THE THIRTEENTH General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome (7th – 18th October, 2012) was concerned with the ‘New Evangelisation’.

In the message of the Synod at the conclusion of their Assembly the bishops explained that the new evangelisation is not new in every sense. We proclaim the same message but in changed circumstances. It is evangelisation that is ‘new in its ardour, in its methods, in its expressions’.

All human beings thirst, they affirmed. We all experience ‘a longing, an expectation that awaits an adequate response’—even in the most bitter forms of atheism and agnosticism we can recognise this phenomenon. The thirst is for the living water: ‘There is no man or woman who, in one’s life, would not find oneself like the woman of Samaria beside a well with an empty bucket, with the hope of finding the fulfilment of the heart’s most profound desire, that which alone could give full meaning to life.’

The other day I was invited over to our parish primary school to speak to Year 5 and answer their questions as part of their Religious Education course. They were studying the Sacraments and were up to the Sacrament of Holy Orders, and needed to ask some questions of their parish priest. I was happy to oblige.

One of the questions was, ‘What’s good about being a priest?’ My reply was: ‘I love assisting people to discover how much God loves them’.

I could have told them that St Paul was my role model in this. St Paul’s whole mission was energised by his knowledge of the love of God in Christ Jesus. God in Christ Jesus gave his all for us—’for me!’ as St Paul wrote: ‘the Son of God loved me and delivered himself for me!’ (Gal. 2:20)

Furthermore, St Paul proclaimed, Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). We do not merit God’s love—God loves us despite our unworthiness. We cannot merit God’s love. Far from being a worry to us that is a further reason for our confidence, trust, hope—’we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom 5:11).

St Paul was eloquent about the power of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? [...] Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [...] For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-32, 35, 38-39)

My answer to the question put to me by Year 5, upon further reflection, could also be the answer to the question, ‘What’s good about being a member of the Body of Christ?’

The ordained priest, after all, is just one of the chief urgers in the challenge of spreading the Good News. He is the one, unless there is a deacon present, who tells people at the end of Mass to ‘Go out and announce the Good News’.

As the Synod of Bishops stated in their message at the conclusion of their Assembly, ‘...whoever receives new life from encountering Jesus cannot but proclaim truth and hope to others.’ What the summons to a New Evangelisation asks of us all is that we proclaim our message in a way that is ‘new in its ardour, in its methods, in its expressions’.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor
A DECISION TO DISCRIMINATE

Aboriginal Disempowerment in the Northern Territory

The Launch Speech

GRAEME MUNDINE

I AM EXTREMELY happy to be here tonight to help launch this very important book A Decision to Discriminate. For so long many of us have been going around trying to make people understand what has actually happened in the Northern Territory since 2007. It’s hard to articulate the impact that the Intervention has had on Aboriginal people across the NT. There are plenty of Government reports—which to be honest completely confuse even the most analytical of minds. There are lots of numbers and dollars floating around, but little in the way of evidence that shows us measurable outcomes and improvements. But these reports mean little if they don’t reflect the experiences of those who are most affected by the Intervention. There have been some very strong statements, for example from the Yolngu Nations Assembly, in recent years and this book adds to and reinforces those statements.

Most importantly, this book highlights the failure of our Government to listen to the voices that are so clearly before them. The book takes people’s comments from the Senate inquiry hearings that were held into Stronger Futures. A Senate Inquiry is an important part of our democratic process—it should enable everyday people to participate in the process of law making. And yet, that system has failed Aboriginal People—again.

Perhaps the thing that has been most difficult to articulate during these past five years is the fundamental disconnect between what the Government says it wants for Aboriginal people and what Aboriginal people want for themselves. There is a lot of common ground. Both talk about better relationships; about the importance of education; about employment and about ending welfare dependency. But what employment looks like in an Aboriginal community, or what kind of education we are talking about or how we address dysfunctional behaviour is where the disagreements lie and where the clear differences in world views become apparent. We don’t look at the world the same way as you do. We don’t necessarily want to be like you. We want to be able to choose how we live in the modern world as Aboriginal people. This is true whether we live here in Sydney or whether we live in the Northern Territory. It should be our decision about what parts of our culture we are willing to give up and how we negotiate the path between ourselves as Aboriginal people and ourselves as Australians.

We also need to challenge the steamroller of Government, and ask them what the concrete outcomes and benefits have been since 2007. I don’t just want to know how many teachers have been employed. I want to know how many are new positions, how many Aboriginal people have been employed and most importantly what they have achieved. For example, we know there has been an increase in police numbers, that’s great. But then we find out that there has been a 250% increase in criminalisation of driving offences since 2006. Approximately 25% of the prison population is made up of driving offenders of which 97%
are Indigenous. So are we to believe that the Intervention has been a great success because more people are in jail for driving offences?

One of the more infuriating aspects of the Intervention and Stronger Futures is Government claims that they have consulted widely and this is what Aboriginal people want. The consultations for Stronger Futures and previous ones for the Intervention were a sham. The consultations were based on the Government’s agenda. There was little, if any, opportunity for communities to identify the most important issues they faced in each community. The Government had already decided for them and had already made the decision about how these issues should be addressed.

The Government then disseminated the discussion paper. We received it quickly here in Sydney, but I’m not sure it was so easily accessible for NT communities. It was, of course, in English and as far as I know it wasn’t translated into any languages so people could actually understand it. There were translators available at the meetings. But given the limited time that communities had to read, discuss and form a response it’s amazing that there was any response at all. As Mr Kantawarra, from Ntaria said:

What people are saying is that not many people saw those Stronger Futures recommendations. So you can see where the people are coming from. They cannot really answer any of the questions, because nobody has really read it.

These comments certainly don’t inspire confidence that the Government has met its obligations of Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of these consultations is how they were interpreted and written up. The Government produced a report, but did not release transcripts of the meetings. This allowed them to claim that communities asked for welfare to be cut from people who didn’t send their children to school. When I read the Government’s report of those meetings I was far from confident that it contained a fair representation of the discussion that occurred. It just didn’t provide enough information.

It seems that these concerns are well founded. As Mr Paterson, from the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT (AMSANT) said:

The Stronger Futures consultation process provides an example. Our officers attended about a dozen of the consultation meetings and judged the process to be inadequate and superficial. Further, our analysis suggests that the resulting Stronger Futures bills do not adequately reflect the issues raised at the meetings. Furthermore, the Stronger Futures response does little to contribute to the essential task of rebuilding community capacity and re-establishing relationships of trust. Rather, it is indicative of a pervasive lack of trust on the part of government.

Statements reported in A Decision to Discriminate clearly show that Aboriginal people are not happy with the process or the philosophy of Stronger Futures and the Intervention. Comments such as these from Mrs Fox, the Chairperson of the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA):

The Stronger Futures package does not recognise the role of Aboriginal people and organisations in addressing disadvantage. It remains focused on mechanisms for the Australian government to make decisions about Aboriginal people’s lives. Aboriginal people want to take responsibility for their families and communities and have to be supported to do so...

The comments in this book also tell us how people have experienced the Intervention. I simply cannot understand how anyone can hear
the following comments and continue along the same path. Were committee members not moved when Mr Oliver, from the Malabam Health Board said:

Do you all know what a lorrkon is? It is a hollow log. We use logs for coffins. Since the intervention and since this new policy has come in that is all we are seeing. We are seeing hollow people walking around. This place is definitely different from the place it was before the intervention.

The Government often justifies the Intervention by claiming the women are in favour of it. Those of us who criticise the Government over its actions are accused of not listening to the women, or even of supporting domestic violence or child abuse. I reject that outright. I have no doubt that for some people there have been some improvements in life. I would certainly hope so with the amount of resources and spending that has gone into the place. But to suggest that those who don’t agree with the Government line are colluding with abusers is just outrageous. It is clear that there are many women, as well as men, who do not agree with the Intervention. It is also clear that not all women, even now, feel that they are being heard by Government, as Ms Summers from the Babbarra Women’s Centre says:

I am the manager of the Babbarra Women’s Centre for Bawinanga. There are a plethora of issues that have not been addressed by government in the second stage of the intervention. Bawinanga actually has a strong women’s group in this community. We invite all members and all women ... to discuss issues that are facing women in Maningrida. I do not see any of those issues being raised in the second stage of this intervention.

Another person Miss Valerie Martin said:

We do not want the Stronger Futures laws. It is just more intervention. We have been telling the government since 2007 that we do not want another intervention, that it is ruining our lives and spoiling our future. We want self-control in our own communities. We used to control our own laws in the community and we had self-control.

There are those who criticise people like me who have been outspoken about the Intervention and who suggest we are not hearing the voices of the victims. This is not true. I have always welcomed anything that reduces violence of any kind and perpetrated by any one. There is certainly a need for action on violence, as well as poverty and other issues that many are living with. My concerns have always been more around how things are being done and what is being achieved. Is it good policy to disempower women’s groups and take away self-control as Miss Martin says is happening? I am concerned about a one size fits all approach that only serves to characterise all Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory as being incapable of running their own lives. I don’t pretend to know what each and every community needs. That’s the point. Each community knows its own needs, hopes and desires. To address these problems we need to take a holistic approach which starts with each and every community, that supports and empowers each and every community and for which each and every community is responsible.

As we read the book and hear what Aboriginal people are saying we should remember that there were also over 450 written submissions to this Inquiry. Community groups, Churches, lawyers groups, medical associations, land councils, individuals, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike all thought this was an issue important enough to put pen to paper. Most of those submissions were highly critical of the proposed legislation. But the Government, in what I can only describe as a calculated and cynical move, not only put the Bills to the Lower House before the Senate committee had made its recommendations; but did so on the day that Rudd’s challenge to Gillard for the leadership went to the vote. You can imagine how much attention Stronger Futures received from the media or the public.

In reality, this inquiry process made no difference because despite the opposition of the
Greens, the Parliament chose to ignore the many voices of dissent and pass the Bills. I sat up and watched the Senate proceedings on the internet, until just after 2.00 am when they finally went through. I must say I was disgusted, although not surprised, to see the level of ignorance and racism from the few of the Government and Opposition Senators who did bother to speak on the subject. It was clear from those speeches that most of those who voted that night had little idea what they were voting for and certainly did not care one iota for what it means in real life to real people who are struggling.

Despite the failure of our legislators to hear Aboriginal voices the inquiry process has put their views on the public record. Those views are now easily accessible to us all through A Decision to Discriminate. The process also allows some insight into what I can only call White Privilege and arrogance operating in our Parliamentary system. A clear example of this is comments made by Senator Scullion, a member of the Senate Committee, and Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs. He has also been clear about his intention to claim the Minister’s job should the Liberals gain government. He is reported in A Decision to Discriminate as saying this at the hearings:

When we get to most communities any observer would say that Aboriginal people more generally hate the intervention. They do not like it, it invades their rights and they feel discriminated against (p35).

And yet Senator Scullion has fully supported the Intervention and its reincarnation as Stronger Futures. For those who doubt claims that the Intervention is protectionist, assimilationist and takes us back to the bad days when every aspect of Aboriginal life was tightly controlled I ask you to consider Scullion’s remarks. He clearly knows that Aboriginal people do not want this regime, and yet he is still willing to ensure its smooth passage into Law. Why? Because he thinks he knows best, just like the Minister and just like every Protector before them.

For any Member of Parliament to think that it is a good thing to implement such policies shows their arrogance, lack of understanding and frankly their racism. Anyone that supports a policy that intentionally and comprehensively undermines people’s rights and takes away their ability to determine their own futures has learnt nothing from history and is continuing the same kind of colonialist, White mentality that we have had to put up with for over two hundred years. This is the worst bit of legislation I have ever seen. I can understand the policies of the past, not that I agree with them, but that was the thinking of the time. Today we are a lot wiser, we know a lot more about working with Aboriginal peoples and yet we still perpetuate these kinds of policies and this way of thinking.

I think the title of the book is spot on. This was a clear decision by Government, under Howard, Rudd and Gillard to discriminate. It was no accident but was a coherent and sustained attitude of ‘we know best and we will drive through our agenda’. But don’t take my word for it, get the book, read it and really think about what is being said by the people that live in the Northern Territory and have to deal with this every single day. Stronger Futures? I don’t think so!

A Decision to Discriminate, Michele Harris (ed.), can be purchased online from www.concernedaustralians.com.au
UNWELCOME PROPHETS

BISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP

Homily for the Mass of the Conferences of the Australian Catholic Theological Association and the Australian Catholic Biblical Association, St Mary’s College, Parkville, 7 July 2012.

A STORY IS TOLD of a travelling circus camped on the outskirts of a town in rural NSW. One evening, shortly before show time, a fire broke out. The manager sent the clown, who was already dressed for his act, to ask the townspeople’s help putting out the blaze and to warn them that it could spread to the village. But the people only laughed at him: they thought it was a brilliant ruse to interest them in the circus. They laughed and applauded his antics, but because they didn’t take the messenger seriously they couldn’t hear his message. By the time the bushfire reached the town it was too late and all was lost.

Something similar happened to Jesus when he returned home (Mk 6:1-6). On tour he’d made a big impact but his own now rejected Him. So he made his famous declaration that a prophet is not honoured in his own town, words that have become proverbial in many cultures. Why did this happen? Well, one reason might be that they were too familiar with him. They thought they knew him all too well. He wasn’t anything special and he had nothing to say that they didn’t know already.

Some of you might know the writings of the American vampire novelist Anne Rice who, after years as an avowed atheist had a brief reversion to the Catholic faith of her childhood, and took some time out writing historical fiction about the life of Jesus. After selling one hundred million books in the vampire and evangelical Christian markets, she spun back out of orbit, declaring herself pro-Christ but anti-Christian. Christians were just too quarrelsome and judgmental, she thought, not gay-friendly, feminist-friendly, Democrat-friendly or even vampire friendly. But her legacy—Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt—is a good read. In an author’s postscript she explained that she had long found the non-divine Jesus of secular atheists and liberal theologians unconvincing. She wondered at the tone of superiority, pity, even contempt in some exegetical and theological commentaries. She’d not encountered it in other fields of historical research. Good biographers, while never uncritical, are always sympathetic towards their subjects, she thought; they find redeeming qualities even in villains. Without interest, empathy, appreciation, we cannot hope to understand and communicate the past. So why, Rice wondered, is there so little friendship with the past, with Jesus, in liberal Jesus scholarship? It’s an interesting question.

I wonder if we theologians, exegetes, hierarchs and preachers sometimes risk being like Jesus’ hometown crowd, over-familiar with his life and message, context and interpretations. Do we sometimes feel like them that we’ve got him all neatly sewn up? Prophets speak for mystery, for things we don’t really know when we imagine we do, and that is not always welcome.

There’s a second reason, perhaps, why Jesus was dismissed in his hometown. Quite simply: he wasn’t saying what people wanted to hear anymore. It was all very well when he offered consoling, poetic words like the beating of the High Priest—“If a prophet is despised in his own country, so too may be a prophetic voice in this world, the dark forces of iniquity’—and a Dad, committed to each other and to the Church, with one side presented as for liberty and medicine also. As a Dominican I remember that endless consumption on credit is unsustai

able; that little ones like the unborn, members of the Equal Opportunity Commission and threats of the ‘same-sex marriage’ issue at the moment of prejudices…she won’t be greeted with open arms. If a prophet is despised in his own country, so too may be a prophetic voice in this world, the dark forces of iniquity’—and a Dad, committed to each other and to the Church, with one side presented as for liberty and medicine also. As a Dominican I remember that endless consumption on credit is unsustainable; that little ones like the unborn, members of the Equal Opportunity Commission and threats of the ‘same-sex marriage’ issue at the moment of prejudices…she won’t be greeted with open arms.
a community wants to protect the established order. Just think of the communists rewriting history, repeatedly, to ensure that even the dead offered no resistance. Or look at the reporting of the ‘same-sex marriage’ issue at the moment, with one side presented as for liberty and equality and the other side as benighted bigots. Victoria’s Deputy Chief Psychiatrist, Kuruvilla George, dared challenge this ideology when he joined one hundred and fifty doctors in submitting to a Federal Inquiry the radical view that children do better with a Mum and a Dad, committed to each other and to the kid for the long haul. For this he was pilloried, driven out of his post on the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission and threatened with being drummed out of both university and medicine also. As a Dominican I recognize the ancient techniques of the Inquisition.

Tonight Ezekiel is sent to speak the Word of the Lord to Israel, ‘whether they listen or not’ (Ezek 2:2-5). So too is Christ. It’s not always a comfortable position to be in. Our lectionary says Jesus was ‘amazed’ by the reaction. εὐθαμαζόμεν might be translated ‘He was in admiration’ or ‘awe’; but here it is something more like ‘He was stunned’—so stumped he couldn’t even work miracles. In this golden jubilee year we recall that the Second Vatican Council called the Church a prophetic people (LG 12, 31,35 etc.), speaking the Word of the Lord, guided by divine wisdom, persuading by beauty and love. But even that most optimistic Council recognized that this will sometimes meet stunning resistance from ‘the rulers of this world, the dark forces of iniquity’ (LG 35 after Eph 6:12). If a prophet is despised in his own country, so too may be a prophetic people.

Prophets speak for divine mystery; they speak also for divine judgment and that may also be unwelcome. If someone comes along and says: you work too hard; you neglect your loved ones or your spiritual life; you are too materialistic or ambitious; you are a liar or full of prejudices…she won’t be greeted with open arms. If a prophetic people says the economy is based on creating and feeding false needs; that endless consumption on credit is unsustainable; that little ones like the unborn, mentally ill, elderly and boat people are regularly violated or neglected—they may be as unwelcome as an asylum seeker in Canberra.

This was God’s great gamble: He could give us what we want, plenty of presents, a spectacle or two, occasional riddles from a mysterious stranger we can politely ignore. Or He could become one of us, from a village or suburb like ours, come speaking divine mystery and divine judgment, and ask us in due course to preach and challenge likewise. That makes Him—and in turn us—harder to misunderstand but easier to write off. It makes His message—and so ours—more challenging and more readily rejected. To come so close as to be our familiar, carpenter, clown, may allow Him more successfully to reveal God to us, but it also risks revealing us more fully to ourselves than we would like.

Make your exegetes and theologians, pastors and people, a prophetic people, O Lord. Give them wisdom to speak of your mystery and courage to speak of your judgment. Open their eyes to the inexhaustible mysteries of God, creation and the human person. Increase their delight in those mysteries, even as they become more familiar with them. Grant them ears to hear and hearts to judge and words to speak. Grant, too, that they might be heard—when their words are truly yours.
NEW ATHEISM’S ALTERNATIVE TO RELIGION

NEIL BROWN

FROM BEING content to attack religious belief, New Atheism in recent times has switched to considering alternatives. AC Grayling, for instance, has compiled *The Good Book* in imitation of the Bible and, as he hopes, an alternative source of inspiration for non-believers. Perhaps the most remarkable section of *The Good Book* is entitled ‘Lamentations’. The following are a few samples:

The brief effortful, confused span of existence between two nothings, burdened with care and trial, is a tale traced on water, a story written in dust.1

Surely, human life is a mistake. Man is a compound of needs and necessities which are hard to satisfy. And even when they are satisfied, all he obtains is a state of painlessness, where nothing remains to him but the dangers of boredom. This is proof that existence has no value in itself; for what is boredom but the feeling of the emptiness of life.2

Alas: the truth is that we suffer, and carry the burden of existence, and there is no remedy other than illusion.3

No opponent of the New Atheism could better express what is at stake in the current debate between belief and unbelief. The response the book offers to such laments is illuminating. ‘Songs’ and ‘Consolations’ are beautiful, celebrating the joys of love and friendship, and the arts, helped along by a glass of wine, even though such joys are tinged with nostalgia, ageing, personal sorrows and difficulties—all a mixture of Epicurean delight and Stoic endurance, reflecting the sources Grayling draws upon.

‘Narratives’ tell of the struggle of the Greeks against the barbarian Persians in defence of their freedom and honour. ‘Proverbs’ give practical advice about making the best of one’s life and situation. ‘Wisdom’ is reason at the service of becoming as self-sufficient as possible: ‘For the pain arising from loss is mitigated as soon as its inevitability is perceived.’4 ‘Epistles’ also celebrate ‘reason’: ‘Consult your reason betimes: I do not say it will always prove an unerring guide; for human reason is not infallible; but it will prove the least erring guide you can follow.’5

There is not a lot to disagree with in *The Good Book*—freedom, reason, courage, friendship, moderation, virtue, are all goods we can recognise and agree upon. What is revealing, however, is what is missing. There is little, if anything, of the flesh, blood, tears, communal and personal failures, injustices, victims, and passions, no widows and orphans, outcasts and sinners, that you find in the Bible. Even though many of his sources would have relied on religious beliefs of some kind these have been carefully edited out. What is missing is ‘heart’, which is what Jerusalem has offered Western culture down through the centuries.

For Grayling, reason seems to exist in a realm of its own, ideally cut off from emotions, circumstances, beliefs and influences.6 *The Good Book* itself illustrates, despite its high ideals, that reason always belongs to a time and place, and the time and place of the book’s compilation is firmly entrenched in a very affluent and elite corner of Western society. The tumultuous and suffering world of the Bible appears a much more just and compassionate ground for ‘reason’ to stand upon to face life’s turmoil. *The Good Book* hasn’t the resources to respond to its own ‘lamentations’.

Perhaps it is a failure of nerve, but New
Atheism has gone to great lengths, even at the cost of the truth, to discredit religion totally, as, for example, this statement of Grayling in *The Meaning of Things*:

But religious morality is not merely irrelevant, it is anti-moral. The great moral questions of the present age are those about human rights, war, poverty, the vast disparities between rich and poor, the fact that somewhere in the third world a child dies every two and half seconds because of starvation or remedial disease. The church’s obsessions over pre-marital sex and whether divorced couples can remarry in the church appears contemptible in the light of this mountain of human suffering and need.7

It is hard to see that statement could be made in good faith, given the social teaching and charity commitments of religious groups around the world. But that is just a more blatant example of a general trend. Christopher Hitchens’ *God is not Great* sets out to demonstrate that there is no good at all, and, in fact, much that is immoral, in religion. From the long list of charges levelled at religion, a number stand out:

• religion is infantile, a human invention, a product of primitive fear.8
• religion is illusory as it contradicts science and outrages reason—‘Thanks to the telescope and microscope, it no longer offers an explanation of anything important.9
• religion is servile—it teaches eternal reward and punishments and imposes impossible rules, such as ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’, and ‘love one another as I have loved you.’ 10

In place of religious belief, we must accept that

Our place in the cosmos is so unimaginably small that we cannot, with our miserly endowment of cranial matter contemplate it for long at all. No less difficult is the realisation that we may be quite random as presences on earth.11

Hitchens describes the Old Testament as a ‘nightmare’, the New Testament as ‘evil’ and the Koran as ‘borrowed’. His principal manoeuvre is to deny the existence of any originating experience, even the historical existence of Jesus. He concludes ‘that monotheistic religion is a plagiarism of a heresy of a hearsay, of an illusion of an illusion, extending all the way back to a fabrication of a few nonevents.’12

Historical and scriptural study here barely exists. For Hitchens, the scriptures seem to have sprung together over a period of some thousand years without any originating experience, except illusion, without any continuing narrative holding them together, down through the centuries of struggle and reflection, without movement or development of any kind, and without any genuine explanation of why they have been able to inspire people ever since, except to say that it is infantile, illusory and servile. As human beings we do have deep-seated needs, but the vast majority of people turn to their scriptures to discover a way to live justly and compassionately, not because of Hitchens’ tired old clichés and stereotypes.

There is no concept that believers might accept their scriptures as a whole, rather than piecemeal, that there might be rules of interpretation as beliefs are refined, that justice, mercy and love might begin to overcome the worst human tendencies as time proceeds, that Christians re-interpret the Old Testament in the light of Christ, who few but the totally biased would deny existed, and that the conclusion, after centuries of anguished searching, is that God is not a figure of fear but that God is Love, and that, with all our shortcomings, that is what we should seek to show one another.

For the most part, however, Hitchens’ target
is not God, but religion. Even on this count, there are few better at rehearsing the faults of religion than believers, but Hitchens can only look through his ‘microscope’ and ‘telescope’ and see what such instruments let him see. He poses a false dichotomy between science and religion.

The fact is that the language and life setting of religion is radically different from science. God is not an object, but an encounter, a relationship that is offered. Science makes important discoveries by examining whatever can be turned into an object of observation and experimentation. The language of faith, on the other hand, is that of human relatedness and engagement, with its narratives, creativity, poetry, longings, loves and failures, violence and victims. This language has its own logic and reasons which relate to our love and compassion, our seeking justice, reconciliation and peace, and our coming to terms with grief and guilt. Genuine science and religion are not opposing worldviews. So, whatever criticisms New Atheism brings against religion they have their origins, not in science, but elsewhere.

Dawkins maintains that atheism offers a positive vision of life in contrast with that of religion:

> The atheist view is correspondingly life-affirming and life enhancing, while at the same time never being tainted with self-delusion, wishful thinking, or the whingeing self pity of those who feel that life owes them something.\(^3\)

If that is meant to be a depiction of Christianity, it is a gross misrepresentation. What is interesting, however, is where this positive vision is coming from, given that atheism itself is a ‘denial’ rather than an affirmation. If science, as they allege, provides the ‘facts’, where do the ‘values’ come from?

For Hitchens, they come from the ‘study of literature and poetry, both for its own sake and for the eternal ethical questions with which it deals.’\(^4\) This is coupled with the cautious hope that “human development is still under way.”\(^5\) While literature and the arts do add great meaning and value to life, it is not their stated purpose and they would be most likely to sink under such a burden. Dawkins, perhaps realising this, looks to another source:

> How, then, do we decide what is right and what is wrong? No matter how we answer that question, there is consensus about what we do as a matter of fact consider right and wrong: a consensus that prevails surprisingly widely. The consensus has no obvious connection with religion. It extends, however, to most religious people, whether or not they think their morals come from scripture.\(^6\)

Dawkins’ exclusion of religion from what he calls the ‘moral zeitgeist’ is a good example of New Atheism’s doctrinaire approach to most matters, but especially religion. While it is true that a person can be moral without religious belief, morality itself is not belief-free. All morality, whether religious or not, depends on fundamental beliefs about such things as what it is to be human, what is valuable in our world, and how we should respond and act towards the world around us. Such beliefs are built into religions, just as they arise from elsewhere. When the vast majority of the world’s population hold religious beliefs of some kind, it is bizarre to try to legislate beliefs out of the equation.

A more fundamental problem with his solution, however, is the way it glosses over the crucial moral issues of the day, particularly where the West is involved, as for example, the amount spent on arms each year, industrial pollution, torture, abortion, exploitation of labour, consumerism, world poverty and war. Factual agreement or complacency is no guarantee that a truly moral stand has been taken. In all such cases people are forced back on whatever ultimate beliefs about good and evil they have, including religious beliefs.

Dawkins offers his own lists of values, such as, no harm, love, honesty, sexual enjoyment, non-discrimination, valuing the future, and no indoctrination, all of which, in some shape or form, believers would agree with.\(^7\) What is also interesting however, is how many of those values historically have Judeo-Christian origins.

Alain De Botton is also an atheist, but with a difference. In Religion for Atheists he dis-
cusses what he considers are the virtues of religion, such as harmonious community, mechanisms for expressing gratitude and grief, the preservation of sacred spaces, charity, nourishment for the soul, forgiveness, antidotes to destructiveness and institutions to preserve and hand on traditions. In sum:

Religion’s great distinction is that while it has a collective power comparable to that of modern corporations pushing the sale of soap and mashed potatoes, it addresses precisely those inner needs which the secular world leaves to disorganised and vulnerable individuals.18

The challenge for atheists, he maintains, ‘is how to reverse the process of religious colonisation: how to separate ideas and rituals from the religious institutions which have laid claim to them but don’t truly own them’.19

He laments that in secular society education is not about life, literature is not to inspire, role models are lacking, life is driven by stimuli, freedom is unchannelled and ‘soul’ is neglected:

The signal danger of life in a godless society is that it lacks reminders of the transcendent and therefore leaves us unprepared for disappointment and eventual annihilation. When God is dead, human beings—much to their detriment—are at the risk of taking psychological centre stage. They imagine themselves to be commanders of their own destinies, they trample upon nature, forget the rhythms of the earth, deny death and shy away from valuing and honouring all that slips through their grasp, until at last they must collide catastrophically with the sharp edge of reality.20

Culture, he claims, is ‘more than adequately equipped to substitute for religion’.21

Is it? We live in a modern consumer culture which is governed by instrumental reason, mass production, the amassing of wealth, the profit motive, exploitation of resources, a huge entertainment and advertising industry and commercial competition. To what extent is such a society capable of addressing the inner and relational needs of heart and soul? Like religion, serious literature and the arts struggle against such an all pervasive pressure.

In Western culture all of the contributions De Botton notes have emerged from and are supported by Judaeo-Christian beliefs. How many of them could survive once severed from that lifeblood? Even now they exist only precariously given the inroads of the surrounding culture. What new beliefs could be found to ground and nurture them?

That question is one that hangs over all of New Atheism’s attempted alternatives to religion. Their fundamental belief is that we exist as accidents in a vast and indifferent universe struggling, ultimately in vain, to give some meaning and value to our lives. Such a worldview is the elephant in the room when their alternatives are on the table. As ‘Lamentations’ says:

But there are no eternities other than grief while it lasts, no certainties other than that grief must come, no escape other than from life itself and what it asks us to endure.22

It is to these ‘griefs’ that religion gives a positive and life affirming response.

NOTES

2 ibid, 79.
3 ibid, 83.
4 ibid, 15.
5 ibid, 566.
6 ibid, 593.
8 God is Not Great (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2007) 75.
9 ibid, 339.
10 ibid, 245.
11 ibid, 106.
12 ibid, 336.
14 God is Not Great, 340.
15 ibid, 111.
16 The God Delusion, 262-3. See also, 268.
17 ibid, 263-4.
19 ibid, 15.
20 ibid, 200.
21 ibid, 160.
22 The Good Book, 74.
SHAPING AN AUSTRALIAN SPIRITUALITY

JIM QUILLINAN

IN 2003 THE Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Interreligious Dialogue issued a discussion paper entitled, Jesus Christ the bearer of the Water of Life. Cardinal Poupard, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture wrote in the forward to this document that ‘the success of New Age growth is a response to people’s longing for peace, harmony and reconciliation within themselves, with others and with nature.’ The paper remarked that the success of New Age thinking and practice offers the Church a challenge:

The search which often leads people to New Age is a genuine yearning: for a deeper spirituality, for something that will touch their hearts and for a way of making sense of a confusing and often alienating world (Water of Life, no. 1.5).

While this document may be over ten years old and perhaps New Age may not be as popular, this genuine yearning for a deeper spirituality still motivates many people. The document urges the Church to ask the reason why people go looking elsewhere for genuine sources that might be found to feed our longing for peace, harmony, community and even deeper meaning in our lives. The document includes a very timely reminder that ‘authentic spirituality is not so much about our search for God, but God’s search for us’ (Water of Life no. 3.3).

For some these are anxious times. Old certainties and the old answers are not always seen as relevant or as helpful. In these times of uncertainty, many of the institutions, customs and ways of thinking which we relied on for stability and security are being challenged. So where does God search for us today and how do we connect with that search? In recent times there have been a number of articles written in various places about our Australian spirituality. That poses the question: how does God seek us out in our country, in this place and at this time? Is there a peculiarly Australian culture, an Australian way of thinking and doing and believing? Do we still hold to the myth that ‘real’ Australians live in the Outback, that somehow we do not have a genuine identity if we are not, in some way, linked with these vast open spaces, with our wilderness areas? Or is our Australian spirituality evolving, just as our national identity is changing, evolving and growing.

It is surprising to read statistics about tourism in Australia today. In the last three decades Australians have travelled overseas and even lived overseas for longer periods of time. Some, particularly our young people, have chosen to live and work in other countries for months or even years before they return. In these times when the Australian dollar is so competitive with overseas currencies, the number of Australians travelling overseas has reached unprecedented proportions. Perhaps even more interesting, however, are the figures about where Australians travel within our vast continent. While the numbers visiting what we term The Outback remain steady, the reality is that few contemporary Australians have visited our remote areas. Australians seem to choose to travel to coastal regions, particularly in the southern winter. The numbers visiting wine growing areas is steadily increasing. The bottom line is that few of us have experienced the wilderness or Outback areas—while we might claim them and admire those who live there, they are not part of our day to day thinking, our psyche. It would seem
when we go to re-create, to be at peace with ourselves, our families, we do so in foreign countries or along our coastline. Even many, if not the majority of those who work in our remote mining centres do so on a fly in, fly out basis. The vast and open skies of Australia are just as vast and open overseas!

But place does shape us spiritually. Robert Hamma suggests that:

Where we live and work, where we choose to go not only reflects our likes and dislikes but they also shape who we are. These places shape us spiritually as well. They mark significant moments in our life story, they provide a refuge and sanctuary in time of spiritual need, and they serve as gateways to the divine. And day by day the ordinary places of our lives leave their mark on us. They become part of us and we become part of them. (Landscapes of the Soul, p.14)

So how does contemporary Australia shape us spiritually? The traditional view held that the wilderness areas of Australia, those vast and uncompromising places, these places of grandeur and silence, gave us a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of the sacred, an experience even of the presence of God. Today it would appear that there is a growing loss of belief in a personal God for a number of reasons. In Australia, is this loss encouraged because we no longer have such a sense of place, this place of vast silence where the Spirit was unencumbered in inspiring us? Is it encouraged because we are now so much more connected with the world we live in? Have we become global citizens as well as global believers or non-believers?

Today we are a people on the move, within Australia and overseas. New settlers arrive almost daily, many from war torn and troubled places where violence, famine and hardship are daily experiences. The experience they bring with them has driven them to question whether the God they once believed in has the power to bring about change in this world. The dreadful experiences of war and famine, as well as random acts of violence that have impacted on the world, have made some people very cynical towards religion and in reality they are unable to find any room for believing in a personal and loving God. Their very presence in our midst raises the challenging question, why can’t God stop these wars and famines and natural disasters?

Our towns and cities are changing. Whereas once the steeples of Christian churches were the only symbols of religious belief on our skylines, we now see minarets, temples and structures that testify to other beliefs, other ways of seeking meaning and purpose, other ways of worshipping God. While there appears to be wide-spread disillusionment with traditional, institutional religion, there is growing interest in Oriental paths of wisdom and enlightenment. In recent decades Australians have begun exploring places which have put them into a closer contact with the religions and practices of various Oriental cultures from Ancient Egypt to India and Tibet. This exposure has encouraged many to adopt Eastern practices and faiths such as Buddhism. There is also an element of ‘one religion is as good as another’. On the other hand, there is an emerging conviction that there exists a deep-down truth, an essence of truth in the heart of every religious experience. This has led to the idea of a form of religion which we can express by gathering the various elements from different religions and cultures forming them into an experience which suits our times and cultural identity. In such an enterprise there is little room for institutionalized religions. There is a very noticeable cultural shift from traditional forms of religion to more personal and individualistic expressions.
of ‘spirituality’. Is it now enough to call ourselves ‘spiritual but not religious’?

Australians have also joined the trend of disconnection from mainstream churches. While evangelical churches are experiencing a revival, the traditional Christian churches are in decline as far as attendance is concerned, except perhaps for the growing number of immigrants from traditional Catholic countries. Prof Alan Black (Edith Cowan University) suggests that religion and spirituality are increasingly seen as a matter of individual perception and choice. We are living in a post-traditional era, with increasing electicism, he argues. In Australian society,

- 24% find their sense of identity and meaning in the Christian faith;
- 17% find it in spirituality—either of an eclectic style, or a spirituality of nature or land;
- 2% find it in religions other than Christianity; and
- 57% in secularism.

It is easy to blame the demise of religion in modern society on science or anti-religious feelings or philosophy even, seen in the rise of more militant atheism. But organised religion must face its own blame. Religion has declined not because it was refuted, but because it has become for many irrelevant, dull, oppressive. For those who feel that way, like the salt Jesus spoke of, religion has become insipid... when religion speaks only in the name of authority, when it looks inward only, when it focuses on its own survival rather than speaking and acting with the voice of compassion, connecting with the lives and aspirations of today’s Australians, its message becomes meaningless to them.

There is a growing sense of unease in our culture. Our overseas travel has given us an experience of how far Australia is from other parts of the world, not just because of the long hours spent in the air. The ease with which we can travel between countries in Europe and Asia is a graphic contrast to the vast distances within Australia and in our getting to some-where else. Technological advances and vastly improved communications have improved our connection with the outside world, as it were, but they have also increased our awareness that we belong to an increasingly complex world. Distance and isolation no longer cocoon us from overseas trends or problems or movements. While we escaped the worst aspects of the recent Global Financial Crisis, an increasing insecurity has persisted and a lack of confidence is evident in our spending habits and in our views about our immediate future. The arrival of refugees by both boat and air also highlight the fact that we are no longer so isolated. Australians have always prided themselves on the fact that Australia is a desirable place to live but these new arrivals have raised questions about what we hold to be important. The debates in our community about this complex issue have not been all that edifying. The values of self-sufficiency, mateship and ‘a fair go’ that we once declared to be our national characteristics, are being seriously questioned in this debate.

This disconnection can also be seen in other aspects of Australian society. In his book *Advance Australia Where?* Hugh McKay writes that Australians consider our society is degenerating, brought about by a lack of connectedness, a surrender to materialism and unbridled selfishness (p.10). Our working life has become more ‘fragmented’ as a result of significant social and economic change in Australia. There is a widening gap between haves and have-nots as opportunities for work become more specialised and unemployment and underemployment increase. Almost daily in the media we see stories of industry restructuring and the disappearance of jobs and occupations. Those in work are required to work longer and the work/life balance is becoming more acute. Global factors intrude as international factors such as increased competition, consumption and investment have contributed to the above changes. These factors fuel our insecurity. Rev Dr Philip Hughes, senior research officer of the Christian Research Asso-
cation, suggests that, despite the relative prosperity in Australia,
• 10 per cent of Australians say they are not very happy,
• 56 per cent are fairly happy, and
• 32 per cent are very happy.
Among the issues that cause them concern are the growing number of failures in family relationships, rural decline and uncertainty and the lack of a clear future for many indigenous people. There is also insecurity about terrorism and crime, climate change, and “who we are”. There are distractions in consumerism and substance abuse, but little vision for the future. If people find meaning, they find it in themselves.

Technological advances have brought with them an explosion of information and knowledge—so much is now so readily at hand. It would appear at times that what was once a “mystery” can now be explained, that Google has become our source of knowledge. Like other places in Western culture, there is now what is often called a more “scientific” view of reality. But, according to Rabbi Abraham Heschel, we have fallen into the trap of believing that everything can be explained, that reality is a simple affair which has only to be organized in order to be mastered.

Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder. (Man Is Not Alone, a Philosophy of Religion, 1951)

Perhaps that may be the starting point for renewal—a deeper appreciation of what we have today, not in financial terms but rather what this vast country offers us. It is not the Australia of the first settlers who came here tens of thousands of years ago, although we have much to learn from them. It is not the Australia of the convicts and those who followed quickly on their heels. It is not the Australia of the post war migrants and refugees from war torn Europe or the Australia of those who have joined us from the Middle East and Africa and Asia. Australia is about all of this. We have been gifted by them all. They are all an integral and fundamental part of our identity. Today, however, I suggest that we have reached a point when we are undergoing a fundamental spiritual change in our individual and mass consciousness.

Firstly, where most of us choose to live and work is in our very multi-cultural, multi faith cities. In Australia we value the freedom to choose our spiritual path. But we are not disconnected individuals, disconnected from each other, or from our past or from our environment or indeed all of life. Together we are on a journey that asks us to listen to our past, as well as the present with all its richness and diversity and the voice deep within us. It is important to allow and encourage that voice to speak.

There is an element of hedonism in our Australian way of life—perhaps the sunshine, the climate, our relaxed way of living give expression to that but it also provides an opportunity for contact with the living God. Too often human fulfilment is presented as only happening in the next life. In a paper entitled “Towards a Christian Spirituality”, ethicist and theologian Rufus Black writes that:

The consequence of this belief is that all the other types of human fulfilment are relativised or even, as in the case of the fulfilment that comes with the joys of bodily life, deprecated. The result is that resources of Christian spirituality have been too narrowly focused on the quest for God rather than on the quest for a fulfilled human life, of which the quest for God is only one part. Thus there have been too few resources created to help people see the depths of reality in all the particularity of everyday life. (“Towards a Christian Spirituality”, Institute for Spiritual Studies, 2004)

Perhaps Australians with their love of sport, the outdoors, with fitness and trying new adventures might give expression to Jesus’ desire “that you might have life more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Australians are asking the question what it means to live a fulfilled life in the here and now. There is a small but sig-
nificant number of Australians who are now adopting the sea or tree change life. Others are seeking a better work and home life balance. There is a questioning of the incessant search for more wealth. There is also a move for more control over our lives. The quest to restore balance in life is really the expression of the fact that spirituality is a practical, not just a reflective, religious concern. Our quest for a more fulfilled human life might well be the starting point to enable those who are searching to experience something more, something beyond the obvious, something of the spiritual dimension of life which also needs fulfilment.

Our spiritual quest is timeless and ongoing, a quest that seeks answers to our ultimate questions. If the Christian churches are to assist, they need to connect, to journey with those on this quest not with a set of answers but with the central tenet of our faith, a belief in and experience of the living God. We begin not with a set of preconceived ideas or notions about the nature of a Supreme Being but with the desire in every human being for an experience of the transcendent. Very often churches are seen as regurgitating and defending old doctrines however important that may seem, rather than communicating the very central beliefs which give them their meaning and purpose — belief in the living God and in the person and message of Jesus Christ. So often we hear sermons which talk of doctrine and formulas but do not explain how they enhance our quality of living, how they contribute to our fulfilment as human beings. The awareness which opens our minds to the existence of a Supreme Being is an awareness of a divine presence, a sense that something lies behind what we see and feel, behind the created moment. The Hebrew Scriptures are filled with such moments of awe and wonder. It is more than a feeling. It is an answer of the heart and mind to the presence of mystery in all things.

Experiencing the Living God may begin when we are struck with an awareness of the immense preciousness of being, of just being alive. It begins when we are moved by the beauty and majesty of creation and our part in it. It begins when we look outward and beyond ourselves in the service of others. It is not a matter of simply contemplating our navel. In many ways it calls us to go back to basics. It calls for new ways of thinking, new ways of connecting, new ways of helping people find the sacred in all things, even the most ordinary - new ways of connecting with each other. It may be timely to reconnect with our land, to appreciate its beauty and its harshness, to appreciate its enormity and its extraordinary variety. In earlier times, both with the aboriginal people and the early settlers, there was a much deeper appreciation of and respect for the land. For many it brought them closer to an experience of the sacred.

Perhaps that reconnection has begun. There is, I suggest, a new and growing consciousness in Australia and a new understanding of the dynamic interdependence of all life. This growing consciousness of interdependence is evidenced in such popular movements such as Landcare which is attracting a significant following of young and old committed to the restoration of our natural reserves. We are not as complacent as we once were to unbridled development, especially in areas we consider to be sensitive historically, culturally or environmentally. But reconnection is more than just to the land. The gradual change in our attitude to the new arrivals coming by boats to seek refuge is a good example of this growing change. We are becoming more conscious that our rugged self-sufficiency may have worked in the past but the world is becoming smaller and even more interdependent. We need others just as much as we have in past eras. It is heartening to see the numbers of Australians working in developing countries overseas, again with such generosity and compassion. Australians have been extraordinarily generous when natural disasters have struck – Australians gave generously when the tsunami devastated parts of Asia, to the victims of the earthquake in New Zealand and the catastro-
phec in Japan. Within our own shores, when devastating bushfires and floods have hit in recent years, Australians have risen to the call for generosity and compassion.

There is an increasing need for genuine dialogue with believers of all faiths and non-believers alike. None of us has all the wisdom, none of us possesses all the truth. We live in an age characterised by world-wide religious and political polarization. Both religious and political fundamentalism is on the rise. Australia is not immune from that movement, that desire to seek certainty in times of historic and quite fundamental change in so many areas. Rather than encouraging dialogue, genuine and open conversation, finding scapegoats, someone to blame and vilify is often the preferred course. The antennae of enforcers of orthodoxy are always cocked for such unsettling conversations. Genuine and honest religious dialogue may be difficult but it is essential. For many, dialogue is a code word for compromise. Rather it is born from a genuine desire to seek new understandings. It must be at one and the same time anchored in our own cultural and religious beliefs but open to others and capable of promoting understanding, co-operation, love and compassion. Too often such dialogue gets bogged down and obscured by antagonism. Take the recent encounter with Cardinal Pell and Richard Dawkins—it was promoted as a battle, a fight rather than an exchange of ideas. Interfaith dialogue, dialogue with those who profess atheism or who are just plain secularists can be an enriching challenge for all involved, an opportunity for growth rather than reinforcing rigidly held positions. Faith is more than the sum of its constituent beliefs. Faith is surely a way of enabling us to imagine anew and experience anew the world we live in at this time in history. Dialogue ‘challenges us to rediscover the power of myths without becoming captivated by the need to develop rigid belief patterns around them’. (David Tacey, *Re-Enchantment: The New Australian Spirituality*).

Churches are regarded by many as irrelevant to the major national debates with nothing much to add to the challenges such as climate change, our changing lifestyles or building a sustainable economy. When the Church speaks about God and about spiritual values, there is a distance from the traditional rhetoric used. In addition, Religion is regarded as a private lifestyle choice, not as a contributor to political discourse. One of the challenges for the Christian faith is to tell the Christian story and expound the Christian principles of love and grace, justice and forgiveness, equality and the worth of all individuals in a way that demonstrates its relevance for the Australian national story. Recent scandals which have plagued the churches have dented their credibility. Nevertheless, while church involvement has declined with just fifteen per cent of the population attending Sunday services monthly or more often, the church-run schools have increased in numbers. There is a strong presence of the churches in social justice, health and welfare. Perhaps that gives us a clue about the shape of our Australian Spirituality as it stands today. In analysing the Parable of the Good Samaritan Fr Andrew Hamilton writes that:

This story, which encapsulates Jesus’ ethic, suggests that groups inspired by a Christian motivation should always begin by looking outwards to ask who in their world are in need of healing, freedom and love, and asking how we can reach them.

That starting point leads to a different logic than the logic of identity. The conversation will go in three directions. It will lead people to ask how they can best support each other in their faith and in their commitments so that they can continue to give themselves happily and effectively to strangers.

It will also lead them to reflect on their society in concrete terms. They will ask what forces enhance and diminish the freedom and dignity of the people who are bruised. Accordingly, they will naturally build relationships with people and groups that have a different ideology, but whose lives and work reflect a passion for the humanity of the disregarded. These Samaritans
will be their natural allies. (*Eureka Street*, ‘Does Catholic identity matter?’, Andrew Hamilton, March 30, 2011))

Australians are, by and large, a practical people. They are doers, looking outwards, as Hamilton suggests, concerned with the here and now. If the Church is to have a part in developing an Australian Spirituality befitting this time and place, we need to ask the question ‘What’s happening?’ and not to answer with the scholastic arguments for God, but to show our living faith experience. What is happening in the churches, schools, hospitals, church groups to enhance the quality of life for ourselves and our fellow Australians? What is happening to help us live a more fulfilled life? What is happening to feed our longing for peace, harmony and community? What partnerships have we formed to enhance the quality of life for all Australians? What is happening to ensure that people are treated with justice and compassion. How can what is happening involve me in being of service to others, to be agents of healing in our communities. Is it any wonder that Jesus’ picture of the Last Judgement is about what we have done for each other, what we have done to feed the hungry, the poor, visiting the lonely and those in prison. It is in reaching out to others, especially those who are in need that we discover even deeper meaning in our lives and we shape a spirituality befitting this time and place. Is this how and where God is seeking us out today?

When we focus on our ultimate fulfilment being only the vision of God in the life to come, there is a denial of much of our humanity, not valuing what is good in this life and where real satisfaction and happiness lies in the here and now. A worthwhile and relevant spirituality will value the relationships we have built up over the years, the expression of our creativity in our work, the skills we have acquired, the friendships we have made, the justice we have fought for and how we have worked together with others. Then we can ask ourselves what new possibilities might arise in the ways in which we interact with each other and with God who continues to seek us out.

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As they live their daily lives in the world with faith, all Christians face the challenge of interpreting the events and crises that arise in human affairs, and all engage in conversation and debate in which, inevitably, faith is questioned and a response is needed. The whole Church lives, as it were, at the interface between the Gospel and everyday life, which is also the boundary between the past and the future, as history moves forward. The Church is always in dialogue and in movement [...]. ‘With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the whole people of God [...] to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine Word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented’ (*Gaudium et Spes* 44).

SPIRITUALITY BEYOND EIGHTY YEARS OF AGE

A Reflection

SHEELAH EGAN

A couple of months ago, I attended a presentation, in a Catholic setting, entitled ‘Ageing and Spirituality’. I was so frustrated. There were fifty–five minutes about ageing, based on statistics and depressing generalities, followed by five minutes of very superficial references to spirituality. I knew a little about faith development theories; I had expected to hear about recent appraisals, about specific references to Catholic traditions; I wanted to hear about applications to my life, to the life of the people sitting with me, people who sit with me in the pews every Sunday. Frustration bubbled below the surface as I returned to my daily routine.

A chance encounter with Michael Green led me to work he had done, (not published) about a spirituality based on the life of Mary. His thinking inspired me, even though I describe myself as a disillusioned cradle Catholic. In Michael’s work I found the key to a meaningful spirituality that was missing from the talk that had so frustrated me, but Michael had not explored spirituality specifically for older people.

A Personal Search

I am not the old lady kneeling all day in church, telling her beads, mumbling ‘Hail Marys’, fearful of death, fearful of facing a wrathful God; worthy as that old lady is, my life has been and is different. I do not understand what resurrection and eternal life mean, but I have glimpses of possibilities; they fill me with hope.

I am not a baby boomer nor do I share the ideas of the generations that come behind them; I am shocked at the thought of spending the ‘kids’ inheritance. I belong to a generation of Catholics where sacrifice was an imperative, but I remember the Latin basis of the word, ‘to make sacred’. Sacrifice is not about giving up chocolate for lent; it is about, in every day terms, striving to make every aspect of my life sacred by putting legitimate interests of others before my own, about seeking God’s will, not mine. When I participate in the Eucharist, through Christ, in Christ, with Christ, my life is made sacred.

I was educated before Vatican II, but by nuns and priests who were intelligent and well-informed. I was taught, before I was sixteen, that, as a Catholic, I did not have to believe in apparitions or superstitious practices. I was taught that, as a Catholic, my place was in the world, in trade unions, in the market place, and particularly in the caring professions. (Women in politics would have been a step too far.) At university, I was introduced to the possibility of a spurious religiosity in the writings of James Joyce; I encountered the extremes of Jansenism, the challenge of the ‘pari de Pascal’, the activism of Max Charlesworth.

Along with the old lady telling her rosary and me, there is a host of other older people. We may have much in common, but each of us is a human being with unique individual differences, human beings who deserve respect with individual differences which need ac-
knowledge. When we seek meaning in our lives, a generic faith is not enough. Within the Catholic faith, there is a range of authentic beliefs and practices for us to draw on.

The talk with the promising title had failed me and the people around me. It had been advertised in a Catholic context, yet there was no mention of our place in the church, no mention of even the most general Catholic experiences. Statistics were used to make generalisations. Stereotypes emerged. The trouble with stereotypes is that the people may come to believe them and may live down to them; alternatively, recognising their differences, they may feel isolated. Each of us is a unique human being; each of us has our own journey.

I have always been committed to Christian ideals and involved in Catholic causes. A weakening body lacks energy and makes active commitment unreliable. Where now is my place in the Catholic community? Can I still contribute? There is a tension between using my remaining talents and letting go of activities increasingly beyond my strength. Finding the balance requires honesty and humility; patient discernment is needed to distinguish between my will and God’s will. Where do I and others like me search? Who is showing us the way?

I looked up theories of development; I noted the critiques; I noted some attempts to apply them to pastoral care of older people, but the attempts were theoretical and tended to be based on stereotypes lacking authenticity. There was almost no link to the Catholic tradition. I began to reflect on my faith, to structure my thoughts in an attempt to find a link to a universal experience, but a universal experience growing out of my Catholic faith.

I believe that God created the world, that he created human beings with the awesome gift of free will, freedom to choose good or evil. Some may choose evil; some of us strive to choose goodness, but shackled by the weakness of being human and enclosed within parameters not always of our choosing, we fail to reach our ideals. However,

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God so loved the world that he sent his only son into the world that we may have life through him. (1John3:9)

We have a way to follow, a hope of eventually attaining the ideal we strive for, a key to the kingdom.

In the words and sense of the popular song, ‘I don’t believe in an interventionist God’. Prayers to win the football final are obviously petty, self-indulgent and, for many people, must inevitably go unanswered. Substitute war or election for the football final; is there a difference?

… you have prayed wrongly, wanting to indulge your passions. (James 4:3)

I do believe that God is within us, that God suffers with us; therefore, we suffer with each other. God has chosen to help us through the efforts that we can make for each other. Since God has given us the gift of free will, surely then our prayer of petition must be for the strength to do his will, for the strength to use our talents to bring him to each other, for the strength to mitigate the evil that battles against God’s will.

As a young woman, in the middle of the twentieth century, before Vatican II, the French writer, Andre Gide, influenced me to be open to whatever experience life offers; his examples were exciting, but amoral. Some of his contemporary writers, however, offered me a Christian context, the wonder and excitement of being open to the will of God as it unfolded before me. Hindsight may expose rationalisations and dubious or spurious responses, but the principle has guided my life.
Hindsight also shows that what may appear as a simple life has been exciting and that the future, too, as I turn eighty, may still offer exciting prospects.

It is still open to all of us, regardless of age, to accept the challenges the will of God places before us. God still relies on me, on us, to use our human talents and perhaps our professional skills to help each other, to be Christ to each other, in our homes, in the bush, in the suburbs or in the wider world scene. (Mt. 25:31-46) We must be the miracle workers until, in the words of St Paul:

In the abundance of his glory may he, through his spirit, enable you to grow firm in power with regard to inner self, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then planted in love and built on love, with all God’s holy people you will have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; so that, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, you may be filled with the utter fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14-19)

The Fullness of God is inclusive

The fullness of God is inclusive to all people of good will, but in the Catholic tradition, we are supported through the liturgy, the work of the people, people called by God, in a particular way, to participate in the life of Christ, his life being both God’s initiative and the perfect response to it. Liturgy is a means of drawing us into the fullness of God. Through accepting the word which is Christ and involving ourselves in the action in which we become Christ, we are responding to the initiative of God’s power/love which enables human beings to be liberated from the selfishness/evil, which is in us and to transcend the weakness which is the human condition. To transcend, however, is not to escape.

This is indeed the mystery of Christ who, as God made man, at God’s initiative, shares the human condition. He responds by living for others and dying for others, thus doing the will of the Father, and in so doing, transcends the very condition of humanity in his resurrection. Through Christ, we share in this mystery; that is the mystery of the liturgy and the wonder of our existence. It is also the mystery of the Church and points to its true nature. The Church exists to lead us to God; otherwise it has no purpose.

The Eucharist is the source of all liturgy. Through communion, the individuals, gathered for the Eucharist, become Christ and he becomes them. No longer individuals we are the body of Christ; we are the church; we are humanity. We are the arms and legs, the heart and head of Christ, sent out to do the work of Christ, to bring about the Kingdom and to suffer, to die and to rise in glory. The Eucharist brings us all into the fullness of God, offers the possibility of a mature faith to all of us.

However, the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine cannot be isolated from the total action. Communion services and the taking of the consecrated host to the sick must always be linked overtly to the community celebration of the Eucharist. Otherwise the essential element of communion, in contrast to community is missing.

Is participation in the Eucharist, a potential end point of faith development, an end point within the reach of all?

Theories of Faith Development have their use

Theories of development are strongly influencing attitudes to, and articles about, ageing. Theories are not facts. We accept them; we modify them; we reject them in the light of experience. People are writing about spirituality in an academic context. Mostly they are writing for ‘caregivers’ and, mostly, the work is based on observation, on statistics, not on experience. I listened; I read; I felt either patronised or ignored. In the effort to include all possible experiences of faith, the richness of religious faith was being displaced.

Theories of faith development gave me insights into the anger, the confusion, the sadness which had led so many of my friends away from the Catholic Church. They may have re-
jected the church, but the church had also failed them, had not reached out to show that the Eucharist was still a source of spiritual growth for all of us.

Some were told by ‘card-carrying’ Catholics that the church was like a club; if you broke the rules, you should be expelled. Others sadly took themselves away from the church because they were scandalised and devastated by the criminal behaviour of people unable to live up to the ideals that they had publically espoused. Some, bewildered as they came to see the goodness of people who were not Catholic, could not cope with the exclusivity that they perceived in the Church. In an age of democracy, some were scandalised by an abuse of power. In a country where the church had put so much energy and resources into education, many were bewildered when they saw informed minds silenced.

These reasons for ‘leaving’ the church are not difficult to understand, but, if the church is the people of God, then doesn’t it include all people of good will? Who had enunciated, from the pulpit, an explanation that the challenges they face may be their struggles to leave behind the beliefs and attitudes of their childhood as they grew older and their faith matured? Who had enunciated, as often as is necessary, that the church, a divine institution, is made up of human beings with all the weaknesses of human beings, including our own weaknesses? Who had sought them out with gentleness to show the full richness of the Catholic faith?

The moving from a blind submission to external rules, the moving to an acceptance of all people of good will, the acceptance that sinfulness is the failure we all experience in striving to attain our ideals, the search for a deeper, broader understanding of a transcendent presence can all be a sign of a maturing faith not a reason for exclusion to the wilderness. The traditions of the Catholic Church provide for growth, provide for maturing, provide for diversity, but I hear only of the challenges for youth, the challenges for families, the challenges of the contemporary church; almost as an afterthought, there is some concern for the physical needs of older people, a pat on the head, a sympathetic hand for the old lady; certainly there is comfort for the dying, but before that?

As an eighty year old, generic faith development references were not enough. I explored a process for myself and found the ideas that I needed.

Christianity, Old Age and Joy

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’…Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘you lack one thing; go sell what you own, and give the money to the poor…. Mark 10: 17-22

Detachment from self-interest is a Christian ideal. Old age is sometimes described as a time of loss. We lose our professional identities; our income may decrease; relatives and friends die or move away, literally or metaphorically; homes, holding a history of a life time, are too big to maintain; gardens, formerly sources of joy become a challenge; strange words replace familiar mantras in the liturgy; arthritis stiffens the joints, restricts mobility; our bodies deteriorate; we lose our health; inevitably, we face the loss of life itself. Ageing is a process of detachment, a progress towards transcendence.

We speak of losing our independence, but were we ever independent? We are social beings. Whatever their claims, people do seek connection to something greater than themselves, an –ism, an –ology, social media. Thatcherism is not only an internal contradiction, not only the antithesis to social justice, not only a failure to recognise the essential element of humanity; it is heresy. At the end of the Eucharistic prayer, having emphasised unity, union, communion, we mutter, or we proclaim:

Through him, and with him, and in him,
O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, forever and ever. Amen.

Our interdependence is basic to our belief. Are we only mouthing words? As we age, we gain the opportunity to reflect that, as human beings, we have always been interdependent. Our dependence on others does not increase; it becomes more obvious. Christ reaches out to us, even more obviously, through others, and we, conscious of Christ within us, can graciously respond with gentleness, can reward the giver with gratitude and with our reciprocal support.

Loss or gain? Each time we detach ourselves from something we value, we have a reason to rejoice for are we not taking a step closer into the fullness of God? Are we not slowly making our way forward to the destiny that was always ours? Life is not downhill; we are climbing the mountain. A mature faith is in reach of all of us. Death is surely the ultimate experience of life.

Gerontologists speak of the benefit of positive attitudes in the ageing process. Theories of development speak of the threat of despair, the need to integrate life’s experiences so that we reach acceptance of the life we have led. The Christian faith fulfils these needs gloriously. Why not proclaim it from the roof tops?

Can pain be included as part of this climb to the mountain? I have experienced great sadness; I have experienced extraordinary stress; I have not experienced pain. I may come to regret the wishes that I have formally expressed about the end of my life. I want to die naturally; I want to experience life to the fullest, even if I am in pain. Remainants of the influence of Andre Gide remain. However, I do not want my life to be extended by artificial means. I believe that pain is part of the human condition, the human condition chosen metaphorically for all of us by Adam and Eve, but I do not believe that we should seek it out. Our bodies are, we believe, temples of the Holy Spirit; we carry Christ within us. Surely we have a duty to avoid pain or to minimise pain for ourselves and others. Christ did not embrace pain, but accepted it reluctantly, in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. As Christians, Christ bearers, carrying Christ to each other, professionally and personally, we should seek to minimise pain. Pain management experts talk of positive attitudes minimising the degree of pain experienced. If we came to see pain as one step, but not a necessary one, towards the fullness of God, the experience could be positive?

For Christians, surely ageing is a positive experience leading us finally to:

……grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; so that, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, you may be filled with the utter fullness of God. (Ephes. 3:18-19)

I come among you as Bishop of Rome, but also as an elderly man visiting his peers. I know well the difficulties, the problems and the limits of this age [...]. Sometimes, at a certain age, one looks to the past recalling when one was young, enjoyed fresh energies, made plans for the future. So, at times, our look is clouded by sadness, considering this phase of life as the time of decline. This morning, ideally addressing all the elderly, in the awareness also of the difficulties that our age entails, I would like to say to you with profound conviction: it is beautiful to be elderly! It is necessary to discover in every age the presence and blessing of the Lord and the riches it contains. We must never let ourselves be imprisoned by sadness! We received the gift of a long life. It is lovely to live also at our age, despite some ‘aches and pains’ and some limitations. On our face there must always be the joy of feeling ourselves loved by God, never sadness.

—Pope Benedict to the residents of a retirement home in Rome, Nov. 12th, 2012.
ARGUING FROM
‘THE COMMON GOOD’

ANDREW MURRAY SM

THE NOTION of the common good floats around in our society and is often used in public argument, particularly by those people who regard social justice as something that is important to them. However there is a question of whether in our kind of society it is a legitimate principle on which to base our arguments. This essay will raise this question and then attempt to resolve it by examining the grounds on which the common good is based and by suggesting a way in which it can be used in our kind of world.¹

‘The Common Good’ Seems not to be Legitimate

At first sight it appears that in our society ‘the common good’ is not a legitimate principle to use in public discussion. We live in a liberal democracy, a form of social and political organisation first mooted in the Seventeenth Century that posits the radical equality of each of its members, who are understood to be individuals, and that proposes freedom and the opportunity to generate wealth as its primary goods. The structure of government is such that it excludes itself from significant areas of human life, notably religion and aspects of morality, unless activities in those areas generate conflict or are shown to cause harm to other members of the society. The moral language of such a society is the language of rights. These rights, initially called natural rights and opposed to natural law, but now known as human rights, are things that we claim. They assume that we will all act in our own self-interest and that the tussles we endure with one another will ensure both that we are able to do what we want and that the general outcome of our activities will be the best available. Many of the rights claimed are specifically designed as protection against the intervention of governments or of other authorities in our lives.²

Strictly speaking, the notion of the common good has no place in discussions about life in such a social and political arrangement. If this sounds strange, let me note that the term did not appear in the 1967 eight volume Encyclopedia of Philosophy.³ Nor does it appear in the Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy published in 2000.⁴ It does appear, however, in the Lexicon of American novelist and apologist for laissez-faire capitalism, Ayn Rand. There she begins, ‘The tribal notion of ‘the common good’ has served as the moral justification of most social systems—and of all tyrannies—in history. The degree of a society’s enslavement or freedom corresponded to the degree to which that tribal slogan was invoked or ignored.’⁵ She goes on to say that there are no such things as the ‘the tribe’ or ‘the public’ but that there is only a number of individual men [and women]. Any larger good is simply the sum of the goods that accrue to each of these individuals.

Yet the Notion is Resilient

Yet the notion of the common good keeps appearing in public discussion. It is often seen in religious and social justice literature. A fact sheet, ‘What is the Common Good?’, can be found on the CSIRO website, albeit meant for school children.⁶ A large literature has formed in the countries of the European Union as they try to work out the implications of the adventure that they have begun together. Even the originators of the ideas underlying liberal de-
mocracy could barely hide it. Thomas Hobbes, in his *Leviathan* (1651), speaks of the construction of a commonwealth. ‘Commonwealth’ or a ‘common weal’ is not far from ‘common good’, though in all these cases the meanings of the term are not necessarily consistent, and they can be thick or thin. Where does the notion of ‘common good’ find its home?

I believe that in our time the notion of common good has been most strongly promulgated in the tradition of the Catholic social justice encyclicals from Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 to Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate* in 2009. This is not to diminish its use by other churches in their deliberations on social justice nor its use by political theorists. The encyclicals use the common good as a normative principle to argue for such things as just wages, friendly relations among members of society, participation in political activity, just distribution of wealth, access to public office, world peace. Consistently, there is insistence that the primary purpose of the state is the attainment of the common good and that society is composed not just of individuals but of persons and communities of different kinds that must all be recognised and treated justly. There is, however, little theoretical discussion of the principle, though John XXIII does assert in the longest discussion of the notion in any of the encyclicals that the common good ‘embraces the sum total of those conditions of social living whereby men are enabled to achieve their own integral perfection more fully and more easily’.

**Sources and Grounds of ‘the Common Good’**

The source of the principle for the popes is clearly the thought of Thomas Aquinas, and Leo XIII acknowledges this at the first use of the term in *Rerum Novarum*. Thomas’s principal sources are Aristotle’s *Politics* and Augustine’s *City of God*. This brings to light a tradition different from that emanating from the Seventeenth Century, from which we receive our liberal democracy. In this older tradition, political communities are seen as developing out of pre-existing natural communities such as families, tribes and villages, rather than through agreement or contract by previously isolated individuals. It is natural for political communities to form but they are not formed by nature. They are achievements of human practical wisdom, which is required both for creating the shape that they take and for the act of bringing them about through human consent and through the development of friendship toward those who are not part of one’s own family.

In this context, the grounds for the claim that there is such a thing as the common good can be made clear. Two of these come from Aristotle. Firstly, he attributes to human beings a natural sociability. Even if they do not need one another for a specifically useful purpose, they like to be together and to associate with one another. The evidence for this is speech through which people are able to share things other than the simple material necessities of life. Speech gives rise to friendship, and, for Aristotle, it is affection that binds the city. Secondly, in so far as the formation of a political community is a human action, it must be done for some good purpose, for every action aims at a good. The principal good of a political community, says Aristotle, is justice, though many other goods follow it—goods of the soul, goods of the body and external goods. What Augustine and Thomas add to this is an understanding of natural law that is
embedded in eternal law, as Augustine says, ‘What shall I say of the common good whose common pursuit knits men together into a ‘people’, as our definition teaches? Careful scrutiny will show that there is no such good for those who live irreligiously, as all do who serve not God but demons.’

An Argument for the Common Good

How then might we argue that the notion of the common good is valid in public debate in this liberal democracy, which we call Australia? We could argue from within the principles of liberal democracy itself as, for instance, John Rawls has done admirably in his monumental work, *A Theory of Justice*. The advantage of this approach is that we are speaking the language of the day. Its disadvantage is that I doubt that such arguments have succeeded or that they are able to succeed on the basis of their presuppositions. We could, alternatively, argue from within the natural law tradition of Thomas Aquinas, as many Christian people do. The advantage of this approach is that it has high normative force, for, indeed, its sense of natural law is founded on God’s creative act and the notion of eternal law. Its disadvantage is that many of those whom we want to persuade will simply reject the theological and metaphysical dimensions of the argument.

Instead, I propose an Aristotelian argument that is properly political and which, I believe, avoids the disadvantages of both these approaches. To do this, we need to consider liberal democracy as a political form stripped of its supporting ideology. By ideology I mean a quasi-religious system of political beliefs that usually includes some positions that are manifestly false. An example of falsity is the belief that there are only individuals and the State and that pre-political and intermediary communities do not exist. If we do this, we can analyse liberal democracy in terms of its constitutionality, that is, who participates in political office and how, and of the specific goods that it pursues and for which it was formed. If the question of good seems alien, we can quote Thomas Hobbes who wrote, ‘the passions that incline men to peace, are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and hope by their industry to obtain them.’ It is this sense of the good that has generated the remarkable economic machine that is the modern state.

Aristotelian Political Analysis

Aristotle’s formal division of constitutional possibilities is well known to us. There are good constitutions in which the good of the whole is sought and there are deviant constitutions in which a particular person or group exercises power in its own interests. Rule can be by one, by the few or by the many. And so we find three good constitutions—monarchy, aristocracy and republicanism—and three deviant constitutions—democracy, oligarchy and tyranny. We should note that Aristotle’s notion of constitution is much broader than our own modern constitutions and includes much of the community’s law, policy and custom. It is the form or shape of the community. The issue of the good enters, firstly, through the specific goals of these particular arrangements and, secondly, through the political question of what is the best constitution, which we will take up now. Aristotle proposes four senses of the best constitution—the best possible, the best practicable, the best that circumstances will allow and the best that a particular people can achieve in the light of what they currently do. It is the first and last of these that will concern us here: the best possible constitution and the best that a particular people can do given the arrangements they currently have.

Under Aristotle’s best possible constitution and assuming adequate material conditions, the good sought both by persons and by the community as a whole is the fullness of virtue, moral and intellectual. Bodily health and fitness are assumed as is a sufficient supply of material goods, which are to be used moder-
ately and liberally, that is with temperance and generosity towards others. The community is a kind of broad aristocracy, or rule by the virtuous. Aristotle does not think that we will normally achieve this, but it is a statement of what we ‘would pray for’. Other constitutions will generally be limited in their goals, so that, for instance, in an oligarchy wealth is usually taken to be the primary good, and in a democracy it is freedom that is most highly prized. Such constitutions he sees as partial, that is as limited by the presupposition on which they are constructed. They are partial both in their achievement of political justice (participation) and in the limited nature of the specific kinds of good that they seek.

The Common Good in Liberal Democracy

The liberal democracy in which we live can be examined using Aristotle’s analysis of the best that a particular people can achieve given the arrangements they currently have. Existing constitutions cannot be changed easily because they are embedded in the culture of a people. Correction can, however, be made by edging them slowly towards something better, often by identifying shortcomings in the current arrangements and by proposing change. Liberal democracy is a flat democracy in which everyone is perceived as equal. The goods it primarily pursues are freedom and wealth. It proposes these both as particular goals and as common goods. By Aristotle’s measure it is partial in its presuppositions. This does not mean that we want to give it up. I doubt that any of us want to lose the freedom to discuss things that in another time may have been regarded as subversive of the Commonwealth in which we live. Nevertheless, we can be critical and we can criticise the particular constitution under which we live both in terms of the achievements of its own ends and in terms of ends that might be imagined under the best possible constitution.

Under the rubric of the partial constitution that we have, we might ask whether it achieves its own ends. Let us consider wealth. As a private good, this end might be said to be achieved if most people are content with how much they have. As a common good, two questions might be asked. Firstly, does the community as a whole have sufficient wealth for funding its institutions and services? Secondly, is the wealth held in private hands distributed sufficiently evenly to satisfy the fundamental presupposition of the equality of all? Alternatively, we can consider freedom. As a private good, are all individuals free, and does this freedom energise them to live worthwhile lives? As a common good, do multiple voices unite in such a way that the country institutes good policy, and does the country live in fruitful relationship with neighbouring countries?

Under the rubric of the best possible constitution, we might ask whether there are goods important to human living that we ignore. The goods that Aristotle proposes are justice, friendship and moral and intellectual virtue. These are already common goods, because they cannot be had alone. Let us take the second. Is the country as a whole bound by affection, or is it marked by division, competition and loneliness? Are our citizens able to form and sustain effective and flourishing communities?

Case Study: Agricultural Land

In the final section of this essay, I will attempt to examine one concrete issue in Australia at the present moment that might be analysed in terms of the common good—the preservation of agricultural lands. The issue has been raised in relation to the mining of coal or coal seam gas under agricultural land, but it is broader than this and includes the encroachment of urban settlement on prime agricultural land and the degradation of marginal agricultural land by poor farming practices. Under the rubric of our liberal democracy, we act with the assumption that land is a private good, so that farmers have the right to sell it for other uses, if they are likely to be better off for doing so.
In so far as we acknowledge a common good, we assume that market forces will determine the best outcome. Thus, we have seen large swathes of rich agricultural land in the Southern Highlands and on the Far North Coast of New South Wales converted to urban use following the collapse of the dairy industry and before alternative agricultural industries could emerge.

Under the rubric of the best possible constitution, broader issues will be considered. Human beings are dependent on the soil for food, something that we are prone to forget in these days of supermarkets and supply chains. Prime agricultural land is the product of geological events that may have spanned millions of years and is finite in extent. Can it be a private good, or is it not rather a common good belonging to the whole community both now and into the future? If it is, then surely it ought to be preserved, even if it is not able to be fully utilised for economic gain at the present moment.

This should give us hope, because, although policy and practice in our country are strongly pushed by economic arguments, we can see that there are, in fact, laws that protect other goods. In this case, land zoning laws and different land titles—freehold and leasehold—exist and exert some control on how land is used. Further laws can be enacted, and often are when voices in the community become strong enough. The partial constitution that we have can be amended to encompass broader senses of the good. This, in turn, offers a significant role to people and groups that already have a richer sense of the common good, which can be promoted in public discussion. This is a significant part of what the encyclicals in the Catholic Social Justice tradition have attempted and achieved.

**Conclusion**

Our conclusion is, then, that ‘the common good’ is a legitimate principle from which to argue in public discussion in this liberal democracy of Australia. If, however, our argument is to be legitimate and we are to be successful we need to use it in an appropriate way. This essay has proposed an approach that is more Aristotelian than Thomistic. According to this approach we can look at our laws, policies and customs and measure them against the common good both in terms of the consistency of the political arrangements we have and in terms of the wider scope of human possibility. The change we can achieve will be piecemeal—step by step improvement in the conditions under which we live.

**NOTES**

1 An earlier version of this essay was presented as a paper to the Wellspring Community, Willoughby Uniting Church, 29 July 2012.
8 See, for instance, John XXIII, *Mater et Magister* 37; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* 7. The exception is John Paul II, who appears not to have made much use of the common good in his social encyclicals. He rather attempted to transform the language of rights to include the reciprocal notion of duties, absent from the 17th Century accounts of rights. See, for instance, *Laborem Exercens*, 16 – 23.
9 John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 58, in Catholic
We must recognize the privileged place of the poor in our communities, a place that does not exclude anyone, but wants to reflect how Jesus bound himself to them. The presence of the poor in our communities is mysteriously powerful: it changes persons more than a discourse does, it teaches fidelity, it makes us understand the fragility of life, it asks for prayer: in short, it brings us to Christ.

The gesture of charity, on the other hand, must also be accompanied by commitment to justice, with an appeal that concerns all, poor and rich. Hence, the social doctrine of the Church is integral to the pathways of the new evangelization, as well as the formation of Christians to dedicate themselves to serve the human community in social and political life.

—Message from the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelisation, par. 12.
CHRIST IN GLORY

The Ascension of Jesus

MARIE T. FARRELL rsm

EASTER, ASCENSION and Pentecost—these are three continuous ‘moments’ in the one great mystery of salvation in Christ. The Church’s liturgical ‘stretching out’ of these great biblical events allows for our extended pondering of the wealth of the mystery.

The feast of the Lord’s Ascension dates from the early fourth century. As a liturgical event, it emphasizes the conclusion of Easter and the beginning of a new era, the ‘end times’, in which the Holy Spirit will be at work in the Church and the world until Christ’s glorious return, his parousia, on the last day. In ‘expanding’ the mystery in this way, the Church situates Christ’s victory over the powers of ‘death’ in historical time.

Biblical Background to Jesus’ Ascension

Celebration of the Ascension of Jesus recalls memories of the accounts of the ascension of the prophets Elijah¹ and Henoch.² Psalm 47 has inspired the Church’s hymnology for Ascension tide:

All peoples clap your hands, shout your joy to God, For God most high is awesome, great king over all the earth.

God ascends the mountain amid cheers and trumpet blasts. Sing out your praise to God…

For God rules the earth; Sing praise with all your skill. God rules over the nations high on the sacred throne…

All the powers on earth Belong to God most high.

New Testament passages written with post-resurrection faith and well after the Ascension and Pentecost, frequently drew upon the figure of the ‘Son of Man’ (i.e. a human being) found in the Book of Daniel in order to establish that the ministry of Jesus revealed his divine origins and power.³

I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples and nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

New Testament passages that speak of the risen Jesus as ‘sitting at God’s right hand’ presuppose the Ascension. Among these references we would include, for example, Jesus reply to the taunts of the High Priest: ‘From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven’ (Matt. 26:64); also included would be the Pauline teaching concerning the immeasurable power of God in Christ as cosmic Lord: ‘God put this power into Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places…’ (Eph. 1: 20-23); and the apostolic profession that, as the Christ, ‘He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among gentiles, believed throughout the world [and], taken up into glory’. (1 Tim 3:16).⁴

The Gospel of John interprets Christ’s ascension as an Easter event, although it is ap-
preciated as being distinct from his resurrection with regard to its significance for salvation. The first Easter appearance of the risen Jesus is to Mary Magdalene who, on discovering the presence of the Lord, made as if to embrace him. However, Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me for I am not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (Jn. 20: 17-18).

According to the Johannine tradition, the ascension evidently occurred before the evening of Easter day when Christ appeared to the disciples, and having shown them the wounds in his hands and side, breathed upon them saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ (Jn. 20: 19-23). One week later, the apostle Thomas touched the wounds in the hands and side of the risen Lord and came to believe (Jn. 20:34-29).

**The Ascension according to Luke**

It is the typological presentation of the Lord’s ascension from the Lukan accounts (Lk. 24: 50-53 and Acts 1: 6-12) that the Church has chosen for her liturgical celebration of the Ascension. The evangelist Luke is remembered as being the theologian of the life of the Church after the physical disappearance of Christ. As theologian Edward Schillebeeckx has commented:

[Luke] handles the old ascension motif out of his new theological view of the Church, and thus it undergoes a change. Henceforth the Church is not based any longer on immediate, visible intercourse with the Lord, but on the witness of the apostles upon whom the Spirit of the glorified Christ has ‘come down’. It is precisely in keeping with his thematic motif that St Luke underlines the conclusion of one period and the beginning of the other.5

Let us consider the Lukan narrative of the ascension (Acts 1: 6-11). It would be helpful for readers if they were to have the text open before them as we note the method used in creating this account of the Ascension.

- **The use of spatial imagery** emphasizes how an upwards movement completes the downwards movement of the Incarnation of the Word. This ascending movement begun in humiliation ends in triumph for, as the Emmaus disciples were to realize, ‘Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ (Lk. 24: 26).

Theologically speaking, therefore, the whole span of God’s saving act in the earthly history of Christ is shown as having been completed with his ascension.

- **The ‘forty days’** (Acts 1: 3) sets the Ascension on the symbolic fortieth day after Easter. We recall how ‘forty’ indicates an intense biblical period of formation represented in the forty days and nights of Noah’s flood, the forty days spent by Moses on Mount Sinai, Elijah’s forty days journey to Mount Horeb, the forty years of Israel’s wanderings in the desert and Jesus’ forty days of trial in the desert.6 Thus, the Lukan setting of the Ascension allows the Christian community to appreciate how Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances to the disciples over a period of forty days prepared them for his physical departure in order that the Spirit may be sent to them in a new way at Pentecost.

- **The ‘overshadowing’ cloud** is a powerful symbol of the divine presence and is reminiscent of the shekinah that enclosed Moses on Sinai, that guided the Israelites to the promised land, and rested over the Temple of Solo-
mon. The *shekinah* also appears in the Lukan account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. It will overshadow the faithful being gathered to meet the Lord at the *parousia* 7.

- **The mountain** represents a ‘gateway’ to the regions of God 8; the mountain of Ascension evokes memory of the mountain of the Transfiguration.

- **The synaxis** (gathering) of the apostles acts as a prelude to the theme of the great gathering of the Christ’s faithful at his return at the end of time.9

- **The two resurrection angels** (from Lk. 24:1-9) who asked then, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead?’ Ask now, ‘Why do you stand looking up to heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come again in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’

**Christological Implications of the Ascension**

The metaphor of the exaltation of the risen Jesus at ‘the right hand of the Father’ denotes belief that the universal and cosmic lordship of Christ is beyond the confines of space and time; it indicates belief that Jesus’ messiahship has been claimed definitively. As it was in the early Church, so now, and indeed forever, is Christ hailed as ‘Christus Victor’. He is celebrated as such in the ceremonial blessing and lighting of the paschal candle at Easter: ‘Christ yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End, Alpha and Omega. His are the times and ages. To him be glory and dominion through all ages of eternity. Amen.’

As was the custom of Christians in the early Church, Psalm 110 is prayed still when Christ’s faithful continue to celebrate his Ascension as a feast of his royal investiture:

Take the throne at my right hand,  
I will make your enemies a footrest.  
I will raise your sceptre over Zion and beyond.  
over all your enemies.  
Your people stand behind you on the day you take command.  
You are made holy, splendid,  
newborn like the dawn fresh,  
like the dew…

By virtue of his Ascension, Christ is declared to be *Kyrios* (Acts 2:36). As glorified Lord his mission is to bestow the Holy Spirit upon humanity.10 At every Sunday liturgy, the faithful, as with one voice, proclaim Christ as Lord in the Gloria and in the Creed: ‘I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ... He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.’

**The meaning of the Ascension ‘for us and for our Salvation’**

The *Letter to the Hebrews* invites reflection on the mystery of Christ’s exaltation to an eternal priesthood.11 His glorified humanity is the new Holy of Holies. With a love proved in sacrifice, Christ makes a continuous offering to God ‘for us and our salvation’; as High Priest, he is the mediator of the ‘new’ and ‘better’ covenant than the one made under the old dispensation. The sacrament of baptism incorporates the members of his Body, the Church, into Jesus’ own exalted Sonship. In a very real sense, we are already with the Father and enthroned with Christ in the ‘heavenly places’ (Eph. 2:6).

Because of the Ascension-Pentecost12 continuum, biblical harvest imagery is used effectively to illustrate the mystery of our salvation.13 Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians acknowledges Christ to be the ‘First Fruits’ of a glorious harvest: ‘In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection from the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ as the first fruits, then at his command, all who belong to Christ’ (1 Cor. 15; 20-23).
‘First fruits’, of course, are not the fully ripened harvest, but they do give the promise and pledge of the whole. Originally the Feast of All Saints was celebrated on the octave of Pentecost and that of All Souls on the following day. These feasts together were understood as signifying the great ‘harvest festival’ of the sending of the Spirit by the ascended and glorified Christ. Likewise, the feast of Mary’s Assumption is preeminently a ‘harvest’ feast. Assumed into glory, Mary is a prophetic ‘sign’ of hope for us all. In the mystery of her Assumption the Church sees Mary as the first disciple of many to be graced with a future already opened up in Christ’s Ascension.

In faith, what the Ascension means for our salvation, is that everything of humanity which we possess has, in Christ, been taken into the very life of the blessed Trinity. Harvest imagery expresses well the joyful hope that we hold for our personal destiny and the destiny of the created universe. As Kyrios, Christ embodies the plenitude of Christian hope. Our faith, therefore, calls us to a way of life, to a spirituality oriented to the future fulfillment of the Reign of God. As baptized-confirmed-eucharistic disciples of Christ, our mission is to be bearers of the Spirit in the world that we know. We are ‘sent forth’ into the world from every Eucharist with the injunction, ‘Go in peace glorifying the Lord in your lives’.

**Conclusion**

During this ‘Year of Grace’ we have been invited to contemplate the face of Christ. We do that here and now by discovering Christ in the eyes of our brothers and sisters for, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you do to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you do it to me’. Heaven, however, will enable us to see God ‘face to face’ as we look into the human eyes of Jesus glorified and experience ourselves being gazed upon with divine love.

Finally, let us make our own the Collect prayer of the Feast of the Ascension:

Gladden us with holy joy, O almighty God and make us rejoice with devout thanksgiving, for the Ascension of your Son is our exaltation, and where the Head has gone before in glory, the Body is called to follow in hope. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

**NOTES**

2. Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5.
3. Dan. 7:13-14; ‘Son of Man’: e.g. Mt. 9:4-8; Mk.2:10; Lk. 22:22; Jn. 1:51.
4. See also Jn. 3:12-13; Heb. Chs 8-10; Rev. 3:21; 11:12; 12:15.
6. Gen. 7:1-8:12; Ex. 24:15-18; Deut. 2; 1 Kg. 19:1-15; Lk. 4:1-14.
7. Ex. 13:21 ff; 19:16ff; 1 Kg. 8:10ff; Dan.7:13; Lk. 9:3; I Thess. 4:17.
8. O.T examples: Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22: 1-14), Mt Horeb (1 Kg. 5: 2-70); Mt Nebo (Deut. 34:1). N.T. examples: Mount of the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-11); Transfiguration, Mt. Tabor (Lk. 9: 28-36); Mt. Olivet (Mt. 26:36-46), Mt. Calvary (Mt. 27:33).
10. The Greek title, *Kyrios*, is retained in The Church of the West in the prayer, *Kyrie eleison* (*O Lord have mercy*).  
11. Heb. 4:14 -5:1-19; Chs. 7-9 inclusive.
12. Celebration of Pentecost fifty days after Easter corresponds to the Jewish harvest Feast of Tabernacles, fifty days after the Feast of Passover.
13. Ps 126:5; Mt.13:24-30; Jn. 4:31-38; 14. The dates were changed during the Middle Ages so as to ‘close’ the Pentecost cycle before Advent.  
15. *i.e.* Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit the sick and those imprisoned. See Mtt, 25:34-41.
ARCHETYPAL THEOLOGY

EUGENE STOCKTON

MY MOST RECENT book The Deep Within had as its subtitle Towards an Archetypal Theology. It is timely to formulate my understanding, so far, as to what I mean by archetypal theology. This is proposed in the hope of attracting others to comment, critique or contribute to an ongoing discussion.

From the outset one needs to de-mystify this whole realm of thinking, because common parlance and writing have imparted to archetypes a false sense of the mystical, which has clouded the real meaningful potential of deep consciousness.

1. When psychologists speak of the ‘unconscious’ or the ‘subconscious’ they imply a discontinuity between the surface of our consciousness and the deeper levels, which are rarely plumbed by subjects or rarely rise to the surface. It suggests that there is only one level of consciousness and of rational thought.

2. Pioneer psychologists saw the foundation of archetypes in a ‘collective unconscious’ common to all mankind, which is tapped into by archetypal images. This was an idea once common among philosophers, scientists, artists and other intellectuals under the influence of German Romanticism peaking in the 19th century.

3. In popular writing archetypes have often been named from figures of Greek mythology and European folklore. This leaves in a mental limbo those whose cultural background has not included these streams of storytelling.

By contrast with the idea of a ‘collective unconscious’ as the primordial source of archetypes, I propose that a sufficient ground for their emergence can be found in the early experiences of infant formation (perhaps even before, but certainly after, birth). Neural development in early infancy suggest rapid changes and intense activity in the mind, before labels can be found to tag the new experiences. Memory seems to begin to operate and become fixed only after language has developed to a certain degree and a sense of self has emerged. Now when we look back to memories, it is to those that can be named and are already centred on self. Before that there are only ‘unremembered memories’, which can set off powerful unaccountable emotions in later life, such as inordinate fear or resentment for seemingly trivial occasions. One counts among these the intimate and complex feelings for one’s mother, or carer or other family members. A baby’s world is a world of feelings, a cauldron of nameless emotions, which continue to exert their influence in later life and higher levels of consciousness.

The level of consciousness most familiar to us is that of surface rational thought such as is found in science, politics, commerce, history, philosophy, conversation and in so many areas as to create the impression that this is the only way of thinking. The world it constructs from our senses is deemed the real, objective world. It is a rational world ruled by its own logic. Words stand for concepts in abstract representation of the real. Facts are stated by the identification of subject and predicate (A is B) and further information is adduced by chains of syllogism. Statements stand to be verified—they are true or false—marking this way of thought as strongly dualistic and discriminatory. It lends itself to the binary language of information technology. Value—what is more or less—is expressed by number, allowing extreme levels of differentiation. The language is typically linear as each stated item is symbolised as a bit of information, with each bit laid out one after another like pixels on a TV screen or printed words on
a page.

Deep down in the well of consciousness are vastly different layers of perception. This is the domain of poetry, myth and imagination, representing a no less real world in a strikingly different way to that of the surface. The bottom layer of perception we have seen is the primordial awakening of infancy, a cauldron of feelings. These bundles of emotion, these emotional tags of felt reality are what are commonly called archetypes. Whether that term is meant to suggest something superior or antecedent, it can include a diversity of such entities in a state of high fluidity. It is important to note that archetypes (and their analogues) are at base amorphous.

Between these two layers of perception is an intermediate layer, which I have called the ‘Playground’. Here the rising archetypes are processed by human imagination. The creative artist may assign to an archetype a transient shape for an immediate purpose—something neither fixed nor constant. Some archetypes are so profound and general that they have acquired universal recognition, e.g. the archetype of Mother. Some archetypes are shaped differently from culture to culture and can be called cultural types or national icons. Biblical types arose and were recognised by the Chosen People as they reflected on their history and perceived there the intervention of their God. Symbols, such as the cross or the national flag, can evoke powerful memories of a people and stir strong emotion.

The processing of these signified archetypes in the Playground is very different to that of rational thought. The stock in trade is not concepts but mental images (and perhaps other internal analogues of bodily senses). Imagination rules. The mental processes at work is the assimilation of like with like (A is like B), recognising the likeness of patterns. All duality dissipates where there is no true or false, right or wrong. Creative intuition leads to new discoveries by playing with images: sets of images can be combined and recombined, mixed and merged, so that new patterns give rise to new meanings and understandings (just as musical notes can be juggled to make new melodies). Myth and story are time-honoured ways of drawing images together in a meaningful way.

The Playground we have seen is where the formless feelings from the deep emerge and take shape as diverse recognisable archetypes. It plays host to many kinds of players playing with its images. The musician and abstract artist draw directly from the subliminal and put it into view. The storyteller weaves his themes into story-lines for listeners with bated breath. The contemplative ponders and gazes in silence. A scientist, at the start of research, may idly indulge in ‘pre-conceptual thought’: his data is represented by mental images tagged with feeling and is then wildly arranged and re-arranged in the kaleidoscope of his mind until he spies a ‘fix’. This is seen as the right juxtaposition of elements which he ‘freezes’ until it can be translated into the thought and language of surface rationality. This is the intuitive leap of genius sometimes told in the lives of scientists. The Aboriginal artist again shows the playfulness of combining traditional symbols into new configurations to tell the story of his Dreaming. I have analysed a number of Aboriginal Christian paintings to show how they theologise on the bridge between the old and the new. Their innovative creativeness was evident in the daring juxtaposition of elements, opening up new ways of expressing their religion.

These parallels lead us to consider archetypal theology. The seer draws from the form-
less, emotion-laden awakenings of infant awareness, which have been shaped by his culture into distinctive forms, shared in common in society. These images or symbols stir up the primal emotions from the depth as they enter discursive thought and language, giving a power and force beyond their literal meaning. But the Christian theologian here meets other streams of primordial meaning, notably that of the Chosen People whose story is told in the Bible. Biblical types are defined as persons, things or events in the Old Testament which are seen to be fulfilled in Christ in the New Testament. But one does not need to be restricted to messianic imagery. The Hebrew mashal (Greek parable) has a wide usage referring to proverbs, maxims, riddles, metaphors, allegories, similitudes, and other forms of comparisons, even by way of extended narratives, such as gospel parables. Even sacred stories, miraculous events and wisdom sayings become part of the treasury of archetypes. With those the seer is not distracted by questions of historicity or accuracy, but first asks ‘What does it mean?’ And in that meaning is found not only a direction, but also a motivating energy, which is absent in abstract theologising. The Hebrew language itself, as other Semitic languages, is directly tuned to the subliminal depth of consciousness, not so much expressing a meaning (as in European languages) as suggesting it.

With this rich inventory to draw on, the seer plays with these images in a contemplative mode. Like the intuitive scientist or the Aboriginal painter, he mentally views his assemblage of images, arranged now in one way now in another, until he arrives at a desirable ‘fix’ carrying its own felt message. Different sets of images bring certain ones into proximity with one another, emphasising some and highlighting relationships between them. Different combinations can convey different messages or directions. Stories especially present themselves as meaningful gatherings of archetypes, which is why myth has always played an important role in religion. Abstract art and music can be viewed in the same way.

Biblical and patristic writing abounds in this kind of theologising. The accompanying box offers a random sample. Typically the topic in question is likened to a biblical type, and in the light of that type it acquires through suggestion further meaning or direction. I call this ‘projection’, by analogy with film projection where light passes through an imaged film to be thrown up on a screen. Projection is seeing one reality through a related reality. The two may be related as macrocosm and microcosm. So for example, what is revealed about the Universal Church can be applied through various levels of local church to the domestic church of the human couple. Or the relationship may be phylogeny to ontogeny, as when the history of the People of God is seen mirrored in the spiritual journey of the individual, who can then read the Bible as a map of life.

This playful exercise in theology is not an idle one, but is conducted to serve some intent. In The Deep Within it helped to map out a personal theology and to explore mystical union with God. It may open up a course of action or give a vision of a way of life. It may feed into rational theology, just as scientific intuition may be the prelude to prolonged scientific research. Intent will guide the direction of observation.

Since archetypal theology is not about establishing fact but about comparing likenesses, it does not raise questions of truth or falsity but only of appropriateness. In the absence of judgment or discrimination subliminal thought is non-dualistic. Opposites are complimentary not contradictory. Hence archetypal theology is valuable in the engagement with another culture or another religion. The insights of the other person may be welcomed as enriching and illuminating one’s own.

Since archetypes are recognised as arising from the cauldron of formless emotions in infancy, it is no wonder that, after taking on the forms afforded by culture in the Playground, they still retain their distinctive emotional tags. Creatively combined in pre-conceptual
thought they can evoke a passion which is lacking in abstract rationality. The demagogue, the advertiser, the propagandist all instinctively know what the theologian could well take note of: namely the power of archetypes to move the heart and mind.

FOOTNOTES

1. Published by Blue Mountain Education & Research Trust, Lawson, 2012.  
2. Ibid. pp. 52-3  
3. Ibid. pp. 32-43  
4. Ibid. pp. 36-8  

1. Bride and Mother

The Ecclesia, the Church, is not primarily or fundamentally the concern of sociology. The institution is merely the visible aspect of the ‘mystery’. Above all, the Church is the power of resurrection, the sacrament of the Risen One who imparts his resurrection to us; the new Eve, born from Christ’s open side as Eve was born from Adam’s rib. From Christ’s pierced side indeed there flowed water and blood (John 19:34), the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist.

Christ has flooded the universe with divine and sanctifying waves. For the thirsty He sends a spring of living water from the wound which the spear opened in his side. From the wound in Christ’s side has come forth the Church, and he has made her his Bride.

—ORIGEN Commentary on Psalm 77,31 (PG 17,141), Commentary on Proverbs, 31,16 (PG17,252).
STOIC-SCEPTICISM
The Adult’s Philosophy

REG NAULTY

The claim here is that as most people grow older, some form of stoicism is the philosophy they come to take for granted. This tendency appears to be universal; it is the upshot of their experience of life.

What, then, is stoic-scepticism? The stoic component has it that we shouldn’t expect too much from life, and the sceptical component has it that there is no point in believing in much. It won’t get you anywhere.

What kind of thing shouldn’t we expect too much of? Happiness. Why not? There isn’t too much to be had. At that point, stoicism passes directly into scepticism. But why do they think there is not much happiness to be had? They’ve never had much, nor have the people they have known.

There is an obvious rejoinder here. Perhaps they just haven’t met the right people. That naturally invites a challenge. Who are they? Well, they certainly exist. If you don’t know any, you are mixing with the wrong people, or they’re scarce in the places you’ve been.

In any case, the existence of happy people is enough to show that stoicism is unnecessary. The idea that it is is common enough to deserve a name: the fallacy of misplaced stoicism. However, we do have to place stoicism somewhere. Some stoicism is necessary for a sane life. No one gets everything they want, and death is part of life. But that still leaves plenty of room for happiness.

That raises the question of how much happiness it is reasonable to hope for. In Giuseppe di Lampedusa’s novel The Leopard, the dying prince famously calculated that in his life he had lived, ‘really lived’, a total of about two or three years. The other seventy had been painful or boring.

In contrast, in real life, Alexander Solzhenitsyn found a fellow inmate of his Soviet forced labour camp, a Baptist, who was happy there. And many people, in more fortunate circumstances than that, have found happiness in children, grandchildren, friends, work, play, music, books, places etc. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that di Lampedusa’s prince is a grump.

Many people would have shared these happinesses, but settle down into some form of stoicism. At the end of the day, not enough happiness has endured. If the problem is as deep seated as it seems to be, surely people, many people, would have found a solution. I suggest that they have, partially at least. Helping other people enriches life somehow. It cheapens it to call it a warm, inner glow. Life is made more satisfying for the giver and receiver.

That seems to be the road taken by many, and it brings them within reach of a metaphysical experience. Buddha, who seems to have been sceptical about the chances for a happy life, recommended compassion. The compassion lessens the need for stoicism, in some cases more, in others, less. In some, it goes as far as a metaphysical experience, which, as it happens, finds one of its best expressions in the work of that old sceptic, Montaigne: ‘In the friendship of which I speak, our souls mingle and blend with one another so completely that they effaced the seam that joined them and it cannot be found again.’

Is there a scepticism ameliorator which works the way compassion does for stoicism? Solzhenitsyn asked the Baptist why he was happy in such a miserable place. ‘Prayer,’ re-
plied the Baptist. Solzhenitsyn said that he had tried it and it hadn’t worked. The Baptist responded that he hadn’t tried it enough. Did it work for him then? It may have, but in another way. Solzhenitsyn became a staunch believer. Prayer deepens our spiritual life. It can function as a scepticism ameliorater, just as it had as a stoicism ameliorater for the Baptist. Just as friendship had a metaphysical experience at the end of it, prayer has a metaphysical experience at the end of it, though in this case, since this union is with God, it is a religious experience.

At this point, a sceptical question may be asked, though it is unlikely to be asked by the one who has had the experience. ‘What has inner experience to do with the vast galaxies wheeling in space, and the cosmic picture revealed by science? Isn’t God supposed to be the mind behind those, too?’ Here, the world of feeling must appeal to the world of intellect. Paul Davies claims that the universe is just too clever to be an accident, is rather convincing. After all, it is hard to believe that this wonderful world is just a fluke.

The Dawkins forces, of course, maintain that the living world provides no evidence for God, since that can be explained by natural selection. But the physical world, apart from the living world, still illustrates Davies’ claim. And if the religious experience goes as far as one’s whole being somehow becoming a movement of divine love, then the experience comes charged with the numinous characteristics of majesty and fascination, which strongly suggest an origin beyond nature, which reinforces Davies’ argument.

I claimed above that the motive for scepticism is simply the conviction that believing won’t get you anywhere. Where did they want to get to? They wanted to get a good job, to become prosperous, to have money to spend on the people and things they liked. That is commendable enough, but perhaps they expected too much from it. Perhaps they didn’t spend enough effort on the things which are eternal. ‘The world is too much with us.’ If they had been less skeptical about spiritual goods earlier, there would have been less need for stoicism later.

I conclude that scepticism is avoidable, and so is stoicism, except in the qualified form mentioned above, namely, for the inescapable disappointments and illnesses of life. Ultimate stoicism is rendered unnecessary by the Providential care of God.

Only through believing [...] does faith grow and become stronger; there is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one’s life apart from self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God.

—Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter Porta Fidei, introducing the Year of Faith, n. 7.
BOOK REVIEWS


The *magisterium* is the college of bishops with the pope, and their task is to safeguard the transmission of the faith. ‘The task of authoritatively interpreting the word of God, whether in its written form or in that of tradition, has been entrusted only to those charged with the church’s living *magisterium*, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ’ (Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, no.10). In order to carry out its task, the *magisterium* is guided by the Spirit.

However, the pope and college of bishops are not the sole members of the Church gifted by the guidance of the Spirit. Individual believers have an instinct for the true faith (*sensus fidelium*), a gift of the Spirit, as also has the Church community as a whole (*sensus fidelium*), and professional theologians as well.

All these Spirit-gifted groups and individuals are human beings whose receptivity of the Spirit’s guidance is subject to fallibility under most circumstances - none of them is free from the possibility of error. Hence there can be tensions among the groups and individuals and the need for ever deeper discernment of what the Spirit is really wanting the Church to hear.

This book explores the recent history of the interventions of the *magisterium* to criticize, discipline, and sometimes silence a number of theologians. It explains the processes that the *magisterium* follows and examines the reactions of the theological community. It makes common sense observations on what should characterize fair procedures in such interventions.

Catholicism has always recognized the need for a normative doctrinal teaching authority. Yet the character, scope, and exercise of that authority, what has come to be called the *magisterium*, has changed significantly over two millennia. This book gathers contributions from leading Catholic scholars in considering new factors that must be taken into account as we consider the church’s official teaching authority in today’s postmodern context.

Noted experts in their fields cover many intriguing topics, including the investigation of theologians that has occurred in recent years, canonical perspectives on such investigations, the role that women religious have played in these issues, the place of the media when problems arise, and possible future ways forward.

—Barry Brundell MSC.


It is with much anticipation that the scholarly and non-scholarly world is now able to read Fr Austin Cooper OMI’s, *John Henry Newman: A Developing Spirituality* (St Paul’s, 2012). It is fair to say that Fr Cooper holds the accolade of being Australia’s leading Newman scholar. After years of scholarly interest in Newman and nineteenth-century British and Colonial ecclesiastical history, we are now able to read this thematic and semi-biographical account of what Cooper terms Newman’s ‘developing spirituality’ (an apt phrase in so many respects).

The book is divided up into seven chapters—the first dealing with Newman’s Anglican and family context; the second with the Oxford Movement and the *Tracts for the Times*; the third with Newman’s influential interest in, and use of, the Patristic tradition. Other chapters deal respectfully with Newman as a preacher, a pastor and his relationship with ecclesiastical authority. The book ends, appropriately, in a chapter that examines Newman’s inspiring relationship with God through prayer.
BOOK REVIEWS

There is much to gain from either a scholarly or devotional reading of Cooper’s book (the book has that dual quality, something rare in academic publications). The work is heavily sourced from Newman’s own writings with limited references to secondary sources made when required. Though at times there is a danger that Newman’s testimony is too often relied upon as a historical source, Fr Cooper’s numerous gleanings from Newman’s letters and diaries are highly original, indicating a deep familiarity with his subject. Additionally, it could be said that this method grounds the book closely to Newman’s mind and allows Cooper to unfold his ‘developing’ spiritual legacy (no doubt the intention). Cooper’s point throughout the book is to illustrate how Newman’s spirituality developed through the familial, social, ecclesiastical and theological contexts that were a part of the late-Georgian and Victorian eras that Newman lived through.

On the whole John Henry Newman: A Developing Spirituality is a lucid and highly readable account of Newman’s life and thought. Paying close attention to Newman’s historical context, it is very much the work of a historian who loves his subject. The hermeneutic of ‘development’ that Cooper uses is arguably the most accurate term to use when speaking about Newman’s intellectual and spiritual growth throughout his life. As Fr Cooper reminds us, more than simply an intellectual construct, ‘development’ for Newman was an integral part of his life and thought.

—Robert Andrews, University of Notre Dame Australia

Peter Varengo SDB, Seed Among The Vines—A Spirituality of the Sunday Gospels Year C, Mosaic Resources 2012, $34.95.

When one has to prepare a homily every week one looks for all the help one can get. This is a book of reflections on the Sunday Gospels for Year C that will provide some food for thought and prayer and perhaps inclusion in the homily, but it is really a book for everyone in the community, whatever their calling. And that is explicitly the aim of the author:

At the same time, as much as pointers for Sunday homilies, these reflections are offered as a source of personal spiritual reflection and prayer for anyone confronted with the Word of God, as well as a resource for teachers, parish ministers, religious and lay, adult faith educators, or group leaders involved in any way in the journey of faith through the reality of daily life. (p.7)

Peter Varengo has been a member of the Department of Pastoral and General Studies at the Catholic Theological College, Melbourne, lecturing in Religious Education. His specialties are adult faith education and spirituality, the psychology of human development and spirituality. He has been involved in parish ministry for many years, and been active in retreat work and spiritual direction.

The author is concerned to let the Word of God speak to our everyday lives, to our human experiences. For instance, the reflections for the last Sundays of the liturgical year highlight how the readings of the Sunday liturgy reflect what we, young and old, are going through as one year ends and we anticipate a new year soon to begin.

I particularly relished the final paragraph of the book, at the conclusion of his reflections on the feast of Christ the King:

As we move out of a liturgical season and into Advent next week, let us look back with gratitude to those glimpses of strength, wisdom, and peace that have revealed the active presence of God’s kingdom in us, individually and collectively, throughout the year coming to an end. As we look forward to the time ahead, let us do so in hope and joyful peace, in the sure knowledge that our God King will continue to live, and rejoice, and grow, and struggle with us to ensure that in the end we will ‘all live happily ever after’.

This passage will give some feel for the style of the book and the quality of the author’s reflections. I thoroughly recommend the book.

—Barry Brundell MSC.
PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

From the First Sunday of Advent (Year C-Dec 2, 2012) to Easter Sunday (Year C-March 31, 2013)

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 First Sunday of Advent in Year C to Easter Sunday in Year C (December 2, 2012 to March 31, 2013). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

Concluding the Year

As we move towards the final weeks of the year, we celebrate also the beginning of the new liturgical year beginning on Advent 1. In this season we look back over the year that has been and forward to the one that is about to unfold. We prepare for the eschatological coming of Jesus specifically in the final Sundays of Advent and celebrate his birth. As mentioned in the previous edition of Compass where the other Sunday celebrations over January touched upon, the birth of this child on December 24-25 is explicitly theological and ecological. Luke’s story celebrates God’s beloved disposition upon all beings of our planet revealed in Jesus’ birth. This is the essential truth and mystery in the angelic chorus sung to the shepherds and the repeated sign, of Jesus ‘wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger’. Jesus’ presence in a manger (a product of Earth) and surrounded with Earth’s cloth highlight Jesus as Earth’s child. Ecological implications to celebrate with our planet flow from this.

* * *

Ordinary Time 2-6 (before Lent)

The first readings during Ordinary Time in the New Year 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 the issues 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).

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). As mentioned in the last Compass edition, 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 4-5) 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 also find ourselves encouraged in our engagement with our world, social concerns and various political and economic factions. We are invited into an alternative community that considers and responds to 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 important 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 revealed 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. Luke’s deliberate retention of this embarrassing aspect of the Easter story is instructive, especially as we seek ways to honour 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.
PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

NEW LITURGICAL YEAR C

Dec 2—Advent 1: Jer 33:14-16. God’s prophet foresees a time of peace, harmony and communion when all will live safely. 1 Thes 3:12—4:2. Paul’s people are urged to live out their community life with love and holiness. Lk 21:25-28.34-36. Our first reading of the Gospel of Luke for the new liturgical year invites an attitude of alertness to Jesus’ coming. Theme—Alertness: Advent initially encourages us to be sensitive to the many ways God comes to us. This coming happens mostly unexpectedly, and especially in pain, suffering and death. This first celebration of our year invites us to ponder God’s presence to us in all these different ways.

Dec 9—Advent 2: Bar 5:1-9. This is a celebration of God’s delight in creation and humanity. Phil 1:4-6.8-11. Paul delights in the Jesus followers at Philippi. They witness to the gospel and he encourages their ongoing discernment. Lk 3:1-6. Baruch’s vision finds its expression in the historical and social preparation for the birth of Jesus. Theme—God’s delight. The advent of Jesus soon to be born among us reveals God’s delight for creation and humanity. Jesus’ birth involves the whole of creation that God has blessed. This powerful theme has profound ecological implications for our faith communities. It commits us to this planet and invites us to celebrate our world and lives that are good, holy and blessed.

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

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

Dec 25—Feast of the Nativity

Midnight

Is 9:2-4, 6-7. God’s light shines on a people that walk in darkness. Their hope is in the birth of one who will usher in God’s authority and justice. Tit 2:11-14. God’s love for us is tangible in the birth of Jesus. Because of this we live lives that are holy. Lk 2:1-20. Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. Theme—God’s Welcome: So many will crowd into our churches this night. All seek to hear a word of hope and encouragement. In the birth of a child God is imaged as helpless, childlike, and welcoming. Mistaken notions of God as vindictive or vengeful are completely overturned. This affects the way we see our world and God’s embrace of us.
Morning
Is 52:7-10. The prophet reveals to an exiled people that a message of salvation will be heard and that God ultimately reigns over disaster. Tit 3:4-7. God’s utter love and compassion enabled Jesus to reveal God’s goodness and kindness to us. Lk 2:1-20. Jesus is born to a peasant couple, victims of taxation, in a world controlled by foreign powers. Theme—Hope. So many will crowd into our churches this day as at midnight Mass. All seek to hear a word of hope and encouragement. The readings powerfully provide the opportunity to celebrate a God revealed in a child, seeking to console and tenderly walk with us throughout the rest of our year and lives.
Dec 30—Holy Family: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14. Wisdom is found in respect and care for the older members of the family. Col 3:12-21. Mutual love and compassion should characterise members of the Christian household. If it is not excluded, special preaching care should also accompany the last verses of this reading, written at a time when subordination represented order and stability. Lk 2:41-52. Jesus is found as the teacher in the temple, and surprises his parents. Theme—Surprise. Families can be communities of great love and growth; at times they are also places of difficulty and pain. No family is ever perfect. Today’s readings encourage an attitude of openness, mutual respect and forgiveness in family or community living. Thought should be given to how to celebrate those who live on their own. In Australia, almost a half of our households are single person dwellings. How can this feast speak to those who live singly, are unmarried, divorced, widowed or do not have children?
Jan 6, 2013—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.
Jan 13—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 were exclusivity, prestige and favouritism permeate all sectors.
Jan 20—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. I Cor 12:4-11. God’s spirit permeates the household of Jesus followers, releasing spiritual gifts upon it. Jn 2: 1-12. Jesus’ first sign reveals God’s joy with humanity symbolised in a wedding feast with an extraordinary quantity of exquisite 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 offers another perspective.
Jan 27—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 important in the Christian community. Those most honoured are those considered socially dishonourable. Now that’s a challenge! Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21. We hear 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 name and celebrate ways this Christian community celebrates this today.

Feb 3—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, not one whom Jesus exalts. 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 responds favourably only to those who think the right thing or act correctly.

Feb 10—Ordinary Time 5: Is 6:1-2a, 3-89. The prophet is overwhelmed by the vision of God’s holiness and his call to 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 calls us. Isaiah recognises God’s utter holiness; a similar disposition overwhelms Peter in his boat and encounter with Jesus. Peter 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 17—Lent 1: Dt 26:4-10. This is 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 to live guided by God.

Feb 24—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’ 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 3—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 our world)

**Lent 3 for Year A:** Ex 17:3-7. The people complain 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 10—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 17—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 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 preparation for Easter – our resurrection and life. What brings us to life? What tangible signs are there that this is already happening around us?

**Mar 24—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.

**Mar 28—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

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occurring within our local, national and international communities?

Mar 29—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.

Mar 3—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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The Christmas novena begins on 17 December. At this point the Advent focus shifts to the Christmas story and the Virgin Mary. These days serve to prepare more directly for the Lord’s birth. This is the best time to hold carols services and to begin to sing Christmas carols in the liturgy.

—From the Ordo.