Quest Books: Wheaton, IL, 1999).

3. R. S. Peters, 'Aims of Education—A Conceptual Inquiry,' in R. S. Peters (ed.), *The Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 11-58, at 20.
4. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, the centenary of which is to be celebrated in 2010, is also counted as another defining moment in the history of the ecumenical movement,

though no Roman Catholics or Orthodox Christians were invited to attend.

5. For a classic treatment of spiritual ecumenism, see Cardinal Walter Kasper, *A Handbook for Spiritual Ecumenism* (New York: New York City Press, 2006).

6. As the Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), expressed it: 'This change of heart and holiness of life, along with

public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism' (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 8).

7. For a recent overview of the principles, convictions and assumptions involved in 'receptive ecumenism,' see Paul D. Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs,' *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008): 30-45.

Anne Hunt's most recent book is Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith (Orbis, 2005), and another Trinity: Insights from the Mystics is currently in press, for publication in early 2010.

Some would have us believe that our differences are necessarily a cause of division and thus at most to be tolerated. A few even maintain that our voices should simply be silenced. But we know that our differences need never be misrepresented as an inevitable source of friction or tension either between ourselves or in society at large. Rather, they provide a wonderful opportunity for people of different religions to live together in profound respect, esteem and appreciation, encouraging one another in the ways of God. Prompted by the Almighty and enlightened by his truth, may you continue to step forward with courage, respecting all that differentiates us and promoting all that unites us as creatures blessed with the desire to bring hope to our communities and world. May God guide us along this path!

—Benedict XVI to Organisations for Interreligious Dialogue,
Notre Dame Center - Jerusalem, 11 May 2009

THE BIBLE ON HISTORY

MARK O'BRIEN OP

READERS FAMILIAR with the broad outlines of modern biblical study would be aware that there has been considerable debate about the historical *reliability* of the Bible. Does it record what really happened? The good news is that the jury of biblical experts is more or less agreed on this one and its verdict is: 'not guilty'. By this it means that the Bible does not record history like our scientific historical records, whether of nature or humanity, and should not be accused of failing to do so.

Paradoxically, believers in the Bible owe Charles Darwin and Enlightenment critics a vote of thanks for freeing it from false accusations and some shoddy defense and for enabling it to resume its primary function which is to help us do theology—to think about God and our relationship with God and in the light of this to make responsible decisions. It does this in the accepted literary conventions of its days: telling stories (about Israel, about Jesus), preaching homilies as in the Prophets and in John's Gospel, memorizing proverbs and parables, singing songs and proclaiming laws.¹

But while the Bible is not a history book it is a book about the *meaning* of history.² It is a carefully considered faith claim about the purpose and destiny of humanity, assembled by dedicated storytellers, singers, lawyers, teachers, scribes, princes and prophets, mums and dads, individuals and communities over many centuries. We believe this motley band was inspired to leave the Bible's extraordinary claims for us to ponder. The 'all in together' nature of its authorship means that is not a particularly tidy product. Indeed, the Greek term for it is *ta biblia*, 'the books'. Thanks be to God for arranging this! The variety of literary forms and viewpoints provides rich fare

for listeners and readers; imagine being stuck with the one type of text and one human author for the whole Bible. It would be like reading a tediously long version of this article—perish the thought!

By the same token the Bible is not there principally to entertain and stroke its readership. Humanity is too serious a project to treat lightly and the Bible does not balk at tackling the difficult questions that have arisen and continue to arise in human history—the relationship between the universal and the particular (*e.g.*, Israel and the nations; Jesus and humanity), transcendence and immanence (*e.g.*, is God involved in the detail of life?), creation and humanity (the environment), good and evil, the beginning and end—in short the meaning of human life.

A Biblical Framework for Interpreting History

This article will attempt to present the Bible's view on some of these questions but readers need to remember that it is my interpretation, informed as far as I can manage by reputable scholarship. My main focus will be the Old Testament, with reference to the New Testament where appropriate.

The first point to make is that the Bible's understanding of history operates within a theological framework or, to put it another way, is based on a number of principles. Key ones are that there is one God YHWH who is Lord of creation and history, that YHWH is a just and merciful God, and that our actions operate within what scholars call the Act-Consequence framework or principle that is part of the order of creation established by YHWH. Simply put, good actions have good consequences while bad actions have bad ones.

These, of course, are all faith convictions and so they cannot be demonstrated to the satisfaction of modern scientific analysis (which operates within its own belief system). All our knowledge emerges from reflecting on or interpreting experience; as intelligent beings we need to make sense of our experience but we cannot take into account all the phenomena associated with our own experience, let alone that of the wider world. We are limited and have to select what we judge are significant moments; for a lot of the time we do this almost instinctively (the patterns of life that become familiar). For other times we may have to assess as much phenomena as we can and make an at times difficult decision.

An interpretation of certain experiences may lead some to conclude there is a God and others to conclude there isn't. It may lead some to conclude there is a connection between things that happen and human life has a purpose, others may see it as all chance. The various stances that people adopt are all acts of faith or belief. One who is convinced there is no God is as much a believer as one who is convinced there is a God. The question for human beings, whether ancient or modern, is not whether faith but what kind of faith? We are all people of faith in some form or other: our limited creaturely condition means that we can't live without it.

The Bible's interpretation of experience (its faith claim which believers accept as inspired) is that God is present to all things in creation and to every moment in history without being confined by either in any way. Such is divine transcendence and immanence. God's lordship of history does not disempower human beings or determine their actions, rather it is what empowers them and enables them to act freely (within the context of a finite creation).

Likewise God is always just, which means that God is intolerant of evil and is resolved to eliminate it from creation. There is no true justice without mercy which means that God's just elimination of evil is always for the benefit of creation, and particularly humanity. God



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is for the other. God's just and merciful governance of creation and history provides the context, according to faith, in which human beings are able to assess the justice and mercy of their own actions. Good actions—those in tune with the will of God as contained in the Torah—will have good consequences while bad actions will have bad ones.

Human life and history has a purpose and will, if it obeys God, fulfill that purpose. For ancient Israelites an important barometer of this unfolding purpose was the quality of life in the land but they knew that, like all things, their assessment of the quality of life could not fully explain the richness or mystery of their relationship with God.

We all make use of the Act–Consequence principle but it cannot be demonstrated as fail-safe because we cannot access or assess every instance. We have to make a selection and this is open to debate and dispute. One can see this in the difference between such OT books as Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, and in a number of psalms. The book of Proverbs promotes the principle with confidence whereas Job and Ecclesiastes challenge it. However, they are not able to replace it with anything more certain or reliable. In the fictional book of Job the wager between God and the satan is whether Job will 'fear God for nothing' (1:9).³ God is willing to take the bet such is God's confidence in Job (who represents any human being). Will we believe in a just and merciful God when the Act–Consequence nexus doesn't seem to work?

Prophetic Application of the Framework

Discerning the connection between acts and their consequences became particularly acute for Israel at the national level. As a tiny nation occupying a sliver of land along the fertile crescent between the superpowers of the west (Egypt) and the east (Assyria, Babylon, Persia), life could at times be precarious. How did the actions of the superpowers fit into a theology of YHWH as Lord of history and Israel as the chosen people? As in our modern world, politics was a hotly disputed arena and, unlike our modern world, always involved religion. Victory and defeat, expansion and retreat, bounty and deprivation had to be explained in relation to one's national god otherwise one's theology/ideology would be regarded as bankrupt. Faced with doubt and dispute, which only heightens the need to know, Israelites and their Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) neighbours did something analogous to what we do in sport, they appealed to the umpire—God, particularly as voiced by the prophet. The prophet was believed to have access to the divine perspective on things. Like our TV umpires in the box high above the field of play, God was believed to see it all and make definitive pronouncements. In effect this is the argument from authority and there are times when we all need it. Notice how we have been coached to accept the verdict of our modern TV umpires, otherwise our enormous sporting industry would implode in endless disputes.

As noted, the Bible proclaims that YHWH is immanently present to all creation and history but this does not mean that prophets were able to see it all and explain every moment of history as it had unfolded, was unfolding in their day, or would unfold in the future. Though inspired they still operated in our limited, human realm. Their claim was that God had identified for them which particular event or course of events revealed the divine purpose. God as Lord of history could do this for any moment of history without impinging on human freedom within history. It was a faith

claim, it was limited and it could only have authority among those who accepted it in faith. Hence it was as open to dispute as the Act–Consequence principle itself. The disputes became particularly intense as prophets vied with one another to interpret the power of Assyria in the 8th century and Babylon in the 6th century BC. One has only to read Isaiah 7–8 (in relation to Assyria) and Jeremiah 26–28 (in relation to Babylon) to see that this was the case. Like our modern spin doctors, prophets disputed and debated with one another and the people had to make of it what they could.

To illustrate the prophetic understanding of history—the orthodox one because it is preserved in the Bible—I will focus on the event that came to be seen as the definitive validation of its claims, namely the Babylonian exile of 587 BC. The conviction that YHWH is Lord of all history meant that the machinations of Babylon, the superpower of the day, must be under God's guiding hand not that of Marduk of Babylon or any other ANE deity. This, coupled with the prophetic critique of Israelite society as corrupt and disloyal to YHWH, led the true prophets to conclude that God was sending Babylon to exact divine punishment on Israel. Whereas YHWH had led Israel to conquer nations and gain the land in the days of Moses and Joshua the tables were now turned: God was sending a foreign nation to conquer Israel. Consistency in Israel's theology of history was thereby maintained. As well, God's justice or intolerance of evil was universal and applied equally to Israel as to the nations.⁴ By definition, divine punishment could not be chaos. As in the flood story all would unfold according to God's creative command.⁵ The purpose of the enemy invasion would be to remove evil from a polluted land (exile of the people), hence it was an integral part of God's saving purpose for all creation. In a word, it was a just and merciful action. If Babylon or any nation overstepped its divine brief and created chaos it would be punished in its turn (cf. Jeremiah 50–51). Israel's pun-

ishment would only be for a certain period (70 years according to Jer 25:12) after which God would return the people to the land. The one nation chosen from all the nations would not lose its status or its mission to be the mediator of divine blessing. This cemented the integral relationship between the universal and the particular in God's purpose and undergirded the theology of a merciful God.

Such was the way prophetic theologians sought to make sense of what, from a purely human point of view, was a disaster and fit it into the existing normative theological framework. But it was limited, as is every attempt, even an inspired one, to interpret experience. For example, it did not address the question of innocent civilians who are the victims of war, although parts of Jeremiah and the book of Lamentations show that Israelite society was well aware of the terror, death and deprivation of war. To try and address these and other pressing issues of war would have robbed prophetic preaching of its rhetorical power and sweeping interpretation of history.⁶

The conviction that YHWH is Lord of history and Israel's acceptance of the prophetic explanation of the exile (an inspired move because it is in the Bible) fueled hope that Israel and the world could, with God's help, overcome failures and their consequent disasters. If this was not the case then the theology being propounded was a fraud. Hence we find prophecies, probably proclaimed in the wake of the exile, that the nations will all, in God's good time, go on pilgrimage to Zion to worship YHWH and learn God's law (cf. Isa 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4). Assyria and Egypt will, like Israel, become a blessing 'in the midst of the earth' (Isa 19:24). War and conquest will disappear; nations will be won over by the innocent suffering of 'my servant Israel' rather than the force of arms (Isa 49:3).⁷

But such hopes were sorely tested by post-exilic realities: the monarchy was not restored, except for a brief violent period under the Maccabees the state never regained its independence, and there was ongoing dispute

within Israelite society over its relationship to foreigners. The prophetic voice seemed to have been stilled; at least we have no significant prophecies in the post-exilic period to match those of Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel.

Contribution of Apocalyptic Literature

The absence of any clear signs that human history was about to realize its divine destiny (perhaps better to say the absence of any inspired and accepted identification of same), coupled with ongoing struggles about issues of justice and mercy, prompted the emergence of apocalyptic writing. This was a scribal contribution that drew on aspects of prophetic and wisdom literature. In highly imaginative yet carefully constructed visions attributed to a sage of antiquity such as Daniel, history was divided into distinct periods with the final one yet to come. It was at once an assurance to readers that all was unfolding according to the mysterious divine plan and a call to keep the faith no matter how bad things may seem.

In the apocalyptic 'vision', the culmination of human history is to be preceded by a violent conflict between good and evil. God will of course be victorious and will then execute a final judgement in which divine justice and mercy will be manifested in a definitive way to all peoples of all ages. Only then it seems will the prophecies about nations seeking God be fulfilled. These are the righteous ones among the nations. Israelites who remain faithful throughout their trials will also enjoy everlasting blessing while the wicked will be consigned to 'shame and everlasting contempt' (Dan 12:3). By the time of Apocalyptic writing, Israelite thinking had come to accept eternal life. Earlier generations had a vague notion of an abode of the dead called 'Sheol', a truly 'dead' place; what mattered more to them was that one lived on in one's children.

With the advent of apocalyptic literature the OT had developed a three-stage application of the theology that a just and merciful YHWH is Lord of creation and history. There

is the articulation of this theology in Israel's foundational story—the exodus and occupation of the promised land; there is the prophetic application of it to Israel's history at strategic points, above all the exile; and there is apocalyptic literature which applies it in a universal and very schematic way to the culmination of human history.

There are two intriguing things about this arrangement. The first is that readers of the Bible fall between the second and third stages. That is, we read in prophetic literature that this theology (according to the faith claims of the Bible) was shown to be true in Israel's own history, particularly that of the exile, and we read in apocalyptic literature that we are moving towards the culmination of human history that is yet to come but sure to come (in God's good time). The second is that, as pointed out, there is no prophetic literature that interprets Israel's post-exilic experience in anything like the same sense as in the lead up to the exile.

Does this gap signal that all subsequent history will conform to the pattern established in the Pentateuch and interpreted by the prophets? It is irrevocably set and there is no need for anything further to be said. Or, and this is my preferred interpretation, is the Bible leaving things somewhat open ended? That is, the Pentateuch/Torah and Prophets are meant to provide the guideline or framework within which we are to ponder and then decide where we believe God's purpose is manifested in our own history.

To recall a statement earlier in this article, the Bible is meant to help us do theology for our time. A factor in support of this position is the variety of views and debate within the Bible itself: it is in a sense unfinished business.

Contribution of the New Testament

The New Testament seeks to establish Jesus as the focus of faith but it does not really alter the stance of readers *vis-à-vis* past, present and future. We read the NT's faith claim that Jesus manifested God's justice and mercy, and God's lordship of creation and his-

tory in a definitive way in his life, death and resurrection. We read that he inaugurated the end time within which we live, but the final manifestation of it is yet to come and is as imaginatively portrayed in the book of Revelation as in OT Apocalypse.

Each Christian disciple is called to model himself/herself on Jesus but each one's life is a unique manifestation of Christian discipleship, never to be repeated on the face of the earth or in eternity, for each life is everlasting. As in the OT, there is a model or pattern but it is not imposed. Rather, each one is called to incarnate it in his or her life in a responsible way. Being Christian does not mean that one escapes the difficulty and uncertainty of discerning the presence of God in one's history or in the history of humanity as it still unfolds in this end time. The Bible teaches us that God is there, present to us at every moment, in every spot, but deciding just when, where and how has caused more dispute and disagreement than it has solved. As a result Christians have tended to confine this process of discernment to the private sphere (God in my life). If we go public, it tends to be in relation to good experiences, not negative ones. Is this a capitulation, a distortion, or a prudent recognition of our limited ability to probe the mystery of God?

What About Hell?

By way of conclusion, it may be worthwhile offering a comment on the devil and hell, that damned life beyond this life. Apocalyptic literature celebrates the inevitable victory of God over the forces of evil in the end time and their banishment to hell. But they are not destroyed, unlike the enemies of Israel which the book of Joshua claims were annihilated. This is in keeping with the Gospels where Jesus never destroys demons; he simply tells them to clear off and leave their victims in peace. In my judgement, this reflects the theological view that God unconditionally loves demons and wicked people, just as God loves good people. God hates their sin but loves them as

sinner. If God didn't love them, they would indeed be annihilated, they would simply cease to exist.

Hence I would suggest that while apocalyptic literature proclaims God's just victory over evil (as it must) it is quite a different kind of victory from the normal human understanding of the term. The key component in the biblical notion is the victory of divine love (or mercy) over all else. Because God loves the devil and his cohort, God will never destroy them and will never impose heaven

on them. The lover never imposes on the beloved. And because the damned hate God (according to the standard theologies of hell), they have no wish to join God in heaven. Their perception of reality is so distorted by evil that this would be anathema. One might therefore say that, in a distant echo of the flood story where God is portrayed grieving over human evil (Gen 6:6), the Bible ends with apocalyptic literature implying that God spends all eternity loving the damned and grieving over them.

NOTES

1. The Second Vatican Council's Document on the Bible *Dei Verbum* urges readers to pay particular attention to its characteristic literary forms (cf. III.12).

2. The Bible has been described as a 'history of salvation' or as outlining the history of salvation. There has been considerable debate about the appropriateness of this term to describe the Bible and it is beyond the scope of this article to enter it. I will therefore refrain from using it.

3. 'The satan' in the book of Job is not the devil (a later theological development) but a member of God's heavenly court, a kind of prosecuting attorney.

4. Just how the nations whom Israel conquered were meant to know YHWH's law or purpose is not spelt out in the Pentateuch, although the prophecy of the foreigner Balaam can be taken as God's message to the coalition that hired him but which rejected it (see Numbers 22–24).

5. The flood story is not about a 'return' to primeval chaos, but the divine resolve to remove human induced chaos. The forces of creation are wielded by God in an orderly manner, the waters rise to a certain level and remain there long enough to ensure the destruction of the sources of evil and chaos before subsiding. Noah's ark is not threatened by any chaotic forces.

6. Those who might be offended by OT theology and turn with relief to Jesus 'meek and mild' only need read Matthew 25:31–46 (among a number of Gospel passages) and the book of Revelation to realize this is quite a distorted interpretation of the NT portrait of Jesus.

7. The Suffering Servant Poems in the so-called Second Isaiah (chs. 40–55), an exilic extension to the 8th century prophet Isaiah's preaching (in chs. 1–39), are identified by scholars in 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9 and 52:13–53:12.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation. Therefore 'all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind' (2 Tim. 3:16–17, Greek text).

However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words.

—Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum, pars. 11–12.*

PRIESTLY CELIBACY

The Obligations of Continence and Celibacy for Priests

BRENDAN DALY

CELIBACY IS a hotly debated issue in the Catholic Church for a number of reasons. There is the enormous scandal of sexual abuse by clergy and the perception by many people that if the law on celibacy was changed then sexual abuse would be a much smaller problem.

There are many cultures around the world that do not accept celibacy. For example, although missionaries have been working with Inuit people in Northern Canada for well over 100 years, not one Inuit man has ever been ordained a Catholic priest. However, there are married Inuit clergy belonging to other denominations.

PART ONE *History of Celibacy*

There are two very divergent approaches to celibacy at the theological level beginning with Gustav Bickell (1838-1917) and Francis Xavier Funk (1821-1917). Gustav Bickell argued that clerical celibacy was of apostolic origins and intrinsically related to ministry. Celibacy was initially a customary law, and only gradually received a fixed, written form. Scholarship in recent times that supports the argument of Gustav Bickell has been the work of Cochini in Paris, Cholij at the Gregorian University, and the Vatican archivist Stickler.¹

Francis Xavier Funk argued that clerical celibacy was the consequence of canon law and Church discipline beginning with the Council of Elvira, in Spain, in 306. Many scholars including Vogels,² Balducelli³ and Dennis⁴

are very critical of Cochini and the idea that clerical continence was of apostolic origins. They contend that this has not been proved. They argue that there is a lack of clear evidence about priestly celibacy and continence prior to the fourth century especially in relation to the apostles and in the first century after their deaths. They say patristic support is limited. However, they do not produce strong patristic or council legislation to support their own view. Balducelli is very critical of the theological justifications for continence in the sources that Cochini uses. These sources have a negative attitude to sexual intercourse: *e.g.* the reference to Origen's 6th homily on Leviticus 21 concerning the necessity of perpetual prayer and the necessity of uninterrupted continence.⁵ Cochini, recognising this, argues that the theological justification for celibacy should change to the priest's relationship to Christ whom he represents.

At this point in the Church's history, everyone is conscious of the sexual misconduct and abuse problems within the Church. Unfortunately, there seems to have always been a gap between the teaching of Jesus and the human reality. This human reality has always complicated the Church's legislation and any interpretation of it. Balducelli is probably right in contending that historical objectivity is elusive when clerical celibacy is being discussed. As Stickler maintained 'a correct interpretation of the sources can only be established on this basis: by taking into account their authenticity, integrity, credibility and particular worth.'⁶

Key Concepts

The Chinese have a proverb that ‘the first step towards wisdom is getting things by their right names’. This is particularly true on the subject of celibacy.

*Clerics*⁷ are all those who have been ordained deacons.

‘*Contenance* means the non-use of the sexual faculties.’⁸

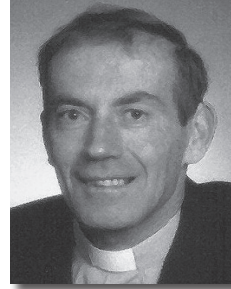
‘*Chastity* is the moral virtue that moderates and regulates the sexual appetite in man and woman.’⁹ ‘Single persons are chaste when they are continent with all persons until they marry. Clergy are bound to perfect and perpetual continence; and are chaste when they do not use their sexual faculties with anyone of either sex for life.

Celibacy is a publicly committed state of living chastely, whereby the person, accepting the gift of God and identifying with Jesus Christ, freely chooses not to marry for the sake of the kingdom of God while serving God and other people.

‘Celibacy’ comes etymologically from the Latin *coelebs* meaning an unmarried man. However, it must be distinguished from simply being not married like a bachelor, as well as reflecting key aspects of Church teaching.¹⁰

Scripture

Jesus taught that the reign of God was imminent and that following him overrode many ordinary activities in life. Being a disciple involved ‘losing one’s life’ (Mk. 8:35); ‘leaving the dead to bury their dead’ (Mt. 8:22); ‘taking up the cross’ (Mk. 8:34); since anyone loving ‘father or mother, son or daughter more than him would not be worthy of him’ (Mt. 10:37). For Jesus and his disciples the task of proclamation had to also be enacted ‘sacramentally’ in their lives ‘for the sake of the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt. 19:12). Peter was married since Jesus cured his mother-in-law. (Mark 1: 29-31) In the text of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus makes the leaving of wife explicit in his answer to Peter’s question:



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Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.¹¹

In Matthew 19:27 and Mark 10:29-30, leaving one’s wife is merely implied in the context of leaving everything in order to follow Jesus. The apostles left home because of their commitment to the Lord and to the preaching of the Gospel. People at home were left behind as a result.

Saint Paul writing to the Corinthians shows his clear preference for celibacy:

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.¹²

The Pastoral letters, to Timothy and Titus, teach us that bishops, presbyters and deacons were often married men. In the Pastoral Letters to Timothy and Titus there is a special phrase that recurs also in early canonical legislation and patristic writings: ‘a husband of one wife’. Saint Paul writes to Timothy stating that: ‘A bishop must be above reproach, married only once.’ (1 Tim 3:2.). Then writing to Titus, Saint Paul tells him to appoint, in Crete, presbyters ‘married only once’.(Titus 1:6). Writing to Timothy concerning deacons Paul says, ‘Let deacons be married only once’ (1 Tim 3:12). De la Potterie is of the opinion that there is no doubt that the expression ‘husband of one

wife' is a covenantal formula.¹³ De la Potterie¹⁴ points out the parallel with 2 Corinthians 11:2, where Saint Paul describes the Church in Corinth as a 'wife', a 'bride' presented to Christ as a 'chaste virgin'. Elsewhere in the New Testament, bridal imagery is significant as in Rev. 21:1-3, or in Ephesians 5: 22-23, where marriage is a sacramental image of the union of Christ and his Church. Ordination makes ordained ministers sacramentally representative of the relationship of Christ to the Church as bridegroom to bride, so that those ordained can only be 'husband of one wife.'¹⁵

Early Church

Clement of Rome (ca. 96) and Ignatius of Antioch¹⁶ (ca. 110) speak of early Christians being celibate and imitating Christ. However, in the first few centuries of the Church, early inscriptions, synods, papal decretals and patristic writings demonstrate very many of the clergy were married and had children. Pope Hormisdas (514-523) fathered a son who became Pope Silverius (536-358).¹⁷ However, we do not know if Pope Hormisdas fathered his son before ordination.

While it is relatively easy to compile impressive lists of married clergy, Cholij, Cochini and Stickler argue that the married status existed with a longstanding, discipline of obligatory clerical continence that was of apostolic origin. This discipline existed in both Eastern and Western Churches. The basis for the total continence was the cleric's total consecration to God and the Church. Total personal consecration was understood to be intimately connected to ordination. Once a person was ordained as a deacon, priest or bishop, then that person was sacramentally consecrated to God. A single man or a widower could not marry after ordination, since the man was then obliged to continence anyway.

* * *

Western Legislation

The Spanish Council of Elvira in 305 A.D. taught in canon 33:

We decree that all bishops, priests, and deacons, and all clerics engaged in the ministry, are forbidden entirely to have conjugal relations with their wives and to beget children; whoever shall do so, will be deposed from clerical dignity.¹⁸

There is no indication that this legislation is a new imposition on clergy. If it were new legislation, there would have to be a case made to justify its introduction. Also, there would be historical records of opposition to such a demanding new requirement of clergy. Clearly this was no new legislation, but legislation that was made to counter a non-observance of a well-known and recognised tradition.

All the leading Latin Fathers of the 4th century, including Saints Augustine, Jerome (347-419) in his *Commentary on the Epistle to Titus*¹⁹ and Ambrose (333-397) in his *Letter to the Church of Vercelli*²⁰, support the legislation concerning clerical continence.

Pope Siricius (384-399) in the decretals *Directa* (385 A.D.) wrote a letter to Himerius answering his questions about continence. This letter was intended for circulation amongst the Carthaginians in one of the provinces of Spain. It stated:

Moreover, as it is worthy, chaste and honest to do so, this is what we advise: let the priests and Levites have no intercourse with their wives, inasmuch as they are absorbed in the daily duties of their ministries. Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, told them: 'Leave yourself free for prayer' (1 Cor 7:5).²¹

Pope Siricius followed this letter up with one to North Africa in 386 in order to communicate the deliberations of the Roman Synod in 386. He quoted from 2 Thessalonians 2:15 'stand firm, and hold to the traditions' that clearly included continence as taught by Saint Paul, and celibacy.

After receipt of the letter of Siricius, the Council of Carthage in 390 was very influential:

The bishops declared unanimously: It pleases us all that bishop, priest and deacon, guardians of purity, abstain from [conjugal intercourse] with their wives, so that those who serve at the altar may keep a perfect chastity.²²

Rusticus of Narbonne asked Pope Leo the Great if married clergy could have conjugal relations. He replied ca. 458:

The law of continence is the same for the ministers of the altar as for bishops and priests, who when they were laymen or readers could lawfully marry and have offspring. But when they reached the said ranks what was before lawful ceased to be so.²³

A cleric was required to live with his wife in continence.

The laws on celibacy were sometimes enforced. Socrates, the Byzantine historian [ca. 440] records the excommunication of clerics not being continent with their wives after ordination at Thessalonika.²⁴ The Emperor Justinian (483-565) considered that priests were obliged to be continent even if they did not always observe the law:

Some of them despite the holy canons beget children from the wives with whom, according to the priestly rule, they are not permitted to have relations.²⁵

Justinian declared all children born after ordination to be illegitimate, and he required bishops to have no children for fear that they would give church property to them.

Gregory of Tours (538-594), in his *History of the Franks*, recounts how Urbicus, bishop of Clermont, was deposed because he did not persevere in being continent.²⁶

Eastern Legislation

Celibacy was first legislated for deacons at the Eastern Council of Ancyra [314 A.D.]:

Canon 10. If deacons at the time of their ordination declare they must marry, and that they cannot be continent, and if accordingly they

marry, they may continue in their ministry, because the bishop gave them permission to marry; but if at the time of their ordination they were silent and received the imposition of hands and professed continence, and if later they marry, they ought to cease from ministry.²⁷

Varying texts of the canon exist and Cochini argues that if someone says before ordination that he could not be continent, then he would not be ordained.²⁸

Celibacy was first legislated for presbyters at the Council of Neocaesarea (314-325):

Canon 1: If a priest marries, he will be excluded from the ranks of the clergy; if he commits fornication or adultery, he will in addition be excommunicated and subject to penance.²⁹

Cochini points out that an Armenian collection of canons (365 A.D.), the Apostolic Constitutions (300-400 A.D.) and, indirectly, canon 14 of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) supports this discipline for deacons and priests.³⁰

The Council of Trullo (691/692) was a crucial council for deciding Greek practice over clerical celibacy. In Canon 13, the Council stated:

Since we know it to have been handed down as a rule in the Roman Church that those who are deemed worthy to be advanced to the diaconate or presbyterate should promise to no longer cohabit with their wives we, preserving the ancient rule and apostolic perfection and order, will that the lawful marriages of men who in holy orders be from this time forward firm, by no means dissolving their union with their wives nor depriving them of their mutual relations at a convenient time. Wherefore, if anyone shall have been found worthy to be ordained subdeacon or deacon or presbyter, he is by no means to be prohibited from admittance to such a rank, even if he shall live with a lawful wife. Nor shall it be demanded of him at the time of his ordination that he promises to abstain from lawful relations with his wife.³¹

The canon is clearly directed against the Latin Church and its practice. Moreover in canon 12, the Council had defended the discipline of continence. The use of marriage was

not unconditional, and whenever a priest acted liturgically as a priest he had to live a discipline of temporary continence.³² In conceding the use of marriage to clerics lower than bishops, the Council had to re-edit ancient texts. The canons of Carthage that legislated for permanent continence were represented as laws for temporary continence.

First Lateran Council (1123)

At the first Lateran Council, attended by at least 300 bishops, abbots and religious, clerical celibacy was legislated for the universal Church in canon 21:

We absolutely forbid priests, deacons, subdeacons and monks to have concubines or to contract marriages. We adjudge, as the sacred canons have laid down, that a marriage contract between such persons should be made void and the persons ought to undergo penance.³³

The Council reinforced an existing obligation by declaring prohibited marriages invalid.

Saint Raymond of Penafort (1180-1275) summed up the reasons for the law of celibacy:

The reason is twofold: sacerdotal purity, in order that they may obtain in all sincerity that which with their prayers they ask from God (Dist. 84, c. 3 and dict. p.c. 1, Dist. 31); the second reason is that they pray unhindered (1 Cor 7:5) and exercise their office. They cannot do both things together: that is, to serve their wife and the Church.³⁴

However, in the period leading up to the Council of Trent, many clergy were not practicing continence or celibacy. The Council of Trent discussed the question of celibacy and firmly rejected the teaching of the reformers stating that the marriages of clerics and religious were invalid.³⁵ In fact the Council was very successful in bringing about a general observance of the law of celibacy because it introduced seminaries for the training of priests.

* * *

1917 Code

Canons 132 and 133 legislated for the obligation of celibacy:

Canon 132§1. Clerics constituted in major orders are prohibited from marriage and are bound by the obligation of observing chastity, so that those sinning against this are sacrilegious, with due regard for the prescription of canon 214§1.³⁶

The law required that clerics had to abstain from marriage and positively to observe perfect and perpetual chastity. Canon 133 then legislated for prudential behaviour to support the celibate commitment.³⁷

Clerics could not live in the same house with any woman, or frequently visit her or receive visits from her in order to safeguard chastity and guard against the appearance of evil. The general thrust of the law was to enable clerics to avoid compromising their celibacy.

PART TWO

Vatican II and the Post Vatican II Debates and Documents

From the time of the second Vatican Council, the issue of optional celibacy for priests has often been raised and discussed in the media and theological circles. In the 1960's and 1970's many priests and seminarians expected that optional celibacy would soon be a reality in the Catholic Church.

Clerical celibacy was not formally on the agenda of the Vatican Council, but it came up frequently in discussions and debates.³⁸ The vote on the proposal to ordain young men to the priesthood without the obligation of celibacy was 839 for and 1364 against.³⁹

In the decree on Priestly Life and Ministry 16, the Council enunciated the theological basis for celibacy:

Perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven was recommended by the Lord (Mt 19:12). It has been freely accepted and laudably observed by many Christians down through the centuries as well as in our

own time, and has always been highly esteemed in a special way by the Church as a feature of priestly life. For it simultaneously signifies and incites pastoral charity as well as being in a special way a source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world.⁴⁰

Great stress was placed on celibacy for the sake of the kingdom, with references to its worth and history in the Church. The Council was confident 'that the gift of celibacy, so appropriate to the priesthood of the New Testament, is liberally granted by the Father.'⁴¹

In the debate on life and ministry of priests, the general secretary of the Council read a letter from Pope Paul VI recommending that the issue of priestly celibacy not be addressed by the Council. The Council Fathers applauded this move. Pope Paul VI stated on October 11, 1965:

It is not suitable to have a public debate on this subject which requires not only to preserve this ancient, holy and providential law of priestly celibacy as far as we can, but to reinforce the observance of it by reminding the priests of the Roman Church of the causes and reasons which, particularly today, make one consider this law of celibacy very suitable because through it priests can devote all their love solely to Christ and give themselves completely to the service of souls.⁴²

The decree on Priestly Training no. 10 insisted that seminarians should be thoroughly prepared to accept the obligation of celibacy 'as a precious gift of God'.⁴³ Similarly, but in more detail, the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life spelt out the obligation to celibacy and continence, while noting that 'the observance of perpetual continence touches intimately the deeper inclinations of human nature.'⁴⁴

1967 Encyclical on Priestly Celibacy

Pope Paul VI acknowledged that serious questions had been raised concerning celibacy and outlined the arguments that had been raised for and against priestly celibacy, but con-

cluded:

Hence, we consider that the present law of celibacy should today continue to be linked to the ecclesiastical ministry. This law should support the minister in his exclusive, definitive and total choice of the unique and supreme love of Christ; it should uphold him in the entire dedication of himself to the public worship of God and to the service of the Church; it should distinguish his state of life both among the faithful and in the world at large. The gift of priestly vocation dedicated to the divine worship and to the religious and pastoral service of the People of God, is undoubtedly distinct from that which leads a person to choose celibacy as a state of consecrated life.⁴⁵

Pope Paul VI clearly distinguished priestly celibacy from celibacy in consecrated life in a religious institute, but upheld celibacy despite all the difficulties and criticisms that have been made of it.

The 1971 Synod of Bishops

The 1971 Synod established a special commission to prepare a document summarising the discussions of the synod. It was published through a papal rescript dated November 30, 1971. The Synod document repeated Church teaching on celibacy:

Celibacy for priests is in full accord with the vocation to the apostolic following of Christ as well as with the unconditional response of a man who has been called and who takes up pastoral service. Through celibacy the priest, following his Lord, demonstrates in a fuller way that he is prompt and ready and, setting out on the way of the cross, he desires with a paschal joy to be consumed somewhat as the Eucharist. If, however, celibacy is lived in the spirit of the Gospel, in prayer and watchfulness, with poverty, joyfulness, contempt of honours, brotherly love, it is a sign which cannot long be hidden but which effectively proclaims Christ to men even of our age. For today words are scarcely valued but the witness of a life which shows the radicalism of the gospel, has the power to attract vehemently.⁴⁶

Towards the end of the Synod the bishops

voted on the law of celibacy: 'The current law of celibacy for priests in the Latin Church must be observed in its entirety.' Voting Placet 168; Non placet 10; Placet iuxta modum 21; abstentions 3

Then on the ordination of married men, the bishops were asked to vote for either

Formula A: Always without prejudice to the right of the Supreme Pontiff, the ordination of married men as priest is not admitted, not even in special cases.

Or

Formula B: It belongs to the Supreme Pontiff alone, in special cases, because of pastoral needs and in view of the good of the universal Church, to allow ordination as priests to married men who, however, are of rather advanced age and of upright life.

107 voted for Formula A while 87 voted for Formula B. There were 2 abstentions and 2 null votes.⁴⁷

Pope John Paul II

On the occasion of the Lord's Supper, Holy Thursday 1979, Pope John Paul II wrote his first letter to the priests of the world. He acknowledged that the question of priestly celibacy had been considered profoundly and completely at Vatican II, in the encyclical *Sacerdotalis caelibatus* and at the 1971 Synod of Bishops. He explained the reason for celibacy was that Jesus inspired it himself:

The essential, proper and adequate reason (for celibacy) in fact, is contained in the truth that Christ declared when he spoke about a renunciation of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and which St. Paul proclaimed when he wrote that each person in the church has his or her own gifts. Celibacy is precisely a 'gift of the Spirit.'⁴⁸

In this letter to priests, the Pope did acknowledge the difficulties of celibacy and spoke in no. 8 of the treasure of celibacy being held 'in vessels of clay.' Throughout his pontificate he was always conscious of how celibacy was both an eschatological sign as

well as being of great social importance for ministry to the people of God.

Relationship of Marriage and Celibacy

Pope John Paul II was conscious of the relationship between celibacy and marriage. He saw issues, such as the commitment involved and the appreciation of the importance of each, being intertwined in particular societies. He stated in his encyclical *Redemptor hominis* March 4, 1979:

Priests must be distinguished for a similar fidelity to their vocation (same fidelity as married people have to their vocation of marriage) in view of the indelible character that the sacrament of orders stamps on their souls. In receiving this sacrament, we in the Latin Church knowingly and freely commit ourselves to live in celibacy, and each one of us must therefore do all he can, with God's grace, to be thankful for this gift and faithful to the bond that he has accepted forever.⁴⁹

In the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, November 22, 1981, the Pope upheld the importance of celibacy:

Virginity or celibacy, by liberating the human heart in a unique way, 'so as to make it burn with greater love for God and all humanity,' bears witness that the Kingdom of God and His justice is that pearl of great price which is to be preferred to every other value no matter how great, and hence must be sought as the only definitive value.⁵⁰

The Pope maintained the discipline of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven is an important eschatological sign.

Formation of Canon 277 of the 1983 Code

Following Vatican Council II, the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law worked on the *Schema De clericis* in 1966. The study group on clerics discussed celibacy October 24-28, 1966. They proposed texts for draft canons 132 and 133. In canon 132, a §2 was proposed exempting married

deacons from the obligations of celibacy and continence.⁵¹

Following consultations around the world, the 1977 and 1980 Schemas had two canons concerning celibacy. Married deacons were exempted from the obligations of celibacy and continence:

Canon 135 §1. Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, and are therefore bound to celibacy.

§2. The prescription of §1 does not bind men of a mature age who are married and are promoted to the permanent diaconate; who, however, if their wife dies are bound to celibacy.⁵²

Following consultation around the world two proposed canons concerning priestly celibacy were discussed on 15 January 1980 and the last phrase of canon 135, 2 concerning married deacons remarrying was removed. The canons now became canons 250 and 251 in the 1980 Schema.⁵³

These canons were discussed at the plenary session of the *Pontificia Commissio Codici Iuris Canonici Recognoscendo* 20-28 October 1981. It was said that the violation of perfect continence pertained to moral theology. In canon 251§2 *audito consilio presbyterali* was removed, as it would affect the legislative power of the bishop, who might know confidential facts and matters. The phrase '*quod est peculiare Dei donum*' [which is a special gift of God] was added to canon 250§1 of the 1980 schema. This phrase had been used in *Presbyterorum ordinis* 16, and it was inserted to answer the question how the charism of celibacy, that God gives to some, can be made obligatory for all priests.

On 25 March 1982 the last schema of the Code of Canon Law⁵⁴ was prepared and was submitted to the Pope on 22 April 1982.⁵⁵ The texts of canons 250 and 251 of the 1980 schema became canons 279 and 280 of the 1982 schema:

Canon 279, 1 §1. Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, and are therefore bound to celibacy. Celibacy is a special gift of

God by which sacred ministers can more easily remain close to Christ with an undivided heart, and can dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and their neighbour.

§2 The prescription of §1 does not bind men who are married and are promoted to the permanent diaconate.⁵⁶

Canon 280§1. Clerics are to behave with due prudence in relation to persons whose company can be a danger to their obligation of preserving continence or can lead to scandal of the faithful.

The diocesan Bishop has authority to establish more detailed rules concerning this matter, and to pass judgment on the observance of the obligation in particular cases.⁵⁷

Pope John Paul II, after receiving the final draft of the new Code of Canon Law on 22 April 1982, assisted by seven experts, including Josef Cardinal Ratzinger and Alfons Cardinal Stickler, personally reviewed the entire draft.⁵⁸ A small number of changes were made to the final draft. These included removing a number of references to administrative tribunals and the second paragraph of canon 279 of the 1982 schema. This paragraph had said that the obligation for celibacy and perpetual continence did not apply to married deacons. Draft canons 279 and 280 were combined to become canon 277 of the 1983 Code that was then promulgated on 25 January 1983.

The text of canon 277 read:

§1 Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, and are therefore bound to celibacy. Celibacy is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can more easily remain close to Christ with an undivided heart, and can dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and their neighbour.

§2 Clerics are to behave with due prudence in relation to persons whose company can be a danger to their obligation of preserving continence or can lead to scandal of the faithful.

§3 The diocesan Bishop has authority to establish more detailed rules concerning this matter, and to pass judgment on the observance of the obligation in particular cases.⁵⁹

Canon 277§1 defines the obligation of celibacy, and the motivations for being celibate, especially for the Kingdom of God. Canon 277§2 advises clerics to be prudent so as not to endanger their continence or cause scandal. The 1983 Code does not single out men or women as being a source of scandal, and leaves it to the diocesan bishop to make particular law concerning this matter as well as to make judgments on particular cases. Clerics cannot validly marry without a dispensation from celibacy. If they marry without a dispensation from celibacy, they are automatically removed from office, and can eventually be dismissed from the clerical state.⁶⁰

Significantly Pope John Paul II decided to make continence obligatory for all clerics in the Latin Church, whether they were married deacons or not. This decision illustrates the absolute conviction that Pope John Paul II had concerning the importance and value of celibacy and continence. His approach fits in perfectly with the argument of Cochini that all clerics within the Latin Church, from apostolic times, were obliged to continence.⁶¹

Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis

After the 1990 Synod of Bishops, Pope John Paul II issued the Apostolic Exhortation on priestly formation.⁶² In it he stated that celibacy is a special charism:

Referring to the evangelical counsels, the council states that pre-eminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt. 19:11; 1 Cor 7:7) in order more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in high esteem by the church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world.... In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the church, giving himself or herself completely to the church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the church

in the full truth of eternal life.⁶³

Continence is to be consciously chosen for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The Church requires celibacy for priests because it sees a link between celibacy and ordination:

For an adequate priestly spiritual life, celibacy ought not to be considered and lived as an isolated or purely negative element, but as one aspect of a positive, specific and characteristic approach to being a priest. Leaving father and mother, the priest follows Jesus the Good Shepherd in an apostolic communion, in the service of the people of God. Celibacy, then, is to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God, as an 'incentive to pastoral charity', as a singular sharing in God's fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church, and as a witness to the world of the eschatological kingdom.⁶⁴

Clerics profess undivided loyalty to Christ and the Church. People usually marry, so the commitment of celibacy requires discipline and a determined spiritual effort. The Pope was conscious of the difficulties and pointed out:

At the same time let priests make use of all the supernatural and natural helps which are now available to all. Once again it is prayer, together with the Church's sacraments and ascetical practice, which will provide hope in difficulties, forgiveness in failings, and confidence and courage in resuming the journey.⁶⁵

As Pope John Paul II taught in his encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, 22 it is not possible for a human being, using only his own strength alone, to transcend human aspirations.⁶⁶

Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum Caritatis

A Synod of Bishops devoted to the Eucharist was held in October 2005. At the synod the issue of married clergy was raised in order to alleviate the shortage of priests and to make celebrations of the Eucharist more accessible for people.

Following the Synod, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the issues of celibacy and continence within the context of his apostolic ex-

hortation on the Eucharist in no. 24 where he pointed out that:

The Synod Fathers wished to emphasise that the ministerial priesthood, through ordination, calls for complete configuration to Christ... This choice on the part of the priest expresses in a special way the dedication that conforms him to Christ and his exclusive offering of himself for the Kingdom of God. The fact that Christ himself, the eternal priest, lived his mission even to the sacrifice of the Cross in the state of virginity constitutes the sure point of reference for understanding the meaning of the tradition of the Latin Church. It is not sufficient to understand priestly celibacy in purely functional terms. Celibacy is really a special way of conforming oneself to Christ's own way of life... it is a profound identification with the heart of Christ the Bridegroom who gives his life for his Bride... I reaffirm the beauty and the importance of a priestly life lived in celibacy as a sign expressing total and exclusive devotion to Christ, to the Church and to the Kingdom of God.⁶⁷

Pope Benedict XVI has reiterated the identification between the priest and the person of Jesus Christ. The way of life of the priest is to be modelled on that of Jesus himself. Being a priest is not just a functional job. The priest is required to conform his way of life to that of Jesus Christ. Pope Benedict XVI, in an address to the Roman Curia on 22 December 2006 pointed out that the rationale for celibacy, 'The solely pragmatic reasons, the reference to greater availability, is not enough: such a greater availability of time could easily become also a form of egoism that saves a person from the sacrifices and efforts demanded by the reciprocal acceptance and forbearance in matrimony; thus, it could lead to a spiritual impoverishment or to hardening of the heart.'⁶⁸ The priest represents Jesus Christ and acts in his name in a special way. His celibacy expresses his total and exclusive devotion to Christ, and his commitment to carrying on his mission.

Anglicans In Full Communion

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the

Faith, on November 4, 2009, promulgated an Apostolic Constitution, *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, Providing for Personal Ordinariates for Anglicans Entering into Full Communion with the Catholic Church.⁶⁹ The document provides for the spiritual and liturgical heritage of Anglicans, and addresses issues for former Anglican clergy entering in full communion. It states concerning celibacy in no. VI.

§1: Those who ministered as Anglican deacons, priests, or bishops, and who fulfill the requisites established by canon law and are not impeded by irregularities or other impediments may be accepted by the Ordinary as candidates for Holy Orders in the Catholic Church. In the case of married ministers, the norms established in the Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI *Sacerdotalis coelibatus*, n. 42 and in the Statement *In June*, are to be observed. Unmarried ministers must submit to the norm of clerical celibacy of CIC can. 277, §1.

§2. The Ordinary, in full observance of the discipline of celibate clergy in the Latin Church, as a rule (*pro regula*) will admit only celibate men to the order of presbyter. He may also petition the Roman Pontiff, as a derogation from can. 277, §1, for the admission of married men to the order of presbyter on a case by case basis, according to objective criteria approved by the Holy See.⁷⁰

These procedures for the granting of a privilege are the same as those for the 'Pastoral Provision' for Episcopalian priests in the United States being ordained as Catholic priests.⁷¹

Father Gianfranco Ghirlanda S.J., Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University, points out that:

...by the concession that those who were married Anglican ministers, including bishops, may be ordained priests according to the norms of the Encyclical letter of Paul VI *Sacerdotalis coelibatus*, n. 42 and of the Declaration *In June*, while remaining in the married state (Ap. Cons. VI § 1); 4. by the possibility that, following a process of discernment based on objective criteria and the needs of the Ordinariate (CN Art. 6§ 1), the Ordinary may also petition the Ro-

man Pontiff, on a case by case basis, to admit married men to the priesthood as a derogation of CIC can. 277§1, although the general norm of the Ordinariate will be to admit only celibate men (Ap. Cons. VI § 2)⁷²

Former married Anglican bishops can only be ordained priests when they enter the Ordinariate. This practice respects the tradition of the Church as reflected by the Oriental Churches which require all bishops to be celibate. Former married Anglican priests may be ordained as Catholic priests. However, it is clear that future candidates for ordination as priests in the Personal Ordinariates will have to be celibate.

Conclusion

Pope John Paul II at a General Audience summarised the history of the law on celibacy:

Jesus did not promulgate a law, but rather proposed an ideal of celibacy for the new priesthood that he was instituting. This ideal has been increasingly affirmed in the Church. It may be understood that, in the first phase of dissemination and development of Christianity, a large

number of priests were married men, chosen and ordained following the Judaic tradition... This is a phase of the Church that was undergoing the process of organising itself, and, to put it in this way, of experimenting with what, as a discipline of the states of life, best reflected the ideal and the advice which the Lord had proposed. Based on experience and reflection, the discipline of celibacy has continued to slowly affirm itself, until it has become generalised in the Western Church, by virtue of canonical legislation.⁷³

A Priest acts ‘in the person of Christ the Head.’⁷⁴ By virtue of his ordination, a priest is sacramentally configured and ontologically identified with Christ. The priest is not simply another Christ like every baptised Christian. Rather a priest represents Christ precisely in his leadership role as head of the body the Church. Just as Jesus does not marry and is totally committed to his mission, the Church requires that those to be ordained as priests have discerned a vocation to celibacy, before they are ordained and act in his name. Their celibacy expresses their complete and total identification with Christ and their commitment to continuing his mission.

NOTES

1 Christian Cochini, S.J., *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, trans. Nelly Marans, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 469 p, French original 1981.

Roman Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, (Herefordshire: Fowler Wright Books, 1989), 226 p.

Alphons Cardinal Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy: Its Historical Development and Theological Foundations*, trans. Brian Ferme, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 1995.

2 Heinz Vogels, *Celibacy – Gift or Law? A Critical Investigation*, (London: Burns and Oates, 1992),

3 Roger Balducelli, “The Apostolic Origins of Clerical Continence: A critical Appraisal of a New Book”, *Theological Studies*, 43(1982), 693-705.

4 George Dennis, *Theological Studies*, 52(1991), 738-739.

5 Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 251.

bacy, 251.

6 Alfons Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 14.

7 Canon 266§1. “By the reception of the diaconate a person becomes a cleric, and is incardinated in the particular Church or personal Prelature for whose service he is ordained.”

8 J. Provost, “Offences against the Sixth Commandment: Toward a Canonical Analysis of Canon 1395”, *The Jurist*, 55(1995), 650. I think his definition of celibacy as “not being married”, is technically correct in law, but there is a need to take into account the fact that it is a positive quality expressing one’s commitment to Christ, and is not just a negative quality of not marrying.

9 Roman Cholij, “Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church: Some Clarifications”, *Priests and People*, September, 1989, 301.

10 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores*

dabo vobis, 25 March 1992, *AAS*, 84(1992), no. 29. (hereinafter PDV)

Richard Sipe has a definition of "Celibacy is a freely chosen dynamic state, usually vowed, that involves an honest and sustained attempt to live without direct sexual gratification in order to serve others productively for a spiritual motive", in *Celibacy: a way of loving, living and serving*, (Missouri: Triumph Books, 1996), 41.

Paul VI, Encyclical, *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 24 June 1967, *AAS*, 59(1967), 657-697.

11 Luke 18:28-30. Scripture translations taken from the *New Revised Standard Version*, 1995, (New York: Oxford University Press).

12 1 Corinthians 7: 32-33.

13 Ignace De la Potterie, S.J., "The Biblical Foundations of Priestly Celibacy", *For Love Alone: Reflections on Priestly Celibacy*, Ed. Divo Barsotti, (Slough: St. Pauls, 1993), 219.

14 De la Potterie, "The Biblical Foundations of Priestly Celibacy", 23.

15 Paul Williamson, Seminar on Priestly Celibacy, at Holy Cross Seminary, Auckland, 2000.

16 1 Clement 33, 1-2; Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to Polycarp*, 5, 2.

17 Cochini, *Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 112. He has list of married clergy 87-123.

18 Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 36.

19 "But if laymen are asked to abstain from relations with their wives for the sake of prayer, what should one think [then] of the bishop, of him who must be able to present spotless offerings to God every day, for his own sins and for those of the people? ... Let the bishop also practice abstinence: not only, as some think, with respect to carnal desires and embraces with his wife, but also with respect to all the troubles that can agitate the soul", in Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 238.

20 "he orders that the bishops be the husband of an only wife, not in order to exclude the one who never took part in the marriage (which is in fact beyond the law), but so that, through conjugal chastity, he keep the grace of his baptism, and on the other hand, the apostolic authority does not ask him to beget children during his priestly [career]; [the Apostle] did talk about a man who [already] had children, but not about one who is begetting [others] or contracts a new marriage.", in Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 234.

21 Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 11.

22 *Concilia Africae* a. 345-525, ed. By Munier, *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina 149, (Turnout, 1974) 13; in Alfons Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 24.

23 Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 37.

24 PG 67, English translation in Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 320.

25 *Codex Justinianus*, 1, 3, 44, in Cochini, *The Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 354.

26 Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 73.

27 English translation from Henry Percival, (Ed.), *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 67.

28 Cochini, *Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 171.

29 Cochini, *Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, 177.

30 Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 138 ff.

31 Council of Trullo; English translation in Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 115-116

32 Cholij, *Clerical Celibacy in East and West*, 199.

33 First Lateran Council, English translation in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, 194.

34 Quoted in Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy*, 50.

35 Council of Trent, Canon 9. "If anyone says that clerics in holy orders, or regulars who have made solemn profession of chastity, may contract marriage, and that such a contract is valid, in spite of church law and the vow ... let him be anathema." English translation in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, 755.

36 *Codex Iuris Canonici (1917)*, Pope Pius X, (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1917); English trans. Edward Peters, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2001. "Canon 132§

§2. Minor clerics can enter marriage, but, unless the marriage was null because of inflicted force and fear, they drop from the clerical state by the law itself.

§3. A married man, who, even in good faith, takes up major orders without apostolic dispensation is prohibited from exercising those orders."

37 *Codex Iuris Canonici (1917)*, Pope Pius X, Rome, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1917; English trans. Edward Peters, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001). "Canon 133§1. Clerics should take care not to retain or in other ways to frequent women upon whom suspicion can fall.

§2. It is permitted to them to cohabit only with the sort of women whose natural bond places them

above suspicion, such as mother, sister, aunt, and others of this kind, or others whose upright way of life in view of maturity of years removes all suspicion.

§3. The judgment about retaining or frequenting women, even those who commonly fall under no suspicion, in particular cases where scandal is possible or where there is given a danger of incontinence, belongs to the local Ordinary, who can prohibit clerics from retaining or frequenting [such women].

§4. Contumacious [clerics] are presumed [to be living in] concubinage.”

38 K. Wulf, “Commentary on the Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, vol. 4, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 279-288.

39 W. Bassett and P. Huizing, eds, *Celibacy in the Church*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 57-75.

40 Flannery, 892.

41 *P.O.* 16; English translation in Flannery, 892.

42 T. L. Bouscarin, *CLD*, vol 6, 200.

43 Vatican Council II, *O.T.* 10; English translation in Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1975, 715.

44 Vatican Council II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 12, in Flannery, *ibid.*, 618

45 Paul VI, Encyclical, *Priestly Celibacy, Sacerdotalis caelibatus*, 24 June, 1967, no.s 14-15, St. Paul Editions, 8-9; *AAS*, 59(1967), 662-663; Flannery, vol 2, 289

46 Synod of Bishops, *Apostolic Exhortation, Ultimis temporibus*, November 30, 1971; *AAS*, 63(1971), 898-922; *Flannery*, 687.

47 *AAS* 63(1971), 917-918; Flannery, vol. 2, 689-690.

48 John Paul II, *Epistle, Novo Incipiente*, 8 April 1979, *AAS*, 71(1979), 407; Flannery, Vol. 2, 354-355.

49 John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptor hominis* March 4, 1979; in *AAS*, 71(1979), 257-324; English translation in *Origins*, 8(1979), 642.

50 Pope John Paul II apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, November 22, 1981, no. 16; *AAS* 74(1982), 81-191; Flannery, 826-827.

51 *Coetus Studiorum De Clericis*, Sessio I, 24-28 October 1966, *Communicationes*, 16(1984), 174-178. “Canon 132§1. Clerici, recepto diaconatus ordine, obligatione tenentur servandi perfectam

perpetuamque propter Regnum coelorum continentiam, ideoque ad coelibatum adstringuntur.”

“§2. Praescripto paragraphi 1 non tenentur viri maturioris aetatis in matrimonio viventes qui iuxta decreta compentis Episcoporum Conferentiae a Summo Pontifice ad probata, ad diaconatum stabilem promoventur.”

52 1977 Schema Canon 135§1: “Clerici obligatione tenentur servandi perfectam perpetuamque propter Regnum coelorum continentiam ideoque ad coelibatum adstringuntur.

§2. Praescripto §1 non tenentur viri maturioris aetatis in matrimonio viventes qui ad diaconatum stabilem promoti sunt; qui tamen et ipsi, amissa uxore, ad coelibatum servandum tenentur.”⁵²

53 Canon 250§1. “Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven, and are therefore bound to celibacy.

§2. The prescription of §1 does not bind men who are married and are promoted to the permanent diaconate.”

Canon 251§1. “Clerics are to behave with due prudence in relation to persons whose company can be a danger to their obligation of preserving continence or can lead to scandal of the faithful.

§2. The diocesan Bishop, having consulted the Council of Priests, has the authority to establish more detailed rules concerning this matter, and to pass judgment on the observance of the obligation in particular cases.”

54 Pontificia Commissio Codici Iuris Canonici Recognoscendo, *Codex Iuris Canonici Schema Novissimum*, Rome, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1982, 308 p.

55 Nereus Tun Min, *The Diocesan Bishop's Concern for Clerical Celibacy in the Light of Canon 277§3: Bishops of Myanmar and Priestly Celibacy*, Doctoral Thesis, (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 2001), 30, has useful material on this. Cf. also Edward N. Peters, *op. cit.*, 171.

56 Canon 279§1: “Clerici obligatione tenentur servandi perfectam perpetuamque propter Regnum coelorum continentiam ideoque ad coelibatum adstringuntur, quod est peculiare Dei donum, quo quidem sacri ministri indiviso corde Christo facilius adhaerere possunt atque Dei hominumque servitio liberius sese dedicare valent.

§2, Praescripto 1 non tenentur viri qui in matrimonio viventes ad diaconatum permanentem promoti sunt.”

57 Canon 280§1: “Debita cum prudentia clericis se

gerant cum personis quarum frequentatio suam obligationem ad continentiam servandam in discrimen vocare aut in fidelium scandalum cedere possit.

§2. Competit Episcopo dioecesano ut hac de re, audito Consilio presbyterali, normas statuat magis determinatas utque de servata hac obligatione in casibus particularibus iudicium ferat.”

58 Edward N. Peters, “Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence”, *Studia canonica*, 39(2005), 171.

59 Canon 277§1: “Clerici obligatione tenentur servandi perfectam perpetuamque propter Regnum coelorum continentiam ideoque ad coelibatum adstringuntur, quod est peculiare Dei donum, quo quidem sacri ministri indiviso corde Christo facilius adhaerere possunt atque Dei hominumque servitio liberius sese dedicare valent.

§2: “Debita cum prudentia clerici se gerant cum personis quarum frequentatio ipsorum obligationem ad continentiam servandam in discrimen vocare aut in fidelium scandalum vertere possit.

§3. Competit Episcopo dioecesano ut hac de re, normas statuat magis determinatas utque de huius obligationis observantia in casibus particularibus iudicium ferat.”

60 Canons 1087, 194§1, 1394§1.

61 Cochini, C., *Apostolic Origins of Priestly Celibacy*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981). See also Edward N. Peters, “Canonical Considerations on Diaconal Continence”, *Studia canonica*, 39(2005), 147-180, and Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory of the Life and Ministry of Deacons*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_31031998_directorium-diaconi_en.html number 61

62 Pope John Paul II, apostolic exhortation, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 25 March 1992, *AAS*,

84(1992), 658-804; English translation in *Origins*, 21(1992-1993), 717, 719-759.

63 Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 29.

64 Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 29.

65 Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 29.

66 Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, 6 August 1993; *AAS*, 77(1992), 507-785; English translation Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

67 Pope Benedict XVI, apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/index_en.htm

68 http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20061222_curia-romana_en.html

69 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Apostolic Constitution, *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, “Providing For Personal Ordinariates for Anglicans Entering Into Full Communion with the Catholic Church,” 4 November, 2009. http://212.77.1.245/news_services/bulletin/news/24626.php?index=24626&lang=en# APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTION ANGLICANORUM COETIBUS accessed 16 November, 2009.

70 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Ibid.*

71 Bishop Bernard Law, “Report of Bishop Bernard Law on the Episcopal Priests Who Seek Roman Catholic Priesthood,” in *Origins*, 4 September 1980, 10(1980), 178. C.f. Brendan Daly, “Anglican Clergy Becoming Catholic Clergy - Why Re-ordination?” *Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand Newsletter*, 2009:1; 62-73.

72 Gianfranco Ghirlanda, S.J., “The Significance of the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*,” <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=9178>, accessed 16 November 2009.

73 John Paul II, *General Audience*, July 17, 1993, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 21, 1993, 11.

74 “*in persona Christi capitis*”, *LG*. 10.

Referring to the evangelical counsels, the council states that pre-eminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. Mt. 19:11; 1 Cor 7:7) in order more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in high esteem by the church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world. . . . In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the church, giving himself or herself completely to the church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the church in the full truth of eternal life.

—Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis*, 29.

GRACE IN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

The Furthering of Nature

HENRY L NOVELLO

IT IS A FACT that Catholics and Protestants go about doing their theology in fundamentally different ways. In Catholic theology, grace responds to the problem of *nature*, as is apparent in Thomas Aquinas' axiom that grace presupposes nature and brings it to perfection (grace as elevating, as supernatural gift of union with God). In classical Protestant theology, on the other hand, grace responds to the problem of *sin*, as is evident in the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith alone (cf. Rom 3:21-26) and penal substitution theories (cf. 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). Protestants tend to accuse Catholics of playing down the significance of sin and of being too optimistic in respect of the fallen nature of humanity, while Catholics tend to accuse Protestants of being too pessimistic about fallen humanity and too focused on the problem of sin. What we have are two different anthropologies and therefore two different ways of viewing the grace of redemption in Jesus Christ. There is a degree of overlap insofar as both talk of justification in and through the crucified and risen Christ, but the tone of theological discourse is simply not the same.

The aim of this short reflection is to consider this fundamental issue of grace from the perspective of evolution: What light does an evolutionary view of the world shed on this problematic? If God creates through the evolutionary process, then clearly the rethinking of the doctrine of creation will also inform a theology of grace. Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, Denis Edwards, and George Coyne are examples of Catholic thinkers committed to

doing theology in an evolutionary perspective by building on the concept of God's continuous creation (*creatio continua*) that belongs to the Catholic theological tradition. They draw upon scientific knowledge of our evolving world, but they approach the scientific data as theologians seeking greater understanding of the faith. This is to say that they do not substitute science for religious faith, but they do see a legitimate dialogue between the two disciplines, each of which has its own realm of applicability. And with regard to this dialogue we must keep in mind that just as scientific theories are always incomplete, our religious understanding of God is also always incomplete, as the *apophatic* tradition of theology, represented by Pseudo Dionysius, makes abundantly clear.

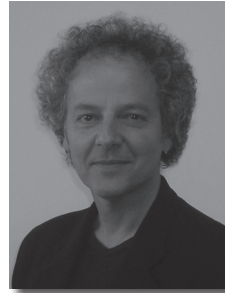
The Fertility of the Universe

Despite the concerted efforts of John Paul II and Benedict XVI in affirming that no incompatibility exists between the Church's teaching on God's purpose and design in creation and the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution, there remain those who are ill at ease with the official position of the Church. In an article by Cardinal Christoph Schönberg of Vienna, for example, which was published in the *New York Times* (7 July, 2005), this influential figure of the Church explicitly asserted that the two positions are incompatible. A process of random genetic mutations and natural selection cannot possibly be compatible with God's providential plan for creation. The fear that

there is no room for the sovereignty of God in this process is groundless, however. This becomes apparent once we appreciate that there are three processes at work in the universe: chance, necessity and the fertility of the cosmos (Coyne 2005).

The meaning of chance and necessity is illuminated by the fertility of the cosmos. A simple example is two hydrogen atoms. By necessity (the laws of chemistry) they are destined to become a hydrogen molecule, but by chance they can only combine when the conditions of temperature and pressure are right. When hydrogen molecules are formed, many eventually combine with oxygen to form water, and so on. The upshot of this process is what scientists call chemical *complexification* (Coyne 2005), which has reached a high point with the emergence of the human brain: in the human being the evolving universe has become conscious of itself and reflects on its *why* (the question of meaning), *whence* (the question of origins), and *whither* (the question of destiny). The human is aware that the reason for its existence lies not within itself but beyond itself (it is referred to Absolute Mystery), and it knows that it does not come into the world ready made but must put its life together through free decisions and concrete actions directed toward constructive ends. With the emergence of the human, in other words, the process of complexification enters the phase of creating meaningful cultures that give expression to the spiritual nature of human existence: we freely seek to realize the good, the true, and the beautiful in our web of relationships to all-that-is.

In self-conscious human beings we can see the process of evolution at work. The human in a given situation is faced with various possibilities open to it, and it must select a direction which it believes is most useful for adapting it to its environment. The right decision is the one that gives the human the best chance of adapting effectively to its environment and attaining greater integration of the self in relation to the other. Both chance (exercise of free-



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dom and the conditions of existence) and necessity (laws of morality operate—not all decisions lead to integration of self, for we can forsake virtue and depart from the good, or abide in virtue and realize the true nature of the human) are at play in the fertility of human life (seeking ontological fulfillment). We humans experience our nature as relational, as linked to everything else, but not according to a closed and determined system; rather, our nature is experienced as dynamic, organic, open-ended, and in quest of greater ontological reality by the wise use of freedom. Given that God's creative purposes are accomplished *through* the contingency of human freedom, this suggests the legitimacy of viewing God as working purposefully *through* the unpredictability and contingency of evolving nature (Edwards 1999, 53-54). We must not think, in other words, that God intervenes or operates alongside the interplay of chance and necessity in nature, but rather acts through this process to exert the maximum influence for good.

From the perspective of the emergent properties (self-consciousness, freedom, capacity for personal relatedness, transcendence toward God) of human being, the process of evolving nature, since it involves a *qualitative* (not merely quantitative) increase of being proper to the previously existing reality, is to be thought of as a 'leap to a higher nature' (Rahner 1966, 164). The word 'leap' is significant in that it conveys the sense of 'discontinuity in continuity' (de Chardin 1959, 188), that is, of a change of state (the qualitatively new)

within the single process of evolving nature. On this ecological view of the world, the explanation of things is given by the patterns of interconnectedness among events, so that as we move up the various levels of organization (electrons, atoms, molecules, cells, tissues, organs, etc.) the properties of each larger whole are accounted for not merely by the units of which it is composed 'but by the new relations between these units' (Birch 1990, 44). As we move from one level to a higher level in the process of evolution, the parts themselves are redefined and recreated in the new complex whole. Needless to say, this begs the question of the final state of the process of becoming, which Christians believe has taken place in Jesus Christ risen, the 'omega point,' in whom evolving nature has been raised to the sublime level of participation in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4).

Evolving Nature and God's Immanence

Rahner (1969, 174-76) formulated the notion of 'active self-transcendence' to convey the sense of how matter develops in the direction of spirit (self-consciousness, knowledge, freedom, and transcendence toward God), and to emphasize that God's immanence in the world is not merely a conserving power but also a power of collaboration with matter. The process of becoming something qualitatively new is truly a *self*-transcendence, yet God, as the power of absolute being, is interior to this process, without, however, becoming a constituent element of the finite being itself. As interior to the process of evolution, God must be thought not merely as before or above creation, but truly *with* creation, leading the universe through the lure or persuasiveness of goodness and beauty (Whitehead 1929, 485-90), so as to produce that which is creatively novel and aesthetically satisfying. God's creative action, in other words, does not interrupt or interfere with the natural interplay of chance and necessity in nature, but it is a constant influence for good in respect of the potentiali-

ties and fertility of the universe (Edwards 1999, 51-52).

This understanding of God's immanence in the universe is clearly supported by the Christian understanding of the Spirit of the risen Christ as moving and inspiring the human spirit and indwelling our hearts so that we might become 'sons of God' (cf. Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:6). The creative purpose of God is to bring into being a community united by freely chosen loving relationships where justice, peace, and joy reign in the Spirit (*i.e.* the transcendent reality of the 'kingdom of God' which is the goal of complexification). To achieve this ontological perfection, we must be able and willing to give ourselves away to the other in love (total dispossession of self), so as to attain the goal of personal, social, and cosmic integration (Novello 2009). God, who is love (1 Jn 4:8), respects our freedom, thus God does not intervene and overpower our freedom but works from within or through our freedom so that we might freely attain to love of God as our final end, a love that gives rise to new possibilities for personal being in the world. The interplay of the processes of chance and necessity in the universe, then, is best illustrated by reflecting upon the human being as emerging from this process of fertility, and how, in the human, the cosmos now enters a new phase of fertility through the exercise of freedom which is fundamentally the capacity for God, and is perfected in love of God who creates all things new.

Grace in an Evolving Universe

In light of the foregoing discussion of the fertility of the universe and God's collaboration with matter that develops in the direction of spirit, a number of significant points arise in respect of our understanding of grace, as follows.

(a) The immanence of God understood as a continuing collaboration with the process of evolving nature serves to posit a *truly sacramental idea of creation*. This is to say that

the natural order, as a work of grace, actually participates in the divine and has a sacred quality about it. Hans Urs von Balthasar (1994, 327) makes a helpful suggestion in this regard when he says that we must think of creation as unfolding 'within' the Trinity. Nature, at least in Western theology, tends to be looked upon as something God acts upon from without, but the evolutionary perspective above presents us with a different picture: it is that through which God expresses the divine life from within. We see this above all in the event of the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ, who participated in human nature so that created reality might participate fully in the glory of the divine nature. Grace should not, then, be thought of as a superstructure and nature as a substructure, which would make grace extrinsic to nature; rather, grace is 'something magnificent which happens to nature. It is nature lit by a new light and fired with a new vision' (Daly 1988, 132). Grace, which in effect is simply God in relation to creation, should not be conceived as juxtaposing nature, but as suffusing nature.

(b) The world is not merely held in existence by grace and sustained by grace, but *nature is furthered by grace*. Nature is not a static and fixed entity, but a dynamic and organic entity that is fundamentally relational and directed toward transcendent reality. If nature were a fixed and closed entity, then neither grace nor sin could affect human nature. The fact that the human being has emerged from the process of evolving nature shows that nature does change, and our moral character, in conjunction with our historical experience of grace and sin in the world, confirms this fundamental point. The term 'nature,' then, must not be understood in the Aristotelian sense of essence or substance, although it is legitimate to speak of the 'essential' structure of the human being as image of God (*imago Dei*). The latter expresses the human's radical openness to God (*capax Dei*) as a self-conscious and self-transcending subject who is called to communion and union with the

living God as its final end.

(c) The self-consciousness of the human includes the consciousness of guilt, so that grace as forgiving love is to be thought as having a redemptive quality. A theology of redemption, however, must be set within a theology of the grace of creation, since our being reconciled to God, and therefore to one another, is part and parcel of God's ongoing creative activity in establishing the kingdom of God in the order of creation. In Western theology, especially Protestant theology, the grace of redemption (soteriology) occupies so pivotal a position that creation merely serves as a preamble to the Fall and the need for redemption. What redemption brings about is the 'restoration' of an original state of justice that was lost by Adam. One looks back to the beginning where an ideal state of existence was lost due to sin. In an evolutionary perspective, by contrast, one looks more forward than backwards, by virtue of the property of self-consciousness that reveals the ideal of what ought to be, of a new emergent whole with an increase of being on the previously existing reality. On this view, *redemption is an integral part of God's activity in bringing about the fullness of creation*. What redemption involves, as the power of God's unconditional love for sinners, is transformation to a new-mode-of-being-in-the-world, understood as participation in the inner-trinitarian event of eternal love (doxology), which is the 'place' of creation.

(d) The river of grace flows everywhere from the beginning, so that we must not think that God is gracious in relation to the world only from the moment of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Since creation is through Christ and the Incarnation is part of God's one divine decree for creation, then *all grace is the grace of Christ or grace given in view of Christ* who is the Father's self-communication to the world, in the Spirit. A truly sacramental idea of creation goes hand in glove with the Incarnation of the eternal Son in Jesus Christ, which culminates in the paschal mystery of his cross

and resurrection from the dead. In an evolutionary perspective, the resurrection of Christ reveals God's ultimate purpose for creation and how grace overcomes the obstacles of sin and death so as to produce a 'new emergent whole' (Novello 2004) or new creation (Rev 21). Even death, indeed, above all death, is an occasion for demonstrating the fertility of God who breathes new life (a qualitatively new mode-of-being-in-the-world) into the dead (cf. Rom 4:17), so that a hopeful view of death as transformation of the whole person into the likeness of God (*i.e.* the glorification of human nature) emerges.

(e) What is more, in this perspective of the risen Christ as the new emergent whole of evolving nature, 'heaven' should not be viewed as some pre-existing place where the righteous ones are destined to be with God in everlasting joy, but rather the '*new spatiality*' (Rahner 1961, 222) opened up or created by Christ's resurrection from the dead as an eschatological event. As this new spatiality, heaven is not to be thought of as above and disconnected from this universe, but as a more complex and evolved universe within this universe (discontinuity in continuity), an idea that serves to underline the validity of the notion of the 'communion of saints' in heaven and on earth. The divine plan for the 'fullness of time' (Eph 1:10), which is to finally unite all things in Jesus Christ risen, 'things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph 1:10), will be completely realized, though, when this universe is totally taken up into the new spatiality of heaven and the new creation is fully established, to the glory of God.

Conclusions

It is clear that an evolutionary view of the universe cannot limit grace to the problem of sin, and that a theology of grace that is formulated in response to the problem of nature as evolving represents a much richer picture of God's ongoing involvement and activity in the uni-

verse. The river of grace flows from the beginning of creation, and it flows not merely as a sustaining power but as the power of continuing creation, so that nature is actually furthered by grace as new complex systems emerge in time. The event of the Incarnation of the Son reveals God's eternal plan for the fullness of time, and how the grace of redemption is not so much 'restorative' as 'transformative' because oriented toward participation in the divine nature as the final end of the process of creative becoming. The reality of sin is a real problem that hinders the actualization of what ought to be (ontological perfection), but fallen humanity cannot lose the image of God; as self-transcending beings, we are always referred to God and capable of receiving the grace of God's forgiving love, which is offered at all times and in all places.

The Catholic (and Orthodox) tradition of doing theology in terms of the grace-nature relationship is certainly supported by evolutionary theory, although at the same time this tradition, rightly, is not too sanguine about the possibilities of fallen humanity forging a better and better world apart from the redemptive grace of Christ who is the way to the Father, in the Spirit. The human subject still needs the grace of Christ to realize its true end of fellowship or union with God, and it is this fundamental point that classical Protestant theology makes central to the development of its understanding of the Christian faith. The latter, however, tends to be too focused on soteriology, while Catholic theology, and especially Orthodox theology, gives greater weight to doxology in the understanding of the faith, since the essence of Christian life, and the direction of the movement of creation as a whole, is conceived as participation in the life of the Blessed Trinity. As we reflect upon the wonders of the universe and acknowledge the deep yearnings of the human spirit, it seems that grace intends to make us finite and mortal beings 'fully alive' by beholding the glory of God (Irenaeus).

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The renewed interest in the theology of the imago dei which emerged at the Second Vatican Council is reflected in contemporary theology, where it is possible to note developments in several areas. In the first place, theologians are working to show how the theology of the imago Dei illumines the connections between anthropology and Christology. Without denying the unique grace which comes to the human race through the incarnation, theologians want to recognize the intrinsic value of the creation of man in God's image. The possibilities that Christ opens up for man do not involve the suppression of the human reality in its creatureliness but its transformation and realization according to the perfect image of the Son. In addition, with this renewed understanding of the link between Christology and anthropology comes a deeper understanding of the dynamic character of the imago Dei. Without denying the gift of man's original creation in the image of God, theologians want to acknowledge the truth that, in the light of human history and the evolution of human culture, the imago Dei can in a real sense be said to be still in the process of becoming. What is more, the theology of the imago Dei also links anthropology with moral theology by showing that, in his very being, man possesses a participation in the divine law. This natural law orients human persons to the pursuit of the good in their actions. It follows, finally, that the imago Dei has a teleological and eschatological dimension which defines man as homo viator, oriented to the parousia and to the consummation of the divine plan for the universe as it is realized in the history of grace in the life of each individual human being and in the history of the whole human race.

—International Theological Commission, 2004: *Communion and Stewardship. Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, par. 24.:

HOLY FIRE

Religious Poetry and Theology

FRANK FLETCHER MSC

LET ME START by asking you to read the poem 'Holy fire'.

The Holy Fire

What are the signs which make a heart?
Compassion, of course, with tenderness
and a supple shoulder for others' tears.
But perhaps the deeper sign is fire;
not just emotion like that of rage
yet even that may purge the swollen bush
and spark new growth from old.

But what I seek is fire which spurns
the scribes and Herod's hypocrisy.
How I have gasped at Jesus' parables,
where the servant who would not forgive
the debt is given years and years with torturers;
or the monstrous tenants who, having killed
the master's son, see all their cities burnt.
Without a turn of heart, the torturing suggests
what might be their due ... for false religion.

But holy fire is more, it makes
the world forgiven—and mid holy tears,
o'erwhelmed.

Are there any stirrings of the heart or mind—in particular, are there any intimations which could involve Koori ministry?

This poetry opens me to Colossians 1: 16: 'things visible and invisible'.

The phrase encourages us to be open to things invisible—to the inner world of intellectual, moral and religious conversion. It is the world of mystery and interiority where we may encounter Jesus in many forms. We need to justify the inner realm in our attempts to explain Christianity.

Poetry can be a doorway to this realm, and also to our experience of the sacral. It makes an inner space in which we may be able to embrace the invisible as well as the visible. Authenticity requires hospitality to all the opera-

tions of consciousness whether they be moral action, mystical experience or falling in love. Acceptance of subjectivity and feelings is key. This extends the data of consciousness without confining it in a rationalist framework of mind only. An horizon thus broadened is able to include the Koori's world of interiority.

Accepting the world of interiority challenges us to develop ways of identifying and working with its diversity. Poetry is the uncanny ability to fit thoughts and feelings together with words. It is an interior and often mysterious operation—a poem writes itself to some extent. So it was with the poem 'Holy Fire'. Let us go back to the poem itself.

* * *

Les Murray has pointed out that the operation of poetry is often overlooked in our culture. However, grand explanatory schemes such as the Theory of evolution by natural selection and Christianity possess a poetic quality. They are dreamt as much as thought. Thus evolution is Darwin's 'poem' that emerged from his meditation on a large body of observed evidence and gave it significance. Such 'poems' are invested with a visionary power that makes them resilient to rational argument. For Murray, poetry works at the divide between rationality and dreaming by reconciling the two realms.¹ The foundational myths of a culture can be seen as a product of this kind of operation.

Sacramentality can also be seen in this poetic light, where the external objects and actions of a ritual intend an interior meaning. In the bible and Christian tradition 'fire' often signifies warmth, deliverance, and transfiguration. For example, the burning bush that is never consumed, the Chosen People who are led by a pillar of flame by night, and the Holy Spirit that

takes the form of tongues of fire all indicate deliverance. The Church has long realised that Advent and Lent are poetic, and Eastertide even more so. In the liturgies of each season, fire sacramentality intends the experience of transfiguration, an emergence of a new form from a new experience.

Poetry taps at the door of interiority, which can be a preparation of the ground for Divine grace. Interiority is the door here, that opens the meaning behind the meaning. If interiority is not opened, myths remain stories. If it is opened, myths can explode into transfiguring fire. This may help us understand what Koories might feel to be their 'poem'.

I have a strong memory of the Koori activist, Mum Shirl Smith. I recall her presence within all the violence and corruption of her time, a respected champion of her people. At the same time I remember the lack of sufficient doctors who would treat Koories, the lack of lawyers to defend them and so on... She was part of the setting up of groups of doctors, lawyers, priests, sisters and brothers. And so began the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service, the Aboriginal Children's Service etc.

Mum Shirl shouting back

In Jesus' light I see Mum Shirl
 anew, not just her tenderness to all
 the Koori young ones in their pain.
 She stood, like Jesus, arms around them
 in the dock. Also, like Jesus, she was shouting,
 shouting back at bureaucracies' hypocrisy.
 And even threatening—my God yes, threaten-
 ing!
 Whilst modern scribes tut-tutted, whispering:
 this is no way for her to speak *to us*.
 Look how she fails to grasp the crucial point.
 Indeed the gubbahs' point fades to empty
 in the roar of fire. So in the jails and
 at the higher tables she listened fearless,
 with her heart aglow.

Within a holy fire.

My reflections on poetry and those of the poet, Les Murray, linking theology and poetry are further affirmed by Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian theologian.² Bediako sees Christianity as a non-western religion where faith is meant to be



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received with primal sacramentality.

To our surprise as westerners, we must admit that the primal lives on within our souls. To come to this realisation usually needs the prompting of some unexpected event. I recall such an event in my final year of school.

In the Body of the Snake

In 1948 I entered a school for prospective missionary priests. The school, situated just outside of Sydney, enjoyed a large bush setting. When I arrived there for my final school year, the Director of Studies seemed quite strict. Somewhat to my relief, after six weeks, he was replaced by another priest quite new to school administration. To kick off our relationship together he suggested we all picnic by a creek at the bottom of a precipitous gorge nearby. Next afternoon after class, with sandwiches packed, we climbed down to swim and play around the rocks.

With evening, a fire was lit and the meal organised. Just as we gathered to say grace, there was a rustle in the grass and a shout: 'Snake, snake!' The new priest moved swiftly, grabbing a branch on the way. He then held up for all to see the body of a long black snake. 'Have any of you ever eaten snake?' he said. We said, no. 'Let's cook it, you'll like it.' So the snake was skinned and cooked. We sat in a circle around the fire and the cooked snake was passed around. Each took a morsel. It tasted good, like poultry. Later, when we climbed out of the gorge we were not the same gaggle of boys who had come down.

In the days following, the modern mentality

in me tried to keep the experience within rational boundaries. The snake had come simply to get water. Our eating its flesh was a spur of the moment decision. The atmosphere was heightened by darkness, fire-light and the bush. Really, it was nothing out of the ordinary. Yet there was another voice in my consciousness which insisted that this incident had brought to me (and to others, as I found out over the years) an experience of soul. In eating the black snake together we had participated in something mysterious. We were at the edge of an eerie reality. Perhaps it is only through such moments, outside the ordinary paths of our lives, that the primal asserts itself in consciousness.

What, then, characterises the primal? The sense of participating within a higher or sacred Mystery. Participation is evoked through immersion in nature and is aided by ceremonial action. Such action has a poetic, imaginative character by linking ritual with an invisible but very real communion with 'the source and channels of power in the universe'.³ Bediako appears to suggest that such action has a primal dimension. He writes:

The revelation of God in Christ is ... the revelation of transcendence. The process is, however, not so much that of God *coming* to mankind, but rather, as the primal imagination perceives it, it is like the rending of the veil, so that the nature of the whole universe as instinct with the divine presence may be made manifest, as also the divine destiny of [humans] as an abiding divine-human relationship ... The New Testament speaks in the idiom of the primal imagination when it declares that 'Now God's home is with [human]kind. He will live with them and they shall be his people'.⁴

Bediako argues that humans live in a sacramental universe, where there is no sharp dichotomy between physical and spiritual. The primal imagination enables the 'physical' to act as a sacrament for 'spiritual' power.

I found Bediako's stress on primal imagination borne out at the masses I attended in Tembisa, a black township outside Pretoria in South Africa. The whole congregation danced

and sang, delighted, it seemed, to express the liturgy in a primal and sacral manner.

Of course, there are considerable differences between Catholic sacraments and aboriginal sacral ceremonies that need extensive discussion to elucidate. The work of Prof W.E.H. Stanner on the religion of Australian tribal Aboriginal people offers a good start for such a discussion.⁵

Bediako understands that the world view of Africa and of similar places provides a primal atmosphere conducive to faith. He sums up the (primal) African world view under four headings, namely:

- a human kinship with nature;
- a sense of being creatures before the sacred;
- a connection with a spiritual world behind the everyday;
- a communion of affection with the ancestors in the other life.

These components of the African world view all involve imagination. They go beyond the modern world view because they sense what is beyond the outer senses. Like poetry, imagination serves to reconcile seeming incompatibilities.

Bediako points out that the west received the Christian faith in much the same way as Africans, through other peoples. He goes on to ask why Christian faith still remains strong in Africa and similar places. He believes this is because these peoples have retained their primal imagination.

Bediako's thesis on imagination also receives support from John Henry Newman's *The Grammar of Assent*. Newman stated that imagination is a necessary dimension of faith for the reason that faith must be a matter of the heart and it is imagination which touches the heart.⁶ Sacral imagination is thus an emotional operation of opening and reaching towards, rather than one of mental invention.

How close is Bediako's primal, African world view to that of Koories? I can say truly that I have heard Koories speaking of kinship with nature, the sacred, the spiritual world and the bonds of affection with those gone before them, particularly when connected with totems.

Koories instruct their young on how to recognise the presence of their totems and how the totems can help them.

The world view presented by Bediako is helpful in several ways. It is a concise summary of the primal religious outlook and, at the same time it is useful for arousing sacral imagination. The varied situations of particular places make a difference. Most Koories are at least partly assimilated, yet there is a core longing for a return to a deeper sense of their tradition. Moreover, being now for several generations driven off their land with only the remnants of ceremony to help them, the mythical core of their tradition has to be stirred. Bediako's characterisation of the primal world view may give some idea of the form this may take.

In John's Gospel, the Greeks approach the Apostles asking to see Jesus (John 12: 20-22). The Uniting Church aboriginal administrator and theologian Reverend Djiniyini Gondarra has insisted that Aborigines long to see Jesus as well, but with Aboriginal eyes.⁷ Instinctively it seems to them Jesus is not the possession of the westerners. This resonates with Bediako's thesis that Christianity is not a western religion. It is translatable to the whole world through the immediacy of the Spirit which enlivens the primal imagination.

Many Koories seem to be awaiting a new myth. At present their search is focused on their inherited tradition. When that search of their tradition is felt as fulfilled, then may they be more open to the Christian tradition. There will

be an unease among some Aboriginal people until they can hear in Christian symbols some primal resonance.

The Rainbow Spirit Elders far North Queensland provide some indication of how a new myth grounded in both tribal and biblical tradition can emerge. They write:

We believe that we are now empowered by the suffering and resurrection of Christ to discern Christ's presence in our culture and the presence of the Creator Spirit in our land.⁸

In dialogue with scripture scholars Norman Habel and Robert Bos, they have identified parallels between traditional and biblical mythologies. Drawing upon Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 8 vs 19-23, the symbol of their new myth that emerges is a sense that the land is weeping.⁹ Paul writes of creation weeping with pain, a pain centred within God. This weeping could refer to the great drought torturing the land. However, that might be reducing the moral level of the myth. It is a weeping over human failure, the failure of aboriginal reconciliation with the gubbahs. The openness of spirit which reconciliation demands is a quality of the new spirit calling out within them. In Rom 8: 21 the crying in creation is understood as the birth pangs of a new beginning: peoples, animals, trees, rivers and the religious realm itself resonate with the hope of new birth.

They are Spirit Elders indeed. Here are aboriginal people with their primal imagination challenging the modern Whites. The weeping land is indeed the breaking through of a new myth.

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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

October 2009 to January 2010

*From the Feast of the Epiphany to the Fourth Sunday of Easter in Year C
(January 3 to April 25, 2010)*

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the Feast of the Epiphany to the Fourth Sunday of Easter in Year C (January 3 to April 25, 2010). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

Ordinary Time 2-6 (before Lent)

The *first readings* during Ordinary Time are drawn from the prophetic tradition (Isaiah, Nehemiah and Jeremiah). As usual, all the readings are chosen thematically with a view to complement the gospel. Though this may be seen to limit their impact, it is important to reflect upon and proclaim the First Testament readings as readings addressing the Israelite people. Their theological insights are trans-temporal and trans-cultural. They still speak to us today as we seek to draw closer to God and experience the kinds of struggles similar to the original audience addressed by these readings.

The *second reading* continues the semi-continuous selection from 1 Corinthians, Paul's letter addresses a divided, struggling and charismatic group of Jesus followers. The issues that Paul addresses in these readings resonate still with us today. These concern celebration of the presence of God's spirit (OT 2, 4), how to respond to those excluded from the

faith life of the Christian community (OT 3), and the implications of Jesus' resurrection (OT 5, 6).

Gospel selections over these Sundays continue to be from Luke (except for OT 2, which is from Jn 2:1-12, the wedding feast at Cana). Luke's gospel is written for a missionary-challenged faith community in a multicultural and diverse Greco-Roman world. The chapters of the gospel over these Sundays (Lk 4-6) present the early days of Jesus' public ministry and teaching. This teaching seeks to encourage Jesus followers overwhelmed by a political and imperial power structure controlled by the Emperor through his armies, governors and puppet kings. As we become addressed by Jesus through these Sunday gospels, we find ourselves too encouraged in our engagement with our world, social concerns and various political and economic factions. We are invited into an alternative community that looks at for the poor and disenfranchised.

During Lent

The *first readings* of the Sundays of Lent enable communities to reflect on their journey of faith as echoed in the journey of Israel (with Abraham in Lent 1 and 2, Moses in Lent 3, Joshua in Lent 4, and the vision offered through Isaiah in Lent 5).

Various aspects of the Christian life impor-

tant for our Lenten reflection emerge out of the *second readings*. Their focus concerns the heart of the Lenten journey, our union with God through Jesus (Lent 1, 2, 4 and 5).

The *gospels* for Lent 1 and 2 traditionally take up the story of Jesus' temptation and transfiguration. Luke's account of these events in the career and ministry of Jesus allow us to reflect on our own struggles with sin and temptation, and God's desire for our transfiguration during Lent. Following the Year C gospels through to the end of Lent will unpack other appropriate Lenten themes (reconciliation in Lent 3, forgiveness and mercy in Lent 4, conversion in Lent 5).

Year A Readings for Lent

The Lectionary preference on the last three Sundays of Lent will always be the Year A readings with their accompanying gospel selections from John. These gospels are appropriate for those preparing for Easter baptism and full initiation into the Catholic community. They are also offer powerful reminders to us who are already baptised and journey in these days through Lent.

These are wonderfully rich readings that pick up the most important theological motifs central to our journey of faith: on Lent 3, our thirst for God revealed in John's story of Jesus with the story of the woman at the well (Jn 4); Lent 4's theme of light in the story of the healing of the man born blind (Jn 9). These lead to the ultimate theme of Lent, resurrected life and freedom from Jesus as reflected upon in the story of his raising Lazarus from the grave (Jn 11). It is no wonder that these readings are so appropriate for catechumens preparing for the waters of baptism, and all of us who seek to deepen our communion with God. John's gospel for Lent 5 is the perfect precursor to Holy Week and the celebration of Easter.

Easter Readings

The Easter gospel (Lk 24:1-12) allows us to accompany the women to the tomb and to hear

the truth of Jesus' resurrection. The women are told to 'remember' what they had experienced about Jesus in his ministry. This memory opens them up to the conviction of Jesus' resurrection and the impulse to proclaim this to other disciples. When the male disciples hear the women's message they think they are literally mad, and one of them (Peter) goes off to check out their story. That Luke deliberately retained this as part of the Easter story is instructive, especially as the official church looks for ways to enhance (or subtly suppress) women's leadership, ministry and proclamatory gifts in today's faith community. Lk's gospel also permits us to lament the ways the Christian community has sometimes stifled the ministry of all, especially women.

The four *Sundays of Easter* further the celebration and implications of the risen Jesus for the life of the Christian community. The *first readings* from the *Book of Acts* offer vignettes of the life of the Jerusalem Christian community and reveal the presence of the risen Jesus in its preaching (with Peter on Easter Sunday and Easter 3, and Paul to the Gentiles on Easter 4) and healing practice (Easter 2).

The *second readings* in Easter are all taken from the *Book of Revelation*. This is a wonderful piece of Second Testament literature frequently avoided by preachers and misunderstood by most. The Book was written for Jesus followers experiencing struggle, persecution and rejection in Asia Minor in the late first century. The selections over Easter offer theologically poetic (and not literal) images of Jesus' holiness (Easter 2), transcendent power and union with God (Easter 3), and God's affirmation of those who struggle faithfully in their lives (Easter 4).

The *gospels* of Easter 2-4 are from *John*. The risen Jesus breathes his spirit of peace and forgiveness on to the frightened disciples (Easter 2), prepares the community of disciples for its future (Easter 3) and, as usually occurs on Easter 4, reveals how he is the good shepherd.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

January 3, 2010—Epiphany: *Is 60: 1-6.* The prophet's vision of God's light bringing peace, harmony and communion to where God lives. It is a universally attractive light. *Eph 3: 2-3a, 5-6.* The writer (not Paul but one of his disciples) celebrates God's mystery now revealed, that is, that all, without exclusion, are to be included in God's community. *Mt 2: 1-12.* The magi, perhaps a vast number (Mt doesn't limit them to three!) are attracted to the light of Jesus symbolised through their attraction to the celestial lights. *Theme—Light.* We all seek insight, understanding, some sense of life's direction. At the heart of our life's journey, is the search for Jesus, the source of light and the end of our spiritual search. Today's celebration allows us to acknowledge how everyone is committed to this search.

January 10—Baptism of Jesus: *Is 40: 1-5, 9-11.* Isaiah's vision of God's presence that brings comfort is expressed through the image of the shepherd gathering sheep and carrying them in the bosom. *Tit 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7.* Through Jesus we are reborn into God's life, purified, and renewed through the Spirit poured out upon us. *Lk 3:15-16, 21-22.* Jesus' baptism is a scene of prayer and communion with God. He becomes an agent of God's spirit. *Theme—Agent of God's Spirit.* Baptism is more than God's recognition of someone, or of a person's communion with God. It is a commitment to communal service and social justice. These aspects are found in all the readings. We are baptised to reveal God's inclusive community. This is challenging in a world where exclusivity, prestige and favouritism permeate all sectors.

January 17—Ordinary Time 2: *Is 62:1-5.* In a time of exile and apparent abandonment, God reveals to the people of Israel that they will be God's delight. *1 Cor 12:4-11.* God's spirit permeates the Christian community, releasing spiritual gifts within it. *Jn 2:1-12.* Jesus' first sign reveals God's joy with humanity symbolised in a wedding feast with extraordinary amounts of wonderful wine. *Theme—Be Delighted.* The first reading and the gospel invite us to celebrate how God delights in and cherishes us. Sometimes this theological conviction is hard to come by, especially when things seem pretty tough. Today's word will help to offer another perspective.

January 24—Ordinary Time 3: *Neh 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10.* After exile, the temple is rebuilt, the Torah is

found, and the first liturgy of the word celebrated. This is a fine picture of how the Liturgy of the Word should be celebrated in every generation. *1 Cor 12-30.* Everyone is an important person in the Christian community. Those who are to be most honoured are those considered the most socially disrespected. Now that's a challenge! *Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21.* The first verses of Lk and then (skipping over the story of Jesus' birth) Jesus proclamation of his ministry. His ministry is essentially about liberating human beings. *Theme—Proclaiming Freedom.* Neh and Lk both present scenes of biblical preaching, one in the story of the renewed people of Israel, another at the commencement of Jesus' public ministry. The scriptures are intended to nurture, liberate and bring their hearers a sense of happiness. This offers an opportunity to celebrate ways the Christian community continues this ministry today.

January 31—Ordinary Time 4: *Jer 1:4-5, 17-19.* The prophet is called to his mission even before birth; it is a divine commission that will succeed. *1 Cor 12:31-13:13.* Paul celebrates the Spirit's charism of love in the Christian community. It is the foundation of its life. *Lk 4:21-30.* Jesus' preaching is not without its critics who seek to silence him. Their God is exclusive and not the one that Jesus seems to be exalting. *Theme—God's inclusivity.* The prophet and Jesus in today's reading reveal a God whose vision is to embrace all people. This spirit of inclusivity is difficult for religious people (ourselves?) who always think that God only responds favourably to those who think the right thing or act correctly.

Feb 7—Ordinary Time 5: *Is 6:1-2a, 3-89.* The prophet is overwhelmed by the vision of God's holiness and his call to the prophetic ministry. *1 Cor 15:1-11.* Paul summarises the Easter event of Jesus' resurrection and first appearances, including to himself, 'the least of the apostles.' *Lk 5:1-11.* Jesus calls Peter to follow him and 'catch alive human beings.' *Theme—God's Call to Us.* Both Is and Lk reflect on aspects of how God's calls us. Isaiah recognises God's utter holiness; a similar disposition overwhelms Peter when confronted by Jesus and says 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner' (Lk 5:8). Both readings offer an opportunity to celebrate God's call of us individually and communally. This is the call to leadership.

Feb 14—Ordinary Time 6: *Jer 17:5-8.* The

prophet urges his people to place their trust in God alone. *1 Cor 15:12.16-20*. Paul continues to reflect on the implication of Jesus' resurrection. *Lk 6:17.20-26*. The beginning of the 'Sermon on the Plain' addressed to disciples who are poor and rich. *Theme—Focussed on God*: Frequently we recognise God's call within us to allow our lives to be shaped by God. Trust (Jer) and recognition of how our possessions can help us draw close to God (Lk) are key to live focussed on God.

Feb 2—Lent 1: *Dt 26:4-10*. A summary of Israel's story concerning Abraham's wanderings and Israel's deliverance from Egypt. *Rom 10:8-13*. Communion with God ('being justified') is God's gift that comes through faith in Jesus. *Lk 4:1-13*. Jesus is tempted to break fidelity with God and rely solely on his own power. *Theme—Our Story & Commitment*: Dt reflects on the story of Israel. This is picked up in the gospel (Lk), where Jesus' story echoes that of Israel, in its temptations to live without God. The journey of Lent begins with a celebration of the way God has called each of us and to live guided by God.

Feb 28—Lent 2: *Gen 15:5-12, 17-18*. God calls Abram to make a covenant of loving commitment to him and his descendants. *Phil 3:17-4:1*. Paul envisions our true 'commonwealth' (v 20) realised in God's transforming presence. *Lk 9:28b-36*. Jesus is transfigured through his prayerful communion with God; the disciples are caught up in Jesus' transfiguration. *Theme—Encountering God*. The second week of Lent invites us to reflect on our encounters with God (as in Abram) and God's encounter with us (through Jesus). Whether we are like Abram, and find ourselves often wandering, or like Jesus, who finds God in prayer and becomes transformed, we seek to draw closer to God.

Mar 7—Lent 3 for Year C: *Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15*. God commissions Moses to lead the people from slavery. This is a wonderful story of divine encounter. *1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12*. Paul urges his audience to listen and learn from the story of Israel. *Lk 13:1-9*. Time is God's gift for healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. *Theme—Repentance*. *1 Cor* and *Lk* provide invitations to allow this week of Lent to be one of sincere repentance and seeking forgiveness. Rather than a focus on private morality (what I have done wrong privately), forgiveness might be expressed in more global or ecological ways (what steps I can take to heal the ecological damage done to my world)

Lent 3 for Year A: *Ex 17:3-7*. The people com-

plain about their thirst in the desert. *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? The readings invite us in this week of Lent to renew our relationship with the source of Living Water, who satisfies us deeply.

Mar 14—Lent 4 for Year C: *Josh 5:9a, 10-12*. God's people enter into the land given to them. The land is God's gift and they celebrate it in their Passover meal. *2 Cor 5:17-21*. Our union with Jesus enables us to experience a new way of life ('the new creation'), and how to be ministers of reconciliation. *Lk 15:1-3, 11-32*. Here is one of the gospel's great and rich parables about the embracing and forgiving father, the ability to change, and the stubbornness to resist welcoming the stranger. *Theme—Coming Home*. Israel (Josh) and the young son (Lk) experience what it is like to finally come home. How can this happen and be celebrated in our faith communities?

Lent 4 for Year A: *1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13* The anointing of David, the unexpected and unrecognised one, as king. *Eph 5:8-14*. Living in the light of God. *Jn 9*. This is a most dramatic story of the dawning insight about Jesus by the healed man born blind. *Theme—Light & seeing*: This week of Lent offers an opportunity to name the ways that we deeply see, interpret and know our lives and world. It is an invitation to come to the source of light, Jesus.

Mar 21 —Lent 5 for Year C: *Is 43:16-21*. The prophet's vision about God's new action on behalf of the people. *Phil 3:8-14*. Paul is totally taken up by his commitment to Jesus and desire to be with him. *Jn 8:1-11*. Jesus forgives and challenges to a change of heart those who judge and condemn. *Theme—Doing something new*. The possibility of a new life, new future and new way of forging a link between the first reading and gospel. What is it that we would like God to do for us, that could renew or refresh us? How will this be seen? What signs are there already in this community that that is taking place?

Lent 5 for Year A: *Ez 37:12-14*. God promises to open the graves of the dead and lead Israel back from exile with a new spirit. *Rom 8:8-11*. God's spirit possesses us. *Jn 11*. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. *Theme—Life & resurrection*: Our readings climax the great themes of Lent in prepa-

ration for Easter—our resurrection and life. What brings us to life? What tangible signs are there that this is already happening around us?

Mar 28—Passion Sunday: *Lk 19:28-40*. The disciples welcome Jesus into Jerusalem as their King and leader. *Is 50:4-7*. God's suffering servant learns to listen to God each morning. *Phil 2:6-11*. Paul's great hymn of Jesus' self-emptying and exaltation. *Lk 22:14-23:56*. Jesus' suffers, is condemned and dies. Throughout he witnesses to God's compassion and forgiveness. *Theme—Compassion and kindness*. Lk's passion story presents us with a figure of God's beloved one who is able to respond to violence in an exalted, graceful and compassionate way. In a world of violence, Lk's passion story needs constant meditation.

April 1—Mass of the Lord's Supper: *Ex 12:1-8, 11-14*. Moses instructs the people how the Passover is to be celebrated. *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. Authentic leadership is the cry of our Church, world, community. How can tonight's celebration identify and celebrate this kind of leadership already occurring within our local, national and international communities?

April 2—Good Friday: *Is 52:13-53:12*. This is a final servant song reflecting on his innocent suffering for others. *Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9*. Jesus feels for us because he can 'sympathise with our weakness' (v15). *Jn 18:1-19:42* Jesus, the exalted one, suffers, and dies as innocent lamb and acclaimed king. The hour of death is the moment of exaltation, victory and community empowerment. *Theme—Victory*. God's solidarity with suffering creation and humanity is revealed in Jn's passion story of Jesus. God is victorious over death and everything that seeks to frustrate God's design.

April 4—Easter: *Acts 10:34a, 36-43*. Peter sums up Jesus' ministry and the meaning of 'Holy Week' for a Gentile centurion. *1 Cor 5:6b-8*. Paul wants us to celebrate the risen Jesus with the 'unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (v 8). *Lk 24:1-12*. The women come to anoint Jesus' body, but discover the tomb empty and the two men proclaiming the

Easter message: They learn that Jesus is risen and are entrusted with this message. *Theme—Easter Struggle*. This is one of the most difficult times of the year for families. Joy which pervades the gospel is also tinged with the pain and difficulty of living out the Easter proclamation: the women's message of the risen Jesus is not believed!

April 11—Easter 2: *Acts 5:12-16*. The healing power of the risen Jesus continues to pervade the life of the first Jerusalem followers of Jesus. *Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19*. John's apocalyptic image of the risen Jesus: 'the first and last...the living one' (v17). *Jn 20:19-31*. Jesus breathes his spirit of courage and forgiveness on to the assembled disciples. *Theme—Healing*. Signs of healing pervade the world: acts of kindness, the patching up of broken relationships, steps towards reconciliation. All these (and others) are signs that of the presence of the risen Jesus. What signs of his presence are tangible in my community and can be celebrated this Easter day?

April 18—Easter 3: *Acts 5:27-32, 40-41*. Peter and John are arrested for preaching about the risen Jesus—an act which they must continue to do no matter the consequences. *Rev 5: 11-14*. John's apocalyptic vision of Jesus: exalted, honoured, worshipped and sharing in God's wisdom and power. *Jn 21:1-19*. The concluding chapter of the gospel pulls together two key themes: discipleship love, and the importance of alertness to the risen Jesus who offers direction for the future Church *Theme—Alertness*. John's final chapter prepares the gospel audience for a new moment in its history. Alertness and attention to the risen Jesus are essential. What practical ways is that happening in our midst now? Who are those in our local communities that show this kind of attentiveness?

April 25—Easter 4: *Acts 13:14, 43-52*. Paul recognises that his mission is to the Gentiles. *Rev 7:9, 14-17*. John's apocalyptic vision of those who have suffered and remained faithful to Jesus. *Jn 10:27-30*. Jesus is the shepherd who knows his sheep and protects them. *Theme—Shepherding God*. God seeks to shepherd and look after us. Jesus is God's loving presence to us revealed through this community. What are examples of how God's shepherds us in our local church community?

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