THE LAST THINGS

As this issue of Compass goes to the press we are at the end of the Church’s year, and our attention turns to the ‘last things’. November is the ‘Month of the Holy Souls’ when we pray for our deceased loved ones, and the liturgy directs our reflections to the life after death which is promised to us. God, we are told, is the God of the living.

Life after death is new life, not a continuation of our earthly life. ‘In death life is changed, not ended’ (Preface of Christian Death I). Death is a transition to fuller life.

Christ by his death and resurrection converted our death into the gateway to life eternal. ‘Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died’ (1Cor 15:20). Christ died so that we might live. Through Christ’s dying and rising from the dead: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where O death, is your sting?’ (1Cor 15:54-55)

But we must die with him as the second letter to Timothy insists: ‘This saying is sure: if we have died with him, we shall also live with him’ (2Tim. 2:11). Dying and rising with Christ is the pattern of the Christian life—taking up one’s cross and following him.

It begins at baptism. When we are baptised we are baptised into his death so as to rise to life with him: we go into the tomb with him and rise with him to new life. And this is the story of our lives every day—dying with Christ in order to live with him. And when we come to the end of our earthly life it is our faith that we die with him to enter into life eternal with him.

At funerals I draw attention to the Easter Candle that stands tall at the foot of the casket. I point out that, apart from the Easter season when this candle is prominent in the church as we celebrate Christ’s resurrection, it is brought out for only two occasions—for baptisms and for funerals, because both are celebrations of entry into life with Christ.

But we can refuse to die and rise with him, we can refuse to follow Christ. In Luke’s Gospel (Lk 14:15-21) Jesus presents such a refusal as a rejection of an invitation to a great banquet. ‘A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many...’ A number of those invited gave excuses and sent their apologies. The master was angered by their refusals and sent his servants out into streets and lanes of the city, and told them to bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame. These latter accepted the invitation! But there was still room, and the master told the servants to go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in—he wanted his house to be filled. (Lk 14:15-24)

Accepting that the master conveys something of God’s action and God’s invitation to us to the banquet of life, we must be impressed by the strong, forceful and inclusive action of God. But still we must accept the invitation—powerful as God’s mercy and love is, and wonderful as what God is inviting us to is, God deals with us as people with free will, and we can still say ‘No’. Missing out is a real possibility. As the master said in Jesus’ story, ‘Those others will never taste my feast!’ But while it is possible to reject God’s invitation, we are not able to say that anyone has ever done so.

We proceed on the presumption that it is well-nigh impossible to miss out. Jesus himself seemed to indicate as much. He said, ‘There are many mansions in my Father’s house’ (Jn 14:2). We rely on the power of God’s love and mercy. At funerals of people who have not been active in practicing the Christian faith, we fall back on such claims as: ‘In his/her heart he/she longed to do your will’, and we take comfort from the thought.
that for God that will be enough to welcome that person and prepare him or her to enter into his peace.

All of us, however, need to complete our conversion before we can meet God face to face. In death we stand before God and our need for further conversion will be apparent. We call this the Particular Judgment. Our un readiness to enter into God’s presence—into heaven—becomes apparent as we come to stand in the presence of our loving and holy God. We can be made ready, fully converted, by God’s purifying grace and the prayers of those who pray for us. This process of painful purification and conversion is called ‘Purgatory’.

If a person’s whole life has been a story of selfishness and evil, ultimately a rejection of God and God’s ways, there is a real danger that at the moment of death that choice will be confirmed. We cannot say whether anyone actually is so insistent in their rejection, but it is important to understand that God does not condemn a person to Hell—it is the lot that a person chooses for himself or herself that confirms the way that person has lived. God has made us for himself, as St Augustine said, and our hearts are restless till they rest in him. The person who rejects God and God’s love even when he or she comes face-to-face with God condemns himself or herself to eternal frustration.

Indeed, it is only just that people who are responsible for great evils and cruelties and who are unrepentant—have not experienced remorse and if possible made restitution in some way—should suffer the penalties for their evil deeds. But God does not condemn them to Hell—they choose Hell for themselves.

Once we have negotiated Purgatory and our conversion and purification is complete we will be fit to ‘enter’ Heaven. God’s grace will have made us like God and we will see him as he is, face to face (1Jn 3:2); this is called the ‘beatific vision’. We will enjoy the presence of God; this will be the source of our bliss. God’s love will overwhelm us. ‘No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ (1Cor. 2:9). ‘Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness’ (Catechism of the Catholic Church no.1024).

Some religious groups proclaim from time to time that ‘the end is nigh’. The early Christians believed that the second coming of the Messiah was imminent. By the end of the New Testament period Christians no longer expected that it would be soon. In Luke’s gospel Jesus discouraged his disciples from speculating about it and urged them to concentrate on the present time and its challenges (Lk 21:5-19). But there will be an end of time when the Kingdom of God will come in its fulness; there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and the righteous will reign forever with Christ, glorified in body and soul (Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 1042-1050).

What we are waiting for is what he promised: the new heavens and new earth, the place where righteousness will be at home. (2Peter 3:13).

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.

The beatific vision is the full union of the human person with God. It is that towards which every person strives. It is that which transcends the person on this earth and draws the person beyond herself or himself to become something other than she or he is at present. It is the goal of every human inquiry, search, and gesture towards the other. It is the completion of all that we are as human beings.

THE SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

Two Essential Aspects

FRANCES MORAN

FACING THE TRUTH

The title of the Victorian Senate Report of the ‘Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations’ provides a synopsis. ‘Betrayal of Trust’

summarizes in a nutshell the findings of the Inquiry. The Catholic Church, among other institutions has been found wanting in its response to victims of child sexual abuse by clergy and religious. In addition, the report points to the neglect of religious organizations to examine their own systems and processes to determine the extent to which these may have contributed to the occurrence of criminal child abuse.

Perhaps the crucial question to be asked here is why this tragedy ever occurred within the context of the Catholic Church, an institution that in 1955 proudly filled the Melbourne Exhibition Building with ninety stands to display its life and works as it made its appeal for more priests and religious.

How is it the case that this tragedy ever came to be, given that which specifically characterizes clergy and religious, namely, that they have chosen to live according to the terms of Canon Law and have a formal commitment to celibacy if not a vow? It is precisely this characterization that distinguishes them from other offenders and is particular to the Catholic Church. The behaviour referred to in the report is inexplicably contrary to the acclaimed lifestyle of priesthood and religious life.

Clearly, there are no easy answers—no quick-fix label to mark the abusers as ‘evil’ will suffice as explanatory. It will not provide the necessary knowledge of determining factors. While no doubt of major consequence, individual psychology is only part of what is at play in the situation. The issues at stake are multiple and complex and could not be more serious. The quest for the answer unreservedly falls to the Church itself. Without knowledge of why this situation ever arose leaves those affiliated with the institutional Church at the edge of a void. In what sense?

Without the Church’s own internal interrogation in search of an answer, there remains a ‘gaping hole’ rent in the fabric of what a person identifies with in the nomination of oneself as a Catholic (let alone a priest or religious). Many feel lost as to an explanation of a scandal that falls at the feet of those said to have a religious vocation. As the community’s anger and disgust subsides a deep, unacknowledged, and even unrecognised disturbance (a dis-ease) will be experienced in the face of the ‘gaping hole’—the latter being approached one way or another, be that spoken or unspoken, yet avoided time and time again.

Many will attempt to de-identify with the Church as a personal solution to the unbearable. This is more easily said than done, and for many, creates its own torments. Others will live never feeling quite secure, never knowing whom they can trust and what they can believe. For so-called ‘cradle-Catholics’, this can be utterly destabilizing. Such loss of trust bears down upon their day to day existence with a vengeance that disrupts a confidence that formerly had been their birth-right. Others will live in hope that
something will happen to re-secure their faith so enabling them to reinvest themselves in the life of the Church once more. But, that hope is inevitably fragile and consequently at constant risk. Others will simply deny the problem has reference to themselves and imagine that they can move on in life regardless. Many will experience aspects of all the foregoing in one form or another. Each who identifies with the Catholic Church is currently called upon to meet the demands of a singular psychological work that can be lonely, harrowing. What remains missing is the unacknowledged ‘truth’ that underpins this entire episode in the history of the Catholic Church. Without this knowledge each has to find a position that saves him or her from the edge of the void.

The language that would allow one to reweave the fabric with the thread of truth remains to be formulated. The hole cannot be patched. The fabric must be re woven with the only thread that has the strength to sustain the tension inherent in life itself—the thread of truth.

Until the Church interrogates itself in the arena of that which lies beyond the statistics, Catholic identification remains a proposition associated with essential risk. It is this notion of truth alone that could provide the possibility of an altered yet secure point of identification with an institution that today suffers from an eradication of its core integrity.

**CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

The opening statement of the Truth Justice and Healing Council’s September 30, 2013 Submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is as clear as it is precise: ‘Sexual abuse of a child by a priest or religious is a crime under Australian law and under canon law’. It is an unequivocal acknowledgement that such abuse is not only sinful but criminal: a crime under the Church’s canon law, just as it is a crime under the law of the state.

But the Council’s submission does not concern itself with the consequences. There is no section outlining the juridical procedures to be adopted in cases of alleged criminal behaviour. We do not find, for example, a description of how a priest or religious accused of paedophilia moves through the stages of a legal process within the terms of canon law. We do not find a statement of how canon law deals with a victim of sexual abuse. Nor do we find any reference to the range of applicable penalties. Instead, we have a document of 206 pages which is concerned with *Towards Healing*, ‘a process offered by the Church to a person who has been abused by a priest, religious or other Catholic Church personnel’ (p. 11).

What the document does chart, however, is the evolution of a response to the Church’s failure to subject the criminal behaviour of alleged offenders to the jurisdiction of a canon law court. In other words, what is being submitted to the Royal Commission is a detailed account of what can be described as a monumental effort over seventeen years to answer the cry of victims of crime under canon law. It is clear that the plea has been neither heard nor responded to under the auspices of canon law, but within the terms of a process developed outside the rightful legal perspective. The real problem here is that *Towards Healing* has unwittingly absorbed the responsibility of canon law to handle investigation, enforcement, and the provision of appropriate legal processes of dealing with instances of grave violation. In essence, the Church has abdicated its canon law responsibilities in favour of a process which originated in a state of affairs marked by an absence of all that good law can and does provide.

On what basis can this crucial contextual shift be explained? The answer is that canon law is not ‘law’ in the common understanding of the term; that is, a rule backed by a temporal enforcement power. It is rather, according to Geoffrey Robertson QC (2010, 43), ‘a disciplinary process relating to sins
for which the only punishment is spiritual’. Further, ‘the procedures for investigation and proof under Canon law are archaic and over-reliant upon admission of guilt’ and ‘the trial proceeds entirely in writing, and is lacking in forensic techniques or even cross-examination as a test for truth’.

Importantly, the intent of canon law is specifically pastoral as pointed out in a commentary by Orsy (2000, cited Robertson, 2010, 44): ‘...the Church’s salvific purpose gives its penal order a unique character which must constantly be remembered... a non-penal pastoral approach may lead an offender to a fuller life in Christ more effectively than penalties. Fullness of life in Christ is the ultimate rationale...’. This means that a victim of abuse by clergy or religious can have no helpful recourse to canon law. It is not able to provide the benefits of law due to, and sought by, a victim of crime.

In effect, therefore, as far as the Church is concerned the issue of child sexual abuse is handled within a context devoid of the normal power of law. Canon law is not law as commonly understood and Towards Healing itself is simply a process and has no intrinsic authority. All decisions within it that relate to the discipline of those found to be guilty of offence, and the nature and amount of compensation given to the victim, are made by the bishops and leaders of religious orders. In a word, where paedophilia is the issue at stake, the Church is lawless. And, it is precisely in the haven of lawlessness that perversion reigns.

To claim that child sexual abuse is a crime under canon law is therefore misleading. It suggests the existence of a law that carries full legal consequences. This is not the situation. But, what the initial statement of the submission actually does, is provide a cover for the very lack of law that is to a large extent responsible for a tragedy beyond all explication.

**NOTES**

2. Catholic Life Exhibition 9th to 17th June, 1955 Pamphlet

Frances M Moran is in private practice, Armadale, working in the psychoanalytic tradition. She has acted occasionally as a facilitator and as an assessor for Towards Healing.

Sexual abuse of a child by Church personnel, whenever it occurred, was then and is now indefensible. That such abuse has occurred at all, and the extent to which it has occurred, are facts of which the whole Church in Australia is deeply ashamed. The Church fully and unreservedly acknowledges the devastation, deep and ongoing impact of sexual abuse on the lives of the victims and their families.

—From the Commitment Statement from leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia.
HAIL, MOTHER OF CHRIST,
BULWARK OF THE FAITHFUL!¹

MARIE T. FARRELL rsm

TREASURED MEMORIES of my having visited and prayed at Christian places of pilgrimage in Syria, and of having had the joy of celebrating Mass at the House of St Ananias in Damascus, have prompted this reflection. It is offered as a prayer for peace and as a symbolic gesture of our Australian solidarity with those ethnic minority groups and Christians suffering persecution and martyrdom from their being caught in the cross-fire of escalating political violence and bloodshed in Syria.²

Since the early 1960s, both the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Syriac Catholic Church have established communities in Melbourne and Sydney respectively. Earlier this year Australia was honoured by the visit of Mor Ignatius Youssif III Youman, Patriarch of the Syriac Catholic Church. This event heightened our consciousness of the plight of the Church in Syria; it has set in motion a national sense of urgency for our Orthodox and Catholic Churches to unite in calling upon the intercession of Mary on behalf of the Syrian people.

Such a concerted effort for union in prayer provides opportunity for recalling some of the theological contributions of St Ephraem and Jacob of Serug concerning the role of the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Refuge of the Afflicted, hear our prayer…

In calling upon Mary to hear and respond to our prayer in the present crisis, it is important to recognize the theological significance of ‘hearing’ in the biblical and early Syriac traditions. From Moses onwards the prophetic imperative to Hear O Israel!... (Dt. 6:4-9) reverberates throughout the Old Testament. Having been heard, the Word of the Lord had to be ‘taken to heart’ by the people of Israel and passed on ‘by word’ to succeeding generations. St Paul’s motif that ‘faith comes by hearing’ (Rom. 10:10) in order to be ‘received’ in the heart by the grace of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:1-3), is essential for one’s dedication and ‘obedience’ to a Christian way of life (Rom 1:5; 16:25).³

The Gospel of Luke (ca. 62 A.D.), associated as it is with the early Christian community of Antioch, presents Mary as the exemplar of hearing and obeying the Word. We are mindful of how the Lukan account of the Annunciation of the birth of Jesus demonstrates the actual process of Mary’s ‘hearing’—of her profound perplexity at Gabriel’s greeting along with that extraordinary message that cut across all her normal reference points and evoked judicious questioning as to how a seemingly impossible virginal conception of a child could occur.

Assured by the angel that ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’, Mary was empowered to give her unconditional Fiat to the implications of her decision to obey the Word of God (Lk 1:26-38). The nuance of ‘obeying’ as a response to ‘hearing’ is often overlooked in English translation when the derivation from the Latin, ob audire, is forgotten.⁴

Luke’s insight so evident in the Annunciation narrative is reiterated, when in acknowledging the blessedness of his mother, Jesus declared that for all who would follow him, true blessedness consists of both ‘hearing’ and...
As we will see below, Ephraem favoured the patristic metaphor suggestive of Mary’s conception of Jesus through her ear. The idea emerged in connection with typological parallels made between Eve’s deception from following the poisonous ‘word’ of the Serpent (Gen 3:1-7) and Mary’s fidelity in following the ‘word’ of the angel Gabriel. It has been argued (see note 2 above) that Patristic reflection in conjunction with St Paul’s ‘faith by hearing’ motif, extended an understanding of how the mystery of Mary’s experience of conceptio per aurem has, in some way, become paradigmatic for all Christians, insofar as the Word of God fruitfully ‘enters’ every believer by auricular means. Images of Mary’s ‘conception by ear’ became popular in the mediæval Annunciation art of the West; we think of works by Fra Angelico and Fra Lippi et al.

St Ephraem the Syrian, ‘Harp of the Spirit’

Little is known about Ephraem’s life. He was born ca. 306 A.D. in the region of Nisibis and died at Edessa on the 9th of June, 373 as a result of caring for victims of the plague. He was baptized as a young man and later, as an ordained deacon, served Bishop St James of Nisibis and some of his successors during sieges under the Persian King, Shapur II.

In recognition of his defense of truth against Arianism and for his theological and mythopoetic insight into the mysteries of the Incarnation, Ephraem was declared a Doctor of the Church by Benedict XV in 1920.

Of particular interest here is how we remember Ephraem for his ardent devotion to Mary so frequently expressed in his remarkable poem-hymns on Faith, on Mary and on the Nativity, the latter entitled by him as ‘lullabyes’ to be sung by Mary to Jesus. It is thought that Ephraem may have founded a school at Nisibis to train choirs of women for the singing of his hymns.5

Ephraem’s astounding paradoxical depiction of the Virgin Mary who gave birth to the ‘uncontainable’ Incarnate One gives cause for our continuous pondering:

Your mother is a cause for wonder: the Lord entered into her and became a servant; He who is the Word entered—and became silent within her; thunder entered her—and made no sound; there entered the Shepherd of all, and in her He became the Lamb, bleating as He comes forth.

Your mother’s womb has reversed the roles:
the Establisher of all entered in His richness,
but came forth poor: the Exalted one entered her,
but came forth meek; the Splendrous one entered her,
but came forth having put on a lowly hew.6

The Mighty one entered and put on insecurity
from her womb: the Provisioner of all entered
—and experienced hunger: He who gives drink to all entered
—and experienced thirst: naked and stripped
there came forth from her He who clothes all!7

Ephraem’s endearingly quaint way of representing Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus ‘through the womb of her ear’ so that, ‘of his
love He came down to renew the image of Adam grown old’, inspires hope that she will indeed hear us and respond to our present cries for help. We too acclaim:

*Who will dare to speak to her son as in prayer, to the hope of his mother as God, to her beloved [child] and her son as man. In fear and love it is right for Your mother to stand before You.*

In keeping with the patristic theology of Irenaeus and Tertullian, Ephraem interpreted Mary as the ‘Second Adam’ as he slept in death on the Cross; likewise, he contrasted her with the Virgin Mother-earth from which the first Adam was formed but was subsequently cursed for his sin (Gen 3:17-19):

*The virgin earth brought forth Adam the head of the earth: today the Virgin brought forth Adam the head of heaven.*

Ephraem clearly identified Mary’s two-fold relationship to the Church—as the new ‘Mother of all the living’ and as ‘type of the Church’ who begets all into eternal life in the sacrament of Baptism. Concerning Ephraem’s perception of the Mary-Church mystery, Murray comments aptly on how: ‘She [Mary] is in it [the Church], the first of the redeemed; but also since the Church is Christ’s body, Mary, the mother of Christ’s individual body, is mystical mother of all Christ’s members in the mystical Body.’

We note that in Ephraem’s time, Christ’s birth and baptism in the Jordan were celebrated simultaneously on the Feast of Epiphany, and how theological parallelism was drawn between Christ’s presence in his mother’s womb and the ‘womb’ of the Jordan. Thus, Ephraem regarded the conception of Christ in Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit as signifying her baptism:

The Light settled on Mary, as on an eye; it purified her mind, it cleansed her understanding, it washed her thought, it made her virginity shine.

The river in which Christ was baptized conceived him again symbolically, the damp womb of the water conceived him in purity, and bore him in holiness, made him rise up in glory. In the pure womb of the river you should recognize the daughter of man, who gave birth as a virgin, and who brought up, through a gift, the Lord of that gift (H. Eccles. 36, 2-4).

In typifying her as New Eve, Ephraem also appreciated how Mary was related to the sacrament of the Eucharist:

*The Church gave us the living bread for that unleavened bread which Egypt gave. Mary gave us the bread of refreshment for the bread of weariness which Eve gave.*

And again:

*There is fire and Spirit in Mary’s womb, there is fire and Spirit in the river in which you were baptized. Fire and Spirit in our own baptism, in the bread and in the cup, fire and the Holy Spirit. In your bread is hidden the Spirit who is not eaten; in your wine dwells the Fire that cannot be drunk. The Spirit in your bread, the Fire in your wine, a remarkable miracle that our lips have received.*

We conclude this section of our reflection, by making our own this prayer of Ephraem calling upon Mary on behalf of those in need:

*Hail, song of the cherubs and angels’ praises. Hail, peace and joy of the human race… Hail, bulwark of the faithful… Hail, reminder of Adam, hail, ransom of Eve… Hail, O chaste one, who have crushed the serpent’s head hurling him into the abyss. Hail, refuge of the afflicted, hail, ransom of the curse.*
Hail, O Mother of Christ, Son of the Living God,  
to whom shall be glory, honour;  
adoration and praise  
both now and for ever and every where  
And for ever, Amen.14

**Jacob of Serug, ‘Flute of the Spirit’**

Jacob of Serug (431–521 A.D.) was born at Curtam, a small village on the Euphrates River. As a three-year old he exhibited extraordinary piety. He probably studied at the school of Edessa, was ordained as a priest in his twenties and was consecrated as Bishop at age sixty-seven but died just two and a half years later. Like Ephraem, Jacob had a passionate love for the Mother of God, who had been officially declared Theotókos at the Council of Chalcedon, 451. Jacob of Serug is remembered as a prolific writer of prose expositions, numerous letters encouraging Christians during the war waged by Kavadh of Persia, for his hymns and for over 700metrical homilies.

While reflection on the following excerpts chosen from his homilies on the Mother of God addresses themes already developed in the writings of Ephraem, they carried their own ‘imprint’ of Jacob’s sublime appreciation of Mary’s grace and calling within the divine economia. Each homily on Mary is prefaced with a fervent prayer to her Son.

The mystery of Mary expressed in the first Homily of Jacob of Serug sets the tone found in all his subsequent homilies that continue to extol her blessedness15:

* A wonderful discourse has now moved me to speak;  
  you who are discerning, lovingly incline the ear of the soul!  

* The story of Mary stirs in me, to show itself in wonder;  
  you wisely prepare your minds! ...  

* Second heaven, in whose womb the Lord of Heaven dwelt  

and shone forth from her to expel darkness from the lands.

Blessed of women, by whom the curse of the land was eradicated,  
and the sentence henceforth has come to an end...

Daughter of poor ones, who became mother of the Lord of Kings  
and gave riches to a needy world that it might live from Him!

Ship which bore treasure and blessings from the house of the Father  
and came and poured out riches on the destitute earth!

Good field which, without seed, gave a sheaf  
and grew a great yield while being unploughed.

Second Eve who generated Life among mortals  
and paid and rent asunder that bill of Eve her mother...

Virgin who without marital union marvelously became a mother,  
a mother who remained without change in her virginity...

Bride who conceived although the bridegroom had never been seen by her  
she gave birth to a baby without coming to the place of his Father...

The homily continues to marvel at the mystery of Mary. No words will ever succeed in exalting the ‘image of the fair one’ nor can they adequately recount her ‘story’ for the perfection of Mary’s humility is indescribable. Even the sun itself fails to radiate the glory of Mary; no mixture of earth’s pigments can capture her beauty.

Exceeding jubilation marks the moment when ‘a pure virgin and a fiery Watcher (the angel Gabriel) spoke with wonder and conversed with argument until they abolished the conflict between the Lord and Adam’. Great
wonder accompanies the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary gracing her with purity, limpidity\textsuperscript{16} and blessedness. The image of the ‘sealed letter’ of Isaiah 29:11-12 elicits meditaton on how Mary was ‘sent by the Father’:

*Mary appeared to us as a sealed letter in which were the mysteries of the Son and his depth.*

She gave her body as a clean sheet; the Word wrote his essence on it, corporeally...

*With her the Father sent us tidings full of good things and through her, forgiveness to all condemned for their bonds of sin.*

*Because of her, the way to Eden which had been blocked was opened.*

*Because of her, the Cherub had removed his lance that he might no longer guard the Tree of Life which offered itself to those who ate it.*\textsuperscript{17}

*She gave us a sweet fruit, full of life, that we might eat from it and live forever with God.*

Homily V concludes with an extended litany of praise and thanksgiving for Mary ‘the blessed one whose blessing is truly more sublime than the praises of the whole world’.

*In heaven, the Watchers; in the depths, man; in the air, glory:* when the Virgin Mary was buried as one deceased.

*Fiery seraphim surrounded the soul of the departed and raised the loud sound of their joyful shouts.*

*They shouted and said: ‘Lift up, O gates, all your heads, because the Mother of the King seeks to enter the bridal chamber of light.’*

As Mary is crowned, the homilist reminds us that Christ the King, crucified on Golgotha is the source of the mercy that we are calling upon her to request on our behalf.

As we have done earlier when considering Ephraem’s prayer for Mary’s intercession, we conclude by making our own, this prayer of Jacob of Serug with which he ended his discourse on the Mother of God:

*The name of Christ the King who was crucified on Golgotha, grants life and sheds forth mercy on the one who invokes him.*

*And also on me a sinner who is not capable of praising her, the Mother of mercy, who brought You forth in the flesh.*

*O Son of God, by her prayers make your peace to dwell in heaven, in the depths, and among the counsels of her [people].*

*Make wars to cease and remove trials and plagues; bestow calm and tranquility and calm on seafarers.*

*In your pity, drive out devils who harass mankind. and exalt your Church to the four quarters of the globe, that it may sing your praise.*\textsuperscript{18} 

Amen
NOTES

1. An Ephraem title for Mary; cf. reference 14 below.
2. Prayerful thoughts are with Syria’s ethnic religious minorities including Circassians, Kurds, Turks and Druze, Ishmaelis, all Orthodox, Eastern and Latin Catholics.
4. Latin, ‘ob’ an intensifier of ‘audire’, ‘to hear’.
8. Kathleen McVey, Ephrem the Syrian citing H. Nat., 9, 125.
10. Ibid., 144. Note that questions in the Church of the West concerning ‘Original Sin’ & the ‘Immaculate Conception’ of Mary did not pertain in the Syrian tradition.
12. Ibid., 145; H.Faith 6:17, 10:8.
17. ‘Lance’ in Syriac is the same as found in Jn 19:34 suggesting theological connections with the piercing of the side of Christ, the flow of blood and water and the sacraments of Baptism & Eucharist. Cf. Note 36, Jacob of Serug, On the Mother of God, 40.

After a two-hour meeting (21/11/13) with ten patriarchs of Eastern Catholic Churches and the Latin-rite patriarch of Jerusalem, Pope Francis prayed for peace and religious freedom throughout the Middle East.

Referring to himself, he said the ‘the Bishop of Rome will not be at peace as long as there are men and women—not of any religion—harmed of their dignity, deprived of what is necessary for their survival, robbed of their future or forced to become refugees.’ He added: ‘Let us make an appeal so that the right of everyone to a dignified life and to freely profess their faith is respected.’

Pope Francis listened to the patriarch of Jerusalem and the Coptic, Syrian, Melkite, Maronite, Chaldean and Armenian patriarchs testify to the perseverance of their faithful in the Middle East where often they are small minorities ‘in environments marked by hostility, conflict and even hidden persecution. At times, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and other areas of the Holy Land flow with tears…I will not resign myself to a Middle East without Christians’.

… (See CN Cath News 24/11/13)
RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM

What have I learnt from Other Churches?

GIDEON GOOSEN

IN THIS ARTICLE I wish to write about learning and ecumenism. However it is a learning from other churches rather than an academic learning about other churches. The things that I have learned and described below do not follow any structure as such. I simply asked myself: what are the things I have learnt from other churches? I have loosely gathered my spontaneous responses into topics which appear as the section headings.

I write as a Catholic who has been involved in ecumenism for fifty years—which on reflection seems quite a long time, but in the context of two thousand years of Christian history, not so long. I have learnt much about other churches and also my own, and well as from them. I have had the privilege of teaching courses on ecumenism at diocesan and university levels, of working on interchurch committees to settle refugees at the local parish level, of serving on diocesan commissions for ecumenism, of serving on ecumenical councils and I have had the privilege of listening to the wisdom of many speakers from other traditions. What follows are some of the main things I have learnt.

Problem solving and Authority

How do local churches decide practical things? I have been impressed with the local UCA who were confronted with the proposal to enlarge their church building. Some were against it, some were for it. Those against pointed out that the number of parish contributors was declining and the therefore the money was not there. The debate in their parish council went on for some time (years) and proved to be a very contentious and divisive issue. However they continued to discuss it over a number of years and then reached the decision that they should not proceed. A folding door was placed at the back of the church which, when opened, gave access to their hall and thus allowed for more people. So by extensive discussion and gathering much information, they were able to decide things. Not all churches proceed thus.

This way of proceeding has its disadvantages. One obvious one is that it takes too long. I recall one UCA person who was a minister in fact, lamenting that they were tired of many church Assemblies that couldn’t decide anything and that she longed for a pope-like figure that could make decisions which would stick. This shows the other side of the coin. Catholics sometimes complain that the pope or local bishop is too authoritarian. The actual issue was on the ordination of homosexuals which is proving such a difficult issue worldwide in all churches. Each system has its pros and cons and no system is perfect. We sometimes look for a perfect system, a perfect minister, a perfect congregation. They do not exist.

Allied to the issue of authority is that of structures. The UCA near where I live has often had no minister while they undertake the task of finding another one. What I have learnt is that they get on with the job of being Christian and day-to-day running of the parish. They have the infrastructure and everyone does his/her job. Catholics sometimes collapse in a heap if ‘Father’ is not there to tell them what to do. This is disappointing but real. It seems to me that the laity are more pro-active in many Protestant churches whereas Catholic laity, in spite of many fine statements in the Vatican II documents, about being collaborators with the clergy and having co-responsibility for the mission of the church, are often passive and
unengaged in the mission of the church. This is seen by the small percentage of parishioners active in parish life.

**Bible**

My Baptist friends are forever talking about bible study groups and obviously take the bible group very seriously. One Baptist who became a Catholic asked the parish priest if the priest would set up a Bible Study group with him, thinking this suggestion would be met with great enthusiasm. But alas, there was a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the parish priest which scandalized the erstwhile Baptist.

In another situation there was an ecumenical bible study group that I used to attend which discussed and prayed about the readings for the coming Sunday. There was much in common and much to discuss but sooner or later I noticed that the issue of literal understanding of the text came to the fore among some who attended. This can be ignored for some of the time but not all of the time. Basic questions about the composition of the gospels and hermeneutics have got to be faced. These issues need a separate and sustained course in biblical studies and cannot be dealt in passing within a bible study group such as we had.

Another biblical event was one that proved most popular. It occurred during the Year of St Paul. Representatives from three different Christian traditions, Baptist, Catholic, and Lutheran took as their topic a theme from St Paul which was particularly dear to their tradition. They spoke on the theme and why it was significant for their tradition. This ecumenical evening was particularly well attended and has convinced me that focusing on the bible is a very fruitful way to promote ecumenism.

**Commitment**

What I have learnt from the Baptists is that you are either one hundred percent in or you are out. You are either an ardent Christian or you are nothing. Like the author of the Apocalypse there is no room for lukewarm Christians.

However commitment comes is different ways. From observing some evangelical Anglicans I have learnt that it is not a good thing to be so narrowly focused on your own congregation, your own denomination, to the extent that you cannot look up and learn from someone else. An Anglican minister in fact warned his flock that they should not pay any attention to matters ecumenical and stay focused on Jesus. The ‘stay focused on Jesus’ part I support but surely all Christians are trying to focus on Jesus and may have something to teach us about how this can be done?

There is a disturbing presumption at work here and it is that there is only one way of doing things, MY way. This strikes me as not being adult thinking. On the other hand, in the context of ecumenical dialogues such as ARCIC, I know that the Vatican often demands that doctrine be expressed with their words and nothing else will do. Vatican thinking is however not necessarily the same as global Catholic thinking.

From a Presbyterian group I have learnt that it can be isolating and anti-growth to be so focused on one’s own group that one is fearful of contact with other Christians. Sometimes the minister wishes to cut off all contact with other Christians but in spite of his efforts there are always some who intuit this is wrong. (Female ministers seem more open to networking).
**Criticism of Catholicism.**

I have learnt from other Christians that my church often comes across as arrogant and superior. Often the declarations and utterances from Rome use language which supports this perception. *Dominus Jesus* was one such recent utterance. I myself now feel the same way too about my church. There needs to be more of the humility so characteristic of the gospels. There has been an understatement of the mystery of life and the false impression given that the Catholic Church has an answer for everything. An over emphasis on ‘correct’ doctrine (as in the Catechism) has led to an imbalance of the priorities in being a Christians. Other Christian churches, through their members, have given me a fair healthier perspective on the weaknesses of my own church.

Speaking about ‘correct doctrine’ makes me think of the Orthodox churches. The Greek Orthodox church and other Orthodox churches have stressed the importance of the Trinity as the centre of the Christian faith. Everything they do begins and ends with the Trinity. Often Catholics begin with Mary and end with Jesus. Are Orthodox and Catholics both Christians?

For those churches that have symbols, statues, paintings on the walls, how many refer to the Trinity and how many to saints, the Virgin, etc. The Christian faith is quintessentially Trinitarian but judging on what you see in some Christian churches you would not think that! I recall wandering in and out some Catholic churches in Dublin and how struck I was with the statues of Jesus and Mary. Likewise in Peru and Ecuador the emphasis was on Mary.

Because of their ecumenical history it is no surprise that UCA members seem more open to matters ecumenical than some members of other churches. I have learnt what a difference it makes when a church makes the restoration of Christian unity a main aim. It becomes part of the ethos or culture of the church.

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**Prayer**

From Pentecostals I have learnt that prayer can be used in the middle of a meeting to solve problems. However I think I personally would not do that.

From Protestants in general I have learnt how to pray and include everything in that prayer. While this means that prayers are very inclusive it also means they can go on and on! What I really appreciate about the evangelical and Pentecostal tradition is the ability to pray spontaneously. This is often done by relating all that one does in the day to prayer. In this way prayer can really flow from the heart. Catholics often have to dive into the missal for a written prayer.

One thing I did notice is that if one only uses spontaneous prayers one can slip into the danger of focusing only on one’s immediate needs and concerns to the detriment of the global picture, of the global church, of humanity. Prayer can, and should be, local and universal.

**Language can be a barrier.**

In ecumenical circles I have noticed how people have changed their language. I personally have learnt to use language from other denominations and concepts. I have noticed that people have begun to swap language. Words like priest, presbytery, sacrament, went out, and minister, pastor, bible study, manse came in. Now a more balanced view of using the appropriate language for the occasion is used. There is a certain arrogance in using my terminology and presuming that everyone else should know what I mean.

**Common Problems**

Problems are often across the denominations, not denomination-specific. All churches tend to have scandals involving the minister/priest; all have congregations where unity is sometimes shattered. Unfortunately the struggle for
unity has been there from the time of St Paul, and seems to be a never-ending problem. Some ministers/priests do not have the necessary skills for conflict resolution. In fact I would say most do not.

Issues can often divide. Presently the burning issues are the ordination of women, the ordination of homosexuals, the understanding of homosexuality. The last of these issues is so explosive I note that ecumenically we keep off it so as not to start an almighty row. Married clergy is not a universal issue as the Orthodox have married clergy, as do many Protestant churches and so do some rites within the Catholic church such as the Maronite and Melkite rites. This latter is one of the best kept secrets in the western Latin (Catholic) rite although with more and more Anglican married priests becoming Catholic married priests, questions are being asked.

Speaking of conflict raises the issues of how churches handle conflict. I have learnt that some churches like the Anglicans are prepared to put it all out in the open as they have done with the ordination of women and the issue of practicing homosexuals. This enables the issue to be debated frankly and in full exposing all points of view. This can be messy and time-consuming, but it is honest. My church on the other hand has had the culture of banning some controversial issues, perhaps in the hope that they will go away. I am always amazed to think that Pope John Paul II try to ban the discussion of the ordination of women. Did he really think that educated western Catholics would accept that? Catholicism needs a theory of conflict and their leaders, global and local, need to learn the skills of handling differences.

**Interchurch committees**

It is always good to hear other opinions. By working together on interchurch committees many false assumptions are corrected and new friendships are made. Accurate information about other denominations is obtained. However one quickly realizes that not all Christians are passionate about the restoration of Christian unity. Unfortunately the non co-operation of ministers is still a big problem. On the other hand some Christians that one encounters are so impressive with their commitment, their dedication, their selflessness, their immersion in the bible, that one feels inferior in this respect.

Rubbing shoulders with other Christians it is clear that some churches have not considered interfaith issue like the salvation of other Hindus, Moslems, and Buddhists, for example. There is often a lack of a theology of other faiths. In this respect it helps to have departments or commissions that think about these things, like the decasteries (departments) in Rome which then present the ideas to all the faithful. churches which lack this kind of infrastructure miss out I feel.

As I have said, I have learnt much about my own church, the Catholic church. It did not take long to work out that not many priests were enthusiastic about ecumenism. Quite a few spoke about it in a supportive way but did nothing. I learnt that ministers of religion, and that includes priests, were the biggest obstacle to ecumenism. Observing what was happening around me it was clear that where the priest was very active in ecumenism, much could be achieved, like covenants among a number of churches.

In fairness to priests and ministers of religion, being involved in ecumenism often looks like yet another duty to address in an already heavy workload. In the same way as social justice could be seen, not as an extra thing to do, but instead as a dimension to all we do, so too, I believe, ecumenism should be a dimension to all we do, rather than an add-on. The paradox is that ministers have said that being involved ecumenically lightened their load rather than the opposite.

I also learnt that Catholic bishops often did all the correct things, like set up a commission for ecumenism but did not actually engage in ecumenical events much. Very few bishops actually attended meetings of ecu-
menical councils. I got the impression that as long as there was a commission and the bishop could include that in his report to Rome, that was all that needed to be done. On the other hand, where the bishops actively supported ecumenical events, the movement made great strides. There is an experiential side to ecumenism which is essential for its success. It involves meeting people from another church. Church representatives on dialogues have spoken of friendships formed at these meetings over days. There is no substitute for this experience. Its absence explains a lot of indifference regarding ecumenism.

My analysis of the issue is that there is a power game occurring here. Any move towards equality with other churches might mean a diminution in the power of the local priest or bishop. There is an element of giving up something in pursuing the restoration of Christian unity, a requirement to be humble and willingness to change one’s thinking. This I think is the challenge that many in authority instinctively avoid. The Oriental churches came to an agreement of Christology some years ago. This was the only thing separating them, but have they re-united? No. Why? I think it is the issue of what they may be asked to give up for this unity. Unless the seed falling to the ground dies ... If two Oriental churches unite which one will provide the bishop? Not many bishops willingly step down. Not many popes retire!! To come back to the point: the power game is obvious and extremely deleterious to ministry. One bishop I know says: power is poison to ministry. How true that is if I look across the problems in the Catholic church today.

Have you noticed that dialogues between Christian churches often make some progress and then come to a halt because neither party is prepared to take a risk with the next step? Should we share ministers? Should we share the Eucharist? Should we recognize each other’s ministry? Churches are inclined to favour their own safety house.

Likewise I have learnt that many of the laity in my church see no need to ‘fraternize’ with Protestants. There is a reluctance to go out and meet other Christians which is what practical ecumenism requires. They think they have all the truth available so why bother with meeting members of other churches? If the other churches want to join us, that is fine. This back-to-Rome attitude is still very prevalent and there is very little I have heard from the pulpit to make Catholic folk think otherwise. Most people in the pews see no convincing rationale for ecumenism.

Let me cite an incident which has remained vivid in my memory. It relates to going out and meeting Protestants. Many years ago I met the priest who was in charge of ecumenism for a diocese. On talking to him he said the important things about ecumenism is to pray for the restoration of unity. Prayer was essential. No mention of action. I thought this strange. I was aware of the mention of spiritual ecumenism in the Vatican II document, Redingregratio unitatis, but always felt that what I would stress with Catholics was: go out and meet a Protestant! That action would set many things in motion. I feel that many Catholic hierarchs think all they have to do is pray and the rest will follow. I see it differently.

Popes have had a huge impact as well. John XXIII and his enthusiasm for our separated brethren was a breath of fresh air. John Paul II had a great idea when he asked Protestants how the papacy could be changed in the way it operates. We have heard nothing about that project since. Benedict XVI, has made a big impact on the Orthodox churches we are told while disenchancing the Protestant churches with his Dominius Jesus. Pope Francis’ actions, on the other hand, are most encouraging for both ecumenism and interfaith dialogue.

These are some of the thoughts that go through my mind when I reflect on what I have learnt from other churches. My prayer now is that we may continue to learn from others as we work together ecumenically.
DEGREES OF MORAL IRRESPONSIBILITY: MORTAL SIN

BRIAN LEWIS

SIN, OR MORAL irresponsibility as failure to respond to the good of persons and ultimately to God, for the most part involves harm to human persons in themselves, in society or in their environment. God is offended because human persons made in his image are harmed (Lewis, ‘Sin as Failure to be Fully Responsible’, Compass 2013, Issue 3, pp. 14-18). The question was asked in that article whether too exclusive a focus on sin as offence against God while taking too little account of the relational dimension of harm to others has led to failure to recognise the reality and extent of sin today?

When the further issue of the degree of seriousness of sin is raised, a similar question could be asked: Do some people see serious sin where none really exists? Is it possible to feel guilty of grave offences that one has not in fact committed?

Clearly not all sin is equally serious, because lack of responsibility can range from some minor fault to an action that is gravely harmful to persons. The degree of seriousness of sin depends on the harm one intends to do and in fact does to human persons in themselves and in their relationships. This can range from a passing hurt to a completely irresponsible act that is totally dehumanizing and totally destructive of a human relationship.

Mortal and Venial Sin

The Christian tradition recognizes this progression in the seriousness of sin in its distinction, implicit in fact although not explicit in name in the New Testament, between mortal and venial sin. The names ‘mortal’ and ‘venial’ were in common use certainly by the time of St. Augustine, but the New Testament already distinguished the reality of so-called daily sins to which all are subject from those serious sins that exclude the person who commits them from the Kingdom of God, such as leading an immoral life, idolatry, adultery, pederasty, avarice and so on (1Cor 6:9f), and which also lead to exclusion from the community (1Cor 5:1-13).

Traditionally sin has been termed ‘mortal’ or ‘death-dealing’ when it is so serious as to destroy the new life of grace that Christ won for us upon the cross, a destruction that will, unless repented of, result in the loss of that divine life for ever. An irresponsible act (or omission) that does not destroy this life of grace is called reparable or venial sin. St. Thomas Aquinas compares sin in this respect to bodily diseases, many of which are curable, whereas some are incurable and hence lethal or mortal. So sins that are of themselves curable are called venial, whereas sins are called mortal since they are incurable of themselves and can be healed only by God restoring the life of grace (S. Theol. I-II, 88,1).

These distinctions do not go to the heart of the matter. St. Thomas tried to put his finger on the real basis of the distinction by discussing sin in the full sense as a turning away from God (S. Theol. I-II, 77,8). This turning away from God is not, however, a pure rejection. It is rather the result of a turning towards a substitute god, namely some created reality. This occurs in mortal sin. In venial sin, however, there is no turning away from God by
substituting some created thing; there is only an unwarranted grasping of creature comfort, a using of created reality in a way that cannot be referred to God. For this reason venial sin cannot be considered sin in the full meaning of the word. It is called sin only analogically.

According to St. Thomas, the basic difference between mortal and venial sin lies in the presence or absence of a turning away from God. God is of course not encountered, at least for the most part, directly. We encounter God through our fellows and our world. It is possible for us to refuse the obedience of faith in God by not recognizing or accepting our dependence on God for salvation. But we can also do this by being so enclosed in our own self-sufficiency as to refuse the claim God makes on us through our brothers and sisters in need. So turning away from God is not limited to destroying faith radically by a formal rejection of the truth of faith. What we destroy in turning away from God is love, whose primary act is love of our neighbour. What is sinful before God is in general that which conflicts with human wellbeing.

The notion of moral irresponsibility as refusal of creative response helps to illustrate the point. Mortal sin is death-dealing at root in regard to relationships, in terms of refusal to respond to the truth of living together in love. If this refusal reaches the point of being totally destructive of persons, personal life and personal relationships, it may well be called mortal sin.

The penitential practice of the early Church supports this perspective. Sin was seen as a community illness, for which penance was a community effort and reconciliation a community event, particularly in the Eucharistic celebration. When by the end of the 2nd century a form of public penance developed, it was intended only for those members of the Church who had gravely harmed the community and relationships within the community by apostasy, murder or adultery. It was not required that lesser sins be submitted to public penance, since they were not seen as posing such a threat to community peace and harmony. The analogy with human friendship perhaps makes the point simply. Just as not every offence ends a friendship, so not every sin overturns friendship with God.

**Conditions for Mortal Sin**

1. **Involvement of the person**

   In our moral tradition it has long been customary to set down three conditions for committing mortal sin: grave matter, full knowledge and full consent. The latter two conditions regarding knowledge and free consent refer to the involvement of the acting person in the action (omission) and are by far the most important consideration. Sin is the action of a person. Matter cannot sin. Only a person can do so.

   The guilt of moral irresponsibility or sin is incurred only when one consciously and freely involves the self in the action. We often do things in a state of distraction. We cause hurt to others without realizing what we are doing and without being at all involved in it. No doubt we should be more sensitive to the feelings of people about us, but at times this is simply beyond us. This may be a cause for concern but it is not a moral issue. Acts done inadvertently are not moral actions in any sense, and therefore they are not sinful. To be human or moral our actions must be the conscious and free seeking of some objective. Even here, as will be discussed shortly, there are degrees of personal engagement in what we do or fail to do.

   Some of the choices we make are superfi-
cial and do not engage us in our depth as persons, but there are decisions in life, such as the choice to marry a certain person, when the decision made is central to the direction of our life and the person we thus commit ourselves to be. There are critical decisions in life which structure our personality and link together in a meaningful pattern the various choices we subsequently make. The behavioural sciences have analyzed these critical decisions and processes in terms like ‘the crises of life’, ‘stages of development’ and ‘the search for meaning’. We need to take account of these ideas and incorporate them into our attempts to reflect on the moral life and failures in it.

St. Thomas thought that on reaching the age of discretion a person makes a fundamental decision which determines her/his stance for or against the Truth and the Good, and implicitly at least for or against God. The decision for good, made with the aid of God’s grace, is the commitment of the person to love. The decision for evil, which is of course not sought as such but perceived under the guise of good, is mortal sin, because one fails to do what is in her/his power to do (S. Theol. I-II, 89,6).

The behavioural sciences today make us wary about identifying the moment of moral maturity with the age of discretion (as St. Thomas did). Some perhaps never become morally mature and in the case of those who do there are probably many peripheral good or bad choices that lead up to the self-determining commitment to good or evil, a commitment for or against God. But it cannot be doubted that moral maturity demands a commitment(s) that gives meaning, consistency and direction to a person’s life, that integrates not only one’s choices but also one’s attitudes, desires, expectations and aspirations.

All this boils down to saying that in the choices we make we determine the sort of person we become. Having freedom, we can commit ourselves to be either loving or self-centred persons. If the commitment is to the former it will be morally good and for God. If the commitment is to the self as the be-all and end-all of existence it will be morally bad and in religious terms mortal sin, separating the person from God and from the true human fulfillment planned for us by God.

A free self-determination that involves launching oneself on such a path, a very deep and free decision for evil, is difficult to contemplate, no doubt because we find it next to impossible to plumb the depths of human sin and evil, but, whether and to what extent such a terrible thing in fact occurs, our Christian tradition at least warns us of its frightening possibility and of its implications for a person’s life and destiny. Mortal sin is not something that happens to a person by accident nor is it something we ‘fall into’.

We are not suggesting that everything a person committed to good choices to do is loving. Many acts of selfishness, impatience, meanness, sloth, may be anything but loving, but one may not invest much of oneself in them or at least not engage the self in such a way as to overturn one’s basic commitment. Faults of this kind are traditionally called venial sins. Nor is it suggested that everything a person inordinately committed to self does is bad. There may be many acts of quite unselfish behaviour that will not so involve the person as to change his/her fundamental self-determination or general direction of life.

It is worth noting that the awareness obviously required for us to determine ourselves in a particular direction is not the speculative knowledge about the rightness or wrongness of some acts, such as we might get from a teacher or a catechism, but our personal realization of the morality of the whole issue. This kind of awareness is called evaluative knowledge. It has particular relevance for the part the matter of an act might play in the difference between mortal and venial sin. What is important is less the objective assessment of the gravity of an action and more the perception that one has of this. If I do not perceive an action as serious, I am not likely to make any sort of fundamental commitment in doing
it. It would be a minor moral act, a venial sin.

The self-determination or personal commitment of which we have been talking must not be seen as definitive or irrevocable. It can be changed, for good or ill.

The Church has taken seriously the Lord’s call to repentance or change of heart and in season and out of season has preached the need for conversion. Conversion is most importantly religious in character, implying a turning to God revealed in Jesus, but it carries with it a demand for a change of moral direction as well.

Although in the history of the Church conversion in the sense of moral conversion seems to have sometimes occurred suddenly in one great spiritual and emotional surge, one would expect it to occur gradually over time and to include many lesser counter-thrusts against a life of sin before reaching the stage of a definitive commitment to God. In similar fashion a person committed to the good is not confirmed in this for all time. Theoretically it is possible for this to be changed in one act of self-disposal towards evil, where one is fully aware of what one is committing oneself to and yet freely does so (Reconciliation and Penance, 1984, n.223). However, it is much more likely that a person will set out on a gradual trajectory that will eventually lead to a final change of commitment. One does not easily set aside in a radical way one’s habitual moral attitudes, patterns of existence and practice.

A comparison often made in this context is with marriage breakdown. A relationship of this kind does not terminate all of a sudden or out of the blue. It occurs over time and involves a gradual falling out of love, accompanied no doubt by a developing pattern of bickering, infidelities of varying kinds and degrees, disillusionment and other alienations. There will normally come a point of decision where one or both partners must face either reconciliation or breakup, a choice to try again or formalize the growing rift.

So a person committed to the good, to living together with others in truth and love, will not in the normal course of events commit a mortal sin in one uncharacteristic act. A preparation for this will be laid down by a succession of moral faults which blur the conscience and lead to an increasing focus on the self as the centre and criterion of moral choice. As St. Thomas puts it, ‘While grace is lost by a mortal sin, yet grace is not usually lost so easily; a person in the state of grace does not find it quite so easy to turn from God because his whole orientation is towards him’ (De Veritate, 27, 1 ad 1).

2. Gravity of Matter

In past times the conditions for mortal sin were in practice reduced to the gravity of the matter of sin. Although the level of involvement of the person has never been completely overlooked, it must be said that in the past, for historical reasons that need not concern us here, too much emphasis tended to be placed on the first condition for mortal sin, namely grave matter. Lists of sins regarded as mortally sinful were drawn up by moralists and some of these found their way into Church documents, even Gaudium et Spes (nn.27, 51, 79-80). Such lists have their value, particularly from a juridical point of view, but they may give a false impression about sin and are certainly an over-simplification.

In a pluralistic society such as ours there is considerable divergence of opinion about what is to be considered morally evil, especially in the areas of personal morality. Older moralists realized that sometimes people do the wrong thing out of ignorance and in good faith but they considered this the exception rather than the rule. Such a viewpoint was based on the idea that there is a moral order that is basically stable and readily recognizable by all, at least in broad outline. There was for them a presumption in favour of wrongdoing being sin in the proper sense of the word. Today we cannot be so sure. The old certainties have gone and disagreement about quite fundamental moral issues, for example, abor-
tion, euthanasia or same-sex relations, for instance, is a fact of everyday experience.

Whatever about this, the categorization of actions as mortally sinful without examination of the attitudes and stances whence they derive leaves the inner meaning of sin as refusal of creative response to basic human values unresolved. Anger, for instance, may be due to a fit of passion, the result of an impulsive temperament, the habitual pattern of discourtesy towards people, or the conscious refusal to be loving towards one’s neighbour. A much deeper analysis of the way in which our actions affect our relationship with others and so with God is required, rather than a mere external labelling of actions. As already pointed out, matter does not sin. The decisive issue is the engagement of the self in the action.

However, the matter or object of the action is still important. It can be a sign or an indication of the depth of personal involvement. If the matter is slight it is not likely that we would be very much involved in it. If on the other hand it is serious and perceived as such the more likely it is that a person would be deeply involved in it.

We have to keep in mind that because of the limitations on human freedom it is not possible to be sure whether or not anyone has in fact committed mortal sin. We cannot be sure even in our own case. The most we can expect to have is some sort of presumption.

A person who finds him/herself regularly committing sin in a serious matter may well presume that such a pattern of moral life argues to a determination of the self against the good and therefore implicitly against God. The frequency of the sin could hardly occur without a change in one’s basic commitment to the good. On the other hand, there would be a counter-presumption in the case of one who is genuinely sorry for the sin committed and who continues to struggle against its recurrence (Häring, Free and Faithful, 1981, 215).

A second situation in which a presumption of mortal sin might be made concerns the matter of the sin, even when there is no recurrent pattern. If the matter is grave one might well presume that one’s self-determination to evil is involved. If it is slight a presumption might reasonably be made that this is not so. Hence even in a particular act a presumption about the gravity of one’s personal involvement, and so of the gravity of the sin, is possible.

Clearly then, although in theory grave matter is not an indispensable requirement for mortal sin, its presence or absence is generally in practice a sign of mortal sin. The Church is of course quite justified in drawing up lists of mortal sins and using them in her preaching and teaching, since behaviour of this kind is likely to engage people in self-centredness and evil in a very radical way and so to be mortally sinful.

To sum up, in the last analysis it is not a listing of grave matters that is important but the degree of personal involvement in one’s acts. If the personal involvement in a conscious and free choice is so deep as to constitute the determination of the self towards evil, one incurs the guilt of mortal sin. If, however, one’s involvement in the action is not at this deep level one does not commit mortal sin, even if the matter is grave. Even when moral disvalues, maybe serious ones, are in question, it is possible not to be engaged at any deep personal level, because of psychological or similar factors (Veritatis Splendor, 1993, n.70).

A clear understanding of this distinction will rule out the temptation some people have to see grave sin everywhere. The indispensable yardstick in determining guilt regarding the harm one has done to persons, and so the offence against God, the sin, must always be the degree of personal involvement in the action (omission), not the gravity of the matter.

REFERENCES


‘DEEP CHANGE OR SLOW DEATH’
Johannine Critique and Ignatian Resolution

FERGUS J. KING

‘Deep change or slow death’ has been adopted by writers on both Christian spirituality and church leadership. This paper suggests that the Gospel according to John sets out an understanding of death and its relationship to change which is markedly different from the ‘deep change’ paradigm. It further suggests that the re-appropriation of a traditional Christian spirituality, that of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, offers the possibility of achieving the desired outcomes of ‘deep change’ within a Christian framework.

It may have taken some time, but the incorporation of management studies into church life and practice is increasingly accepted: an increasing array of resources is available for those interested in the field. Part of this cross-disciplinary fertilisation includes the writing of Robert E. Quinn, the Margaret Elliott Tracey professor at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business. His book *Deep Change* has become increasingly influential not least because of the maxim, ‘deep change or slow death’. It describes the significant degree of change which institutions and individuals may need to undergo to avert decline or stagnation:

The process of deep change differs from incremental change in that it requires new ways of thinking and behaving. It is change that is major in scope, discontinuous with the past and generally irreversible. The deep change effort distorts existing patterns of action and involves taking risks. Deep change means surrendering control.

Quinn’s theories have been appropriated by writers on psychology, and found its way into discussions about leadership within the church, at both personal and institutional levels. Yet it may be worth pausing to reflect on whether the phrase, although initially enticing, may actually be at odds with Christian thinking, and promote a different set of values. While some argue that there is a great correspondence between the theories of modern business and church practice, this cannot be simply assumed in every case. Work is needed to ensure that the gap between the worlds of church and business is bridged effectively. The adoption of phrases or terms from non-Christian traditions is no novelty (we need only think of the patristic and medieval use of Platonic and Aristotelian categories), but history shows that they can distort what they are meant to explicate: for some, the use of Platonic categories led to a distortion of the gospel.

‘Deep change or slow death’ raises precisely such issues in considering the applicability of management theory. Whilst neither disputing the need for change, nor, indeed, change at a significant or deep level in both individual and institutional behaviour, the phrase itself raises issues which are contrary to those found in a core Christian text, namely the Gospel according to John. For ‘deep change or slow death’, by its own internal logic, embraces three claims: first, that death may be avoided, second, that death is not desirable, and, third, that change and death are
mutually exclusive. The adjectives, after all, serve only to reinforce a basic choice: change or die. The hope of avoiding death through change panders to a long-held Christian tendency, with the added irony that this occurs within a faith which claims that death is not an end (e.g., Romans 8:38-39). The maxim may serve to perpetuate rather than eradicate such a false hope. A study of John offers an alternative configuration of change and death.

**John and the Inevitability of Death**

Whilst ‘Deep change or slow death’ implies that death may be avoided (by change), John has no truck with such ideas, stressing the inevitability of death as a physiological process. Four episodes in the narrative support this claim. The first of these comes from the controversy in the Temple at the feast of Booths. The others come from more eirenic narratives, often with those identified as disciples; the Lazarus narrative (John 11:1-44) and two from the epilogue (John 21): the exchanges with Peter (21:15-19) and the Beloved Disciple (21:20-24).

In John 8:21, 24, at the beginning of an angry exchange, Jesus argues with his opponents that they will die in their sin. In so doing, he is challenging the fullness of their faith and practice, and suggesting that it is inadequate. The exchange which follows is hyped up by the polemic style of the day. The exchange shows that even the paragons of faith are subject to the inevitability of death. Jesus uses the question of descent, citing his opponents’ reference to Abraham as their spiritual and physical ancestor (8:39-47). Jesus adds a further identification, bitterly arguing that their true ancestor is the devil (8:44). However, the sting is in the tail. Even if their claim to be descendants of Abraham is conceded by Jesus (8:37, 56), their death would still be inevitable. For in John 8:53, the facts are put bluntly by the opponents themselves: ‘Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died.’ In attempting to remind Jesus of his own susceptibility to death, a point which he would not argue (3:14), they have unwittingly pointed to their own mortality. By their own admission, Jesus’ opponents, who cannot claim to be superior to ancestors like the patriarchs and prophets, given that this is precisely the charge they are bringing against Jesus, must concede that they too will die. The claim that Abraham saw Jesus’ day does not soften what is going on by referring to his post-mortem existence: the passage may have the sense of foreseeing, anticipating, or being given a vision before death. The second, and most detailed discussion is found in John 11 which recounts the raising of Lazarus, and a number of significant dialogues. These touch on the place of death. The first would seem to imply that death is illusory but this is not so. Death is neither an end, nor dissolution (11:4); rather it leads to God’s glory. The verse does not say that death is avoidable.

The dialogue with the disciples, as Jesus prepares to travel, stresses the reality of death: the language of sleep is a euphemism, death is a fact (11:13-14). The dialogue with Martha continues to explore the theme that death may be avoided: she thinks that the presence of Jesus, a known healer, would have prevented her brother’s death (11:21). Jesus’ reply does not address this hope, but turns the focus to resurrection: that death is not an end, but is followed by a further stage. This question is repeated in the dialogue with Mary (11:32).

The earlier answer is not repeated. Instead, Jesus asks to be taken to the tomb (11:35). The pious hope that would deny death is countered
by the literal, physical reality. The conversation with Martha at the tomb will re-iterate this: he has been in there for four days and stinks (11:39). Like it or not, social niceties force Martha to acknowledge verbally the reality of her brother’s death.

The theme of denial is continued in the dialogue with the Jews, but now with a critical edge (11:37). Both the conversation with Mary and that with the Jews provoke strong emotional responses from Jesus (11:33, 38). While traditionally these responses have been taken to indicate Jesus’ grief, something else is more likely to be going on. Jesus, after all, has already stated that death is not as people usually understand (11:4), but for the glory of God, and the actions to come will confirm this (11:41-44). It makes no sense, given Jesus’ awareness and understanding of what is going on, for him to weep for Lazarus in the conventional way of a mourner. On the other hand, it does make complete sense for him to be greatly disturbed in the sense of being disagreeable, it does make complete sense for him to present the writer as denying this account, but in allowing himself to die. What presents the writer as denying this account, and, in so doing, re-iterating the inevitability of his own death, unless preceded by the eschatological coming of Jesus (21:23). The text presents the writer as denying this account, and, in so doing, re-iterating the inevitability of his own death, unless preceded by the eschatological coming of Jesus (21:23). Should that coming be delayed, the death of the Beloved Disciple in no way indicates any failure of God’s plan.

These episodes serve to illustrate the inevitability of death as a physiological fact. As such, they indicate that approaches to life and behaviour which would claim to avoid death are alien to John. The astute reader will note that so far the discussion has not touched on the death of Jesus. John will stress the certainty or reality of Jesus’ death, quite likely as a response to Docetic interpretations of his life and death, but takes great pains to emphasise that Jesus’ death is something which he chooses to accept. His death is better explored for what it reveals about the desirability of death.

John and the Desirability of Death

‘Deep change or slow death’ makes it very clear that death is something to be avoided: it gives every impression of making this an ab-
absolute value. John, on the other hand, takes a very different view of death in regard to Jesus. If Jesus is truly human, it is inevitable that he will die: this claim is even made by those who claim that his tomb has been found, in Palestine, RozaBal in India, or Shingô in Japan. However, John makes it clear that Jesus is no puppet, the powerless victim of either circumstance or some theological necessity. John’s Jesus is always in control of his own destiny (6:15; 7:8; 8:20, 59; 10:39; 12:27; 13:27; 16:32; 17:1; 18:11, 36; 19:11).

Because of this we may say that Jesus desires death, not in the sense of actively seeking it, but in allowing himself to die. What makes him do this is his love for, and obedience to, the Father. These provide the absolutes in John’s gospel, and death is relativised. Death is desirable to the extent that it is the way in which God may be obeyed, and love lived out in that obedience. In ethical terms, we might say that doing the Father’s will is the absolute and makes death into an adiaphora, something which has no intrinsic value, good or bad, in itself. This means that death is not to be sought in its own right as a good, or avoided as an evil.

This attitude is most clearly seen in the parable of the grain of wheat (12:24-26). Although this is likely a proverb37, it is also presented as an example of parrhesia (frank speech) introduced by the phrase, ‘Very truly, I tell you’ (12:24 NRSV). Frank speech, stripped of rhetorical flourishes, expresses core beliefs, truths stripped of all adornments38. The nature of Hebrew mashal, which includes proverbs, also suggests it be read as a commentary on the action around it39: Jesus is talking of what will befall himself and his followers,40 not just making a general utterance. Death becomes not only necessary,41 but desirable because of its linked behaviour (love— 3:16) and consequences (eternal life— 3:16, 15:25).42 Given that John’s gospel invites both the historical disciples and its audience to enter into a right relationship with God by imitation of Jesus’ example, death is something which is not to be avoided, but which is desirable in the right circumstances, or with the right motivation. That motivation is not the instinct of the individual for self-preservation, but the glorifying of the Father.

**John, Change and Death**

‘Deep change or slow death’ views change and death as mutually exclusive. John’s Gospel links change and death intimately. Instead of death as disaster, it is the point at which change becomes truly transformative and life-giving. Nowhere is this clearer than in John’s account of Jesus’ death. Being ‘raised up’ embraces both the raising of crucifixion and glorification43: it is a life giving event which brings salvation (3:14-16).44 In John, death, resurrection, ascension and giving of the Spirit (Pentecost) all are contained prophetically within the Crucifixion: ‘it is finished’ (19:30—NRSV) is not a cry of despair or resignation, but of triumph45, even of fulfilment46. Jesus does not just die on the Cross: ‘gave up his spirit’ (19:30—NRSV) implies death, but also means ‘passed on his Spirit’47. Such dying, in conformity to the Father’s will, gives life to others as well as self. In John’s gospel we are given a picture of change and transformation in which death is the gateway to life, that is, eternal life (3:15), something considered superior to this level of existence.

The later example of Peter (21:15-19) provides a reminder, in the starkest sense, that the way of the Messiah is also the way of the disciple. But there is an additional outcome. While the one who dies in this way gains eternal life, death also contributes to the glorifying of the Father (17:1-5).

‘Glorifying’ is one of those church-y words which may be used without really considering what it means; it implies the recognition and acknowledgement of God’s rightful place in relation to the world, and living out the respect that it entails in obedience to both his plans and his nature. This marks a further difference from ‘slow death or deep change’
whose aims and objectives do not necessarily contain this dimension of glorifying another (to use the Johannine terminology), but are concerned solely with the results achieved by the one who is changing: there is nothing to prevent ‘deep change’ occurring in a very different worldview or context, even a theological vacuum. This is impossible in the Johannine dispensation which must be played out in the context of the relationships made between the Father, Christ, the Spirit and the disciple.

In contrast to ‘deep change or slow death’ John offers a picture in which ‘Change is death is life’. It is completely at odds with the conventional wisdom of the world, but profoundly Christocentric. It further embraces the consequence of glorifying another (God) as an objective rather than one’s own continued existence or presence, a factor which is absent from the deep change paradigm. John puts forward a teleology with a markedly different emphasis.

**Moving Beyond ‘Deep Change’**

If ‘deep change’, or its equivalent, is to be effected, the Johannine dispensation indicates that it needs to be done through death, rather than by avoiding it.

It is appropriate at this point to note a concern voiced many years ago by Thomas C. Oden in a study of pastoral care: he found that modern writing had come to dominate the field, and that the riches of Christian pastoral tradition had been almost completely discarded. Following his lead, it is worth asking if there are older Christian practices which might allow the goal of deep change without the avoidance of death.

A study of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, The Path of Interior Knowledge by Parmananda R. Divarkar, suggests that there is indeed such a resource. The value of his study lies in its interpretation of the exercises in light of modern psychology. The Path also, and this is significant for our concerns, includes much reflection on John and particularly the implications of the Farewell Discourses (13:1-17:26) for discipleship. Divarkar is not alone in finding parallels between John and Ignatius. David Stanley notes that both

...make the startling pledge of leading the believer to the life-giving experience of intimacy with the tri-personal God through the contemplation of selected narratives of the life of Jesus.

Indeed, they share a desire to ‘seek the will of God’, a phrase found only in John 5:30 in the whole New Testament.

As the First Annotation puts it, The Exercises are meant to guide the exercitant:

...to rid oneself of all inordinate affections, and being so rid to seek and find the divine will in the ordering of one’s life for the salvation of the soul.

Divarkar offers a translation of this into language and sentiments more appropriate to our own time:

...becoming aware of a deeper level of reality in oneself and of God’s presence and activity there, responding totally at that level, establishing oneself in that openness of attitude to God after the pattern of Christ, letting that openness permeate the whole of oneself, till one is wholly responsive to the whole reality of God-to God as he really is.

Thus the Exercises share much with ‘deep change’: an identification of, and break with, old behaviour, radical change, and surrender to God’s will. However, where ‘deep change’ in its reduced form is necessarily self-centred and has no further considerations, the Exercises offer a theocentric approach to change, focussed on the other, not the self: it is the glorifying of God which is paramount. They offer an approach which allow the exercitant to focus on this end, by identifying her/his own inordinate attachments, a term which embraces

...not just sinful attachments but also certain rigidities of character, and a whole range of inhibitions and narrow ideas, including theological prejudices, that come in the way of a total
 openness to reality.\textsuperscript{55}

However, rejecting inordinate attachment is not simply to seek the opposite, but rather ‘an attachment liberated from the power of things, from the disorder introduced by their power’.\textsuperscript{56} The exercitant is intended to develop behaviour which intentionally focusses on the differences between personal wishes and preferences, and those of God, and opt for the latter. The First Annotation and the Meditation on the Two Standards\textsuperscript{57} are pivotal in this regard. The Two Standards demands significant change in attitude, priorities and orientation\textsuperscript{58}, or, in more traditional language, conversion, intended to bring the exercitant’s priorities into line with those of God:

Conversion in us means moving out of, or being torn out of one mind-set and being placed in another; the first is that of fallen human-ness, the second is divine.\textsuperscript{59}

The potential of the Exercises is not limited to effecting change in individual participants in directed retreats. The 18th, 19th and 20th Annotations\textsuperscript{60} offer flexibility in engaging with the Exercises: the 19th offers the possibility of this being done in everyday life, not just the confines of a structured retreat.\textsuperscript{61} The impact of Ignatius’ thinking is not, however, limited just to individual spirituality.\textsuperscript{62} A number of writers explore the potential for this in public life: Elizabeth Liebert sets out a process for social discernment within postmodern contexts.\textsuperscript{63} Elinor Shea the application of the Exercises to social consciousness,\textsuperscript{64} John Veltri the social and communal dimensions of the 1st Annotation,\textsuperscript{65} and Gerard W. Hughes a fictional depiction of the Exercises in an everyday group setting.\textsuperscript{66} The Exercises offer the possibility of change in individual, corporate and institutional life.

The net effect, which in Divarkar’s presentation focusses on the events around Jesus’ death, are essentially identical to those envisioned by ‘deep change’ in breaking with addictive, damaging and compulsive behaviours to provoke the radical transformation of both individuals or institutions. Both are asked to break from their inordinate attachments in their behaviour. Planning and praxis are re-oriented towards the glorifying of God, not just the potential benefit to the individual or the institution—benefits which may remain ultimately self-serving. Indeed, they demand that personal gain or preference be put aside. It is worth asking whether the potentially self-centred teleology of ‘deep change or slow death’ might not ultimately undermine its own programme, as well as whether its avoidance of death is a significant misdirection.

Instead of changing to avoid death, change comes by embracing death, dying to self and being transformed by the process. Such views find a rich and unique expression in the parable of the grain of wheat (John 12:24):

Following Jesus in death in order to share also in his victory and his perfection sets the Christian message apart from all myth.\textsuperscript{67}

To which we might add, ‘even that of deep change’.

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16 I am grateful to Bishop Brian Farran, the retired bishop of the Anglican Diocese on Newcastle, for pointing out the significance of John 8 to the discussion of ‘deep change or slow death’, though he would reach very different conclusions about the value of ‘deep change or slow death’ from the reading presented within these pages.
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THE NEW ATHEISM

Some pre-history

BARRY BRUNDELL MSC

There is a strange and misplaced triumphalism in the writings of the new atheists. There is certainly no reason for Christians to feel besieged or needing to go on the defensive.

The aggressive atheism that we hear so loud and clear today has a long pre-history.

In the beginning, in the early centuries and in the medieval universities theology was ‘Queen of the Sciences’ and philosophy and natural philosophy (which later became the natural sciences) were ‘Handmaids of Theology’.

God wrote two books, it was stated, the book of Sacred Scripture and the book of Nature. Since God was the Author of both books, there were no contradictions to be found between what was written in each book.

From a literal interpretation of Scripture it was calculated that the world was created in the year 4004 BC, and that creation occurred over a period of six days, all living species being created separately—living species were fixed, not evolving.

The Copernican Theory

The first sign of possible contradictions between the two books was the emergence of a new astronomical theory. Through most of the Christian era, since the second century A.D., everyone had lived with the geocentric astronomical system that the Alexandrine astronomer and mathematician Claudius Ptolemaeus (ca.100-170)—known as Ptolemy—expounded in his treatise The Almagest. Incorporating the main themes of Aristotelian physics and cosmology, Ptolemy devised an astronomical system in which the Earth is motionless in the centre of the universe while the Sun, stars and planets all circle around it and are carried in uniform circular motion on crystalline spheres. The planets have their own individual spheres, while all the stars are fixed to one great sphere, the sphere of the ‘fixed stars’. This system was assumed without question in the Aristotelian/Thomistic theological tradition which became quasi-normative in the Catholic Church in the period following the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

Nicolai Copernicus (1473-1543), a canon of the Cathedral of Frauenburg in Poland, decided that there had to be a simpler system. He decided to abandon geocentrism; he put the Sun at the centre of the universe and set the Earth in circular motion around the Sun along with the planets and fixed stars. This allowed a new and a much more simple explanation of the apparent movements of the heavenly bodies. No longer was it necessary to hypothesise ad hoc the complicated apparatus required in the Ptolemaic system. Copernicus published the full account of his system in On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres (De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium libri sex), 1543. He dedicated the treatise to Pope Paul III.

This astronomical innovation was to have far-reaching implications. If one were to take Copernicus’ astronomical theory as a statement of the way things really are in the universe, then Copernicus had removed the Earth from its central place in the universe, he had set it in motion.

They took some time in coming—about seventy years—but objections were inevitable. The basic unease was well expressed by John Donne, English divine and poet, in his 1611
poem entitled ‘The Anatomy of the World’:
... new Philosophy calls all in doubt, ...
‘Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;
All just supply, and all Relation....’

Robert Burton, another Anglican clergyman, was less the philosopher and more the disgruntled populist in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). He wrote:
The World is tossed in a blanket amongst them, they hoist the Earth up and down like a ball, make it stand and go at their pleasures. (Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, as quoted in Heninger 1977, 58.)

In the eyes of the normal educated person the theory was preposterous. Common sense, the popular world view, Aristotelian philosophy and the Ptolemaic system all harmonised beautifully; the Copernican system on the other hand was in conflict with every one of these other sources of ‘truth’, and, most significantly, was in conflict with the literal interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

**SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTIONS**

**‘Common Sense’:**
The Copernican theory taken as a picture of the real contradicted the plain evidence of the senses: the Sun rises and sets, the stars circle in the heavens from east to west, and the Earth does not move!

**Traditional Theoretical Objections**
How explain why, if the Earth is in motion, when an object is dropped from the top of a tower it invariably lands at the foot of the tower: we would expect it to land at a distance.

If the Earth is in movement, how is it that loose objects do not fly off?

If the Earth is moving, especially if it is moving at the rate that the Copernican theory requires, and if I jump in the direction opposed to the movement of the Earth, towards the east, I should jump much further than when I jump in the same direction as the movement of the Earth, towards the west. Likewise, if I fire a cannon in an easterly direction the ball should travel much further than if I fire in a westerly direction.

If the Earth is moving as fast as the Copernican theory requires, why are we not feeling a tremendous gale, and why is the flight of birds not affected?

(These objections had been answered in the middle ages by Nicholas Oresme (1320-1382); Copernicus himself answered them; so did Galileo in his *Dialogue*. They were hard to lay to rest.)

**Cultural and Religious Objections:**
The popular world-view harmonised with Ptolemaic astronomy, Aristotelian philosophy and especially the Christian theological doctrines of the dignity and role of the human race in the whole of Creation as explained at that time. The Earth is the dwelling-place of the human race. It is at the centre of the universe, and humans are those very special beings who in Adam have been constituted head, steward and high priest of all creatures on the Earth (*Genesis* 1.26-31), and who are the link between the natural and the supernatural worlds, between the material and the spiritual worlds, who live for a short while on the Earth, and whose final and true home is in heaven. It was an ages-old synthesis based on very many obvious facts about the universe, and upon the conviction that the Earth is the theatre of the divine-human drama in which human beings must respond to their calling to know, love and
serve God here on Earth in order to be happy with him forever in Heaven. It supported a vision that was deeply implanted in the human psyche and popular faith, in the architecture of the cathedrals, in systems of government and in the whole fabric of Christian medieval civilisation.

Copernican astronomy, if taken literally, threatened that harmony of science, philosophy, theology and the accepted world-view at every point. It did violence to the human psyche. It was a huge task, therefore, to try to convince people that the Earth moves and is merely one of the planets circling the Sun. You would need some very convincing evidence, and even that would not be enough.

THE UNIVERSITIES

Aristotelian philosophy was the reigning philosophy in the Universities, and Ptolemaic astronomy was grafted onto it. The natural place for the Earth was the centre of the universe, the Earth being a heavy body which sought the lowest place, and there was no lower place in a spherical universe than the centre. The duality of earthly matter and heavenly matter in the Aristotelian universe, with one physics for the Earth and a different physics for the Heavens, harmonised with the Ptolemaic system but not with the Copernican. And this duality had ethical significance. On the Earth matter was earthy, all was transitory, changeable and changing, nothing was permanent or at rest, all was marked for decay and death. In the heavens (the super-lunary regions) all bodies were composed of celestial matter (the Aether); the heavens were the realm of eternity, perfection, immutability, stretching from the sphere of the Moon up to the highest heaven.

This two-tiered universe also corresponded to observation: the heavens never change, the heavenly bodies proceed on their perfectly circular courses with absolute regularity, their light never goes out. On Earth where humans live, everything is the reverse—changing, ir-

regular, transitory.

Scholars had a clear understanding that astronomical hypotheses did not attempt to present pictures of the real world. This was the traditional interpretation of astronomical theory from the time of the early Greeks until Copernicus. Astronomical theories were pure hypotheses ‘to save the appearances’—mathematical constructs, mere instruments for linking observations and predicting future phenomena (Duhem 1969). When astronomy was as complicated as was Ptolemaic astronomy, no one would have been tempted to think otherwise. Only in astrology was an explicit link made between astronomical theory and real life.

Because of a misleading anonymous preface (written in fact by his disciple Osiander) early readers of Copernicus’ treatise were given to understand that Copernicus was not intending his theory to be interpreted in any other way: it was no more than an abstract model of the universe and not to be understood as a true picture of the way things were. Osiander misrepresented Copernicus’ personal position.

CRACKS IN THE REIGNING
PTOLEMAIC/ARISTOTELIAN
SYNTHESIS

From the second half of the sixteenth century the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic/theology synthesis began to come under pressure. Astronomy was beginning to change under the impact of a renewed empirical approach together with the use of superior instruments and better methods of observation and recording. Cracks were beginning to show in the Aristotelian superstructure. The physics of Aristotle, both that of the earthly region and that of the heavenly, was under considerable pressure.

Comets had been observed in 1577, 1585 and again in 1618, and they were identified as super-lunary phenomena. New stars were observed—Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) had observed a Nova, or new star, in the constella-
tion Cassiopeia in 1572, and a Supernova was observed in 1604. These authoritative scientific observations contradicted the celestial physics of Aristotle by demonstrating that the heavens were not immutable, that the crystalline spheres were not solid and probably did not exist. And without the crystalline spheres some new way of keeping the heavenly bodies in place and travelling in their orbits needed to be found. But even so, these anomalies did not impose acceptance of Copernicanism as a true picture of the universe.

THE GALILEO AFFAIR

Then came Galileo onto the scene. He wanted to prove that the Copernican hypothesis was more than a system ‘to save the appearances’ but rather that it was a true picture of the universe. He had good evidence to support his claim, but not convincing evidence.

He turned his telescope onto the skies and reported his observations in the _The Sidereal Messenger_ (1610). The moon, he reported is not perfectly spherical, it has craters and is mountainous—it is like the earth, not a perfect ‘heavenly body’.

He observed that Jupiter has moons in orbit around it—does that not show that the Earth can be in orbit with the moon circling it without the moon being left behind?

In 1613 Galileo published his _Letters on Sunspots_—again, the Sun is a ‘heavenly body’ but is not perfect, unchanging and incorruptible, not made of special heavenly matter.

Galileo observed that Mars and Venus wax and wane, and Venus showed phases in a manner similar to the moon, indicating that Venus orbits the Sun and not the Earth.

Such telescopic evidence for the Copernican theory as a picture of the real was not so convincing to the general public, for whom telescopes were highly suspect instruments and vision was the least reliable of the senses. People distrusted the evidence of their eyes because the eyes were subject to illusions, to seeing strange effects that were not there in reality. Optical instruments were considered very untrustworthy, especially mirrors and lenses. They were used in magical side-shows to astound the populace with strange, weird and marvellous effects, showing objects and persons as deformed, enlarged, changed in colour, moving wrongly. Above all there was no theory of lenses and how they functioned.

In 1604, Kepler’s _Vitellionem Paralipomena_ laid the foundations for modern geometrical optics, but his work had little initial impact.

Galileo presented an argument from the phenomenon of the tides, an argument which he considered very probative. The traditional theory was that the tides were caused by the Moon. Even the great Kepler thought that!

Galileo claimed that the combined motions of the Earth, its rotation and its revolution which follow from the Copernican system, resulted in the ebb and flow of the seas that produced the tidal motions. Galileo was wrong, of course, and his reasoning seemed far-fetched. People were more ready to stay with the traditional explanation, though it was really not very good as an explanation at that time. It was Newton who showed that the traditional theory was correct, though for the wrong reasons.

Hence Galileo’s evidence was not as convincing to others as it was to himself.

Church Authorities Intervene

The Church authorities should have left Galileo to front up to philosophers who were wedded to the Ptolemaic system, and to the ordinary citizens who saw the sun rise and set and found absurd the notion of the earth hurtling through space and not leaving them behind or objects flying off, etc. His presentation of the Copernican theory as a picture of the real was just too incredible.

Besides, there was a compromise theory proposed by the great astronomer, Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), that was an alternative to both the Ptolemaic and the Copernican theories. It left the Earth motionless and presented
the Sun as circling the Earth and all the other heavenly bodies circling the Sun. This theory was orthodox, because it did not contradict the scriptures.

Unfortunately, however, instead of leaving Galileo to the mercy of the philosophers and the general public, the theologians and the Church authorities took the matter in hand and made it a dispute about the interpretation of Scripture. The essence of this objection was the claim that the immobility of the Earth and the movement of the Sun are truths taught by Scripture, specifically in Joshua 10:12-13; Ps 93:1; 104:5, 19; Ecclesiastes 1:4,5 (cf. 2Kg 20:8-11) and also Ps. 19:4b-6a.

The Holy Office formally ruled that it is heresy to hold that the Sun is the centre of the world and motionless, and that it is wrong and verging on heresy to claim that the Earth is not the centre of the world and that it moves. The De Revolutionibus of Nicolai Copernicus was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books ‘until corrected’. The reason why it was heretical, the judges of the Holy Office ruled, was that ‘it expressly contradicts the teachings of Sacred Scripture’, and for that reason it was incompatible with Christian doctrine.

Thus the scriptural objections were the formal reason for its rejection. That meant that the Copernican theory taken as a picture of the real became a heresy: it was condemned as heretical in what it stated about the Sun because it contradicted the teaching of Sacred Scripture, and as virtually heretical in what it stated about the Earth, because it was at least ‘erroneous in faith’.

The crisis as it was allowed to develop was fundamentally a struggle between two conflicting claims to cosmological knowledge. Between a cosmology that was claimed to be taught in the Bible and which was accepted in the same way that anything else taught in the Bible was accepted, and which was deeply ingrained in the world as everybody knew it, and a shockingly new cosmology that was unconvincingly claimed to be supported and imposed by natural science.

In the final judicial proceedings against Galileo the controversy was further reduced to one question, viz. whether or not the Copernican theory contradicted the Scriptures.

That, I believe, is where the church authorities bungled the Galileo Affair. A whole world-view was being dismantled and a fundamental cultural shift was in progress, and there was still much to be done in strengthening the scientific evidence. But the scriptural question was made to bear the whole load: it became the presenting problem while the many other more fundamental cultural factors, arguably the real reasons for objecting to the Copernican system, remained undeclared and shielded from scrutiny and critique. Debate was stifled.

Once the argument was reduced to an argument about the interpretation of scripture the inadequacies of Catholic theology were exposed and along with them the state of unreadiness of the Catholic church for the new scientific age which was dawning. Especially the theories of biblical inspiration available at the time were inadequate.

Cardinal Bellarmine, Galileo’s judge stated that it is forbidden to interpret Scripture in a way that contradicts the common interpretation of the Fathers of the church unless a true (i.e. certain) demonstration could be made that we need to re-interpret the Scriptures, and the Copernican theory is not so evidently true as to cause us to review the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures. Cardinal Bellarmine wrote:

I say that, when there is a true demonstration that the sun is in the centre of the world and the earth in the third heaven, and that the sun does not go round the earth but the earth round the sun, then we will need to proceed with great caution in explaining the Scripture passages which seem to be in contradiction and rather say that we do not understand them than say that what has been demonstrated is false. (Letter to Foscarini in Blackwell, pp.265-267.)

* * *

34
**Galileo ‘Martyr for Science’**

Galileo is commonly depicted as a tragic hero pitted against the powerful, despotic Catholic church institution, an enlightened man fighting for freedom of thought against organised, authoritarian and unenlightened theologians. Truth and intellectual freedom prevailed, according to this account, in spite of the efforts of the ecclesiastical bullies and bigots. There is hardly a more well-worn ‘truth’—or, rather, myth—in the whole of the history of the modern world than this interpretation of the Galileo Affair, but it is not the way things were.

At this point contemporary atheism was born, based largely on the belief that scientific explanations and theological explanations are in competition. True, there have been many instances down the centuries when scientific explanations have been found for phenomena that had been previously given religious explanations. This has been and still often is interpreted as a retreat by religion before the triumphal march of scientific progress. A whole school of historiography flourished at the turn of the twentieth century based on that interpretation of the history of the relations between religion and science. For example, William Draper wrote *The Warfare of Science and Theology*, in which he wrote the history of western society as one long battle for hearts and minds between religion (described as superstition) and reason.

This ‘warfare’ interpretation has been rejected by scholars (e.g. Brooke 1991). It seriously distorts the picture of the actual relations between science and religion down the ages.

In fact, the story of the relations between science and religion is of one poorly managed encounter—the Galileo Affair—and much more fruitful interaction between science and theology when other scientific developments were made. We aim to develop this theme in a future article.

**REFERENCES**

THE APPEAL TO REASON

NEIL BROWN

EVER SINCE THE Enlightenment, some three centuries ago, ‘reason’ has been a driving force for change and social betterment in the Western world. Whenever an appeal to ‘reason’ is made we immediately take notice because we think the real state of affairs is about to be uncovered. Yet ‘reason’ can be a weasel word, hiding more than it says, when, for example, it becomes a catchword, as it does when used by the New Atheists.

They misleadingly identify ‘reason’ with scientific or instrumental reasoning to the exclusion of its any other forms. In doing so they are using the guise of ‘reason’ to smuggle in a whole intellectual framework and agenda of their own.

The British philosopher, A. C. Grayling, while perhaps not the most colourful or best known of the New Atheists, has been arguably the most committed to establishing an alternative to religion, even publishing in 2011 The Good Book as an atheistic replica of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures. Recently he published The God Argument in which he reprises the modern arguments against theism and makes a case for ‘reason’ as the alternative to ‘faith’.

Grayling, like all the New Atheists, defines ‘reason’ in naturalistic terms, thus automatically disqualifying all religious claims:

The deliverances of common sense, practicality and science... are based on evidence gathered and vastly confirmed by experience, whereas the beliefs of various religions are untestable, inconsistent with each other, internally contradictory, and in conflict with the deliverances of common sense and science... If these claims have content they should be testable. Yet they are untestable, and at sharp odds with everything that science and common sense show us about the nature of reality.

Many believers, of course, see things differently; they are comfortable with the findings of genuine science, yet see that there is more to the universe and to human life than scientific methods are able to uncover. Their faith too they see as having its own testimony and evidence as they live it out.

This New Atheism version of ‘reason’, however, is not simply an expression of naturalism or scientism, but is camouflage for a radical Liberalism, which maximises individual freedom to the fullest extent compatible with the rights of other individuals to be free from ‘harm’. All else is to be left to personal preference and lifestyle choice, such as, in sexuality, drug use, pornography, abortion, and euthanasia.

The ideal good life, Grayling argues, might involve such things as a life that seems meaningful and purposeful, love and friendship, activity, honesty, authenticity, autonomy, integrity, and a felt quality of life from an aesthetic point of view. But whether or not such values are present depends entirely on individual preference. He asks ‘what would it add, to any of the above, to say that in addition to these considerations there is a deity or there are deities?’ His answer, unsurprisingly, is ‘nothing whatsoever’ because faith is not a legitimate form of reasoning. And, he adds, that his account ‘does not consist in a body of doctrines and prescriptions’ thus making it ‘as far from being like a religion as anything could be’. That is a very dubious claim, as we shall see.

‘Reason’ can’t be imprisoned in one only human purpose, namely scientific reasoning, no matter how successful and influential that purpose might be. Reason is as broad and multifaceted as human life itself is: we also seek relatedness, love, goodness, truth, faith,
beauty, music, art, literature, and a host of other interests, all of which require a different use of ‘reason’ from scientific experimentation.

Human beings use their ‘reason’ to find a way through a huge array of problems, needs, purposes, interests, values to live by, and practices. Much of this is means-to-end reasoning, with the criteria for success or failure provided by the particular end sought, e.g. if we play tennis we have some idea of what a ‘good’ tennis racquet is.

We can also reason about ends themselves, e.g. in choosing a profession: in such cases we examine the goal itself by specifying what it involves for us, how it fits with our other ends and values, what would count as achieving it, what it would exclude, and sorting out any real or apparent conflicts that emerge.8

In like manner, language skills, relationships, the arts, religion and culture generally, require us to immerse ourselves in them, to grow within them in ways we never fully understand, in order to learn, to exercise them, and to appreciate what they entail.9

By reducing ‘reasoning’ to means-to-end deliberation only the New Atheists exclude the real variety and richness of human reasoning and, even more significantly, disguise their own ends by doing so.

Nor does ‘reasoning’ exist in a vacuum, for as well as being something that individual human beings do in their own particular circumstances, it is also an ability constructed by culture and history. It emerges with language from particular intellectual and behavioural frameworks, so that much of what it contains consists of presuppositions, paradigms, unspoken rules, assemblies of values and traditions, which can never be made fully explicit, because the whole assemblage constitutes who we are.

There are degrees of personal involvement in reasoning as we can easily see in the variety of forms that reasoning takes: in science and technology, for example, it is curtailed to allow and safeguard ‘objectivity’, although it still demands the commitment, interest and honesty of the scientist or practitioner if it is to succeed. In most other areas of life, as in the arts or religion, it is the involvement itself that is crucial.

Each human purpose or practice has its criteria of success or failure embedded in it and will accordingly select its own relevant facts from the almost limitless array of features in the environment—the ‘facts’ of science, for example, are not the ‘facts’ of the arts, love or religion.

Nor is the end result, as Michael Polanyi points out, always simply the sum of all the facts—a new solution to a problem, a scientific discovery, a new composition, all go beyond the facts to a totally new conception of what all those facts mean when taken or put together:

The admonition to look at the unknown really means that we should look at the known data, but not in themselves, rather as clues to the unknown; as pointers to it and part of it. We should strive persistently to feel our way towards an understanding of the manner in which these particulars hang together, both mutually and with the unknown.10

Scientific reasoning, therefore, has its own kind of facts, but it cannot have a stranglehold on all facts. Success or failure in the appreciation of art or music or religion will be far less tangible, more personal, more open-ended, than science, but nonetheless real, nonetheless vital for all that, more a matter of ‘gradual appreciation’ than scien-
Reasoning in religion is embedded in practices and traditions, such as prayer, worship, rituals, sacred writings and belief systems, where we allow ourselves to be drawn into and become attentive, not to the particular ‘parts’ of our world, but to what all these parts taken together convey to us of the ‘whole’.

The ‘facts’ of religion are the pointers or clues that draw us to the whole and reveal to us the meaning and value that comes to us from the whole, such as, a sense of God’s presence, deeper meaning and purpose in our lives, values for living, spiritual and moral energies and resources, or a sense of communion with the divine. Like music and the arts this can only be appreciated to the degree the person allows him or herself to participate in the practice.

The exclusion of all other vital forms of human seeking from the realm of ‘reason’ is not the only quarrel with this New Atheist appeal to ‘reason’. The other issue is precisely what is being advocated under the guise of ‘reason’ as if it were ‘reason’ itself.

The particular version of Liberalism espoused by Grayling is a driving political philosophy in the English-speaking world. It prioritizes individual freedom of choice, personal autonomy, equality of opportunity, especially gender equality, individual human rights, an ethic of reciprocity and utility, and tolerance, even of religious and other beliefs, despite their being seen as illusory or superstitious.

This Liberalism, however, is only one strand of the many political theories and belief systems that have influenced human history, and, as such, has to be argued for, not simply assumed as the only ‘rational’ position.

Other systems, some secular, some not, recognise different values and priorities, such as family, honour, community, solidarity, authority, economic equality and tradition. From the viewpoint of many of them, Liberalism is seen, amongst other things, to undercut social and family ties, to empty out of human freedom all consideration of standards, to reduce morality to utilitarian calculations only, and to deprecate tradition and the sacred.

The Western nations, the most powerful of which are strongly influenced by Liberal ideals, and despite, or perhaps because of, their huge material successes, seem to their critics to be mixed with intractable problems, such as ecological disasters, economic imperialism at the international level and growing economic inequality on the homefront, burgeoning arms expenditure, the loss of binding moral standards, and a system of corporate competitiveness and acquisitiveness that is undermining their social fabric.

The point is not whether any or all of such allegations are or are not correct, but rather that you can’t feasibly rule them out of court, unless, of course, you assume from the start that Liberalism is the umpire, which is precisely, according to John Gray, what Liberalism does:

It is a mark of an illiberal regime that conflicts of value are viewed as signs of error. Yet Liberal regimes which claim one set of liberties—their own—is universally legitimate adopt precisely that view. They treat conflicts among liberties as symptoms of error, not dilemmas to which different solutions can be reasonable. Liberalism of this kind is a species of fundamentalism, not a remedy for it.12

This strain on Liberal ‘tolerance’ shows particularly in the more intemperate New Atheists, such as, Sam Harris on the ‘war’ with Islam and Christopher Hitchens on religious education as ‘child abuse’.13

Even from the evolutionary point of view, much employed by the New Atheists to support their case, although not in fact by Grayling, the values picked out by Liberalism have only ever been one strand of the full evolutionary scenario according to Gerd Gigerenzer, the Director for Adaptive Behaviour and Cognition at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin:
Institute in Berlin:

The psychologist John Haidt proposed five evolved capacities, each like a taste bud: *a sensitivity to harm, reciprocity, hierarchy, ingroup, and purity*. In a society with an individualistic ethic, only the first two buds are activated... In a society with family-oriented ethic, moral feelings concerning harm and reciprocity are rooted in the family, not in the individual... In a society with a community orientation, concerns about harm, reciprocity, and hierarchy relate to the community as its root... Its ethical view activates all five sensitivities...14

Here again it is not a matter of who is right or who is wrong, but that, contrary to what Liberalism believes, not only is it not the umpire, but in fact there is no independent umpire at all, as Alasdair MacIntyre concludes:

It is an illusion to suppose that there is some neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions.15

Liberalism not only claims to be the neutral ground of reason, but also sees itself as the high ground from which all competitors can be vanquished, as Grayling himself shows:

Humanists distinguish between individuals and the wide variety of belief systems people variously adhere to. Some belief systems (those involving astrology, feng shui, crystal healing, animism, religion... the list is long) they combat robustly because the premises of them are falsehoods—many indeed are inanities—and, even more, because too often belief...serves as a prompt to discord and strife, and at last even murder.16

Richard Dawkins tries his own conjuring trick when he appeals to ‘a somewhat mysterious consensus’, existing in society and evolving over time, which he terms the ‘Zeitgeist’, the ‘spirit of the times’.17 When the ‘rabbit’ appears out of the hat, however, it too is Liberalism in disguise.

Dawkins, Grayling, and the other New Atheists, may be right about the pervasiveness and influence of Liberal values in English-speaking countries, but it is far from being a ‘consensus’ as John Gray explains:

the fact of pluralism is not the trivial and banal truth that individuals hold to different personal ideals. It is the coexistence of different ways of life. Conventional liberal thought contrives to misunderstand this fact, because it takes for granted a consensus on liberal values.18

Pluralism means not just the fact that increasingly in the modern world different groups and individuals with different cultural viewpoints and value systems inhabit the same place, but that it is accepted as an ideal that no one viewpoint may dictate the terms of coexistence to the others, and that consensus, justice, juridical procedures and rules, be achieved by free and impartial dialogue and cooperation of all stakeholders. The ‘reality’ in any given country will be governed by history and demography and hence will only approximate the ideal, but it is an ideal that applies to all groups, secular and religious, and hence to Liberalism itself. It does not help of course that the New Atheism regards all theists and its other secular critics as deluded.

It also means, however, that in a pluralistic world religious groups must remain open to dialogue and cooperation. The Catholic Church’s social justice tradition is pivotal for us in this regard, particularly, Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in terris* on human rights, and the Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on Ecumenism*, and its Declarations on Religious Liberty and *Non-Christian Religions*. Over the past one hundred and twenty years the tradition has attempted to work out the principles needed for us to enter fully into the modern pluralistic and increasingly secular world.

The question still remains: How able is ‘reason’ to the task put before it? Grayling recognises the dark side of human life, ‘the unkind, angry, hostile, selfish, cruel side’, but the remedy offered is for ‘reason’ to rid humanity of ‘the superstitious, tendentious, in-
intellectually captive, ignorant side."\(^{19}\) It is not difficult to guess who he has in mind there! Given the complex issues facing the modern world, it seems a rather ‘shallow’ diagnosis. But, more significantly, it is very doubtful that ‘reason’ alone is up to the task, as Terry Eagleton argues: ‘it is only if reason can draw upon energies and resources deeper, more tenacious, and less fragile than itself that it is capable of prevailing, a truth which liberal rationalism for the most part disastrously overlooks.’\(^{20}\)

To talk of ‘reason’ in the abstract overlooks the fact that it is always vulnerable human beings who reason amidst the challenging and complex circumstances of their times. Modern consumer societies, heavily influenced by Liberalism as they are, promote competitiveness, free choice, the acquisition of wealth, individual rights and interests, reciprocity, and self-fulfilment. A deeper and broader sense of humanity also requires a concern for compassion, family and community networks, care of the earth, economic equality, and concern for the disadvantaged, which other viewpoints and value systems will foster and promote to avoid sliding disastrously into individual self-absorption.

Our inner subjective lives can run shallow or deep. It is both the strength and the vulnerability of religion that it is able to create and penetrate to the depths of human guilt, aggression, insecurity, and the needs and desires that drive us. The history of religion, even to the present, is fraught with the ways these forces have been misdirected or unleashed with devastating effects. Nor will such forces disappear just because religion disappears. Rather, they inevitably resurface from the depths as the Twentieth Century witnessed so tragically.

Culture and life have many more uses for ‘reason’ than New Atheism is willing to acknowledge, and many of these uses, especially in religion, are not just to pursue our own material needs and desires, but to preserve and promote our inner, personal, subjective, spiritual, and relational lives which can all too easily be lost sight of in our scientific, technological, commercial, Liberal world.

**NOTES**

3 *ibid*, 177-197.
4 *ibid*, 199-236.
5 *ibid*, 161-2.
6 *ibid*, 174-5.
7 *ibid*, 149.
10 *ibid*, 127-8.
11 *ibid*, 202.
16 *The God Argument*, 256.
18 *Two Faces of Liberalism*, 13.
19 *The God Argument*, 256.
BOOK REVIEWS


The recent Book, *The Mountain*, by Australian Drusilla Modjeska, author of eight other books, will be of interest to ex-PNG missionaries, and to other expatriates from PNG, and missionaries to other countries such as Timor Leste, and South Africa and even to missionaries among our own Aboriginal Australians.

I found it that way, especially as I am an older missionary prone to reminiscing on the ‘times and tides’ in my missionary life and the ‘tides and times’ of the histories of the countries in which I have served. In looking at the drama in the lives of others (especially University types), at their hopes, fears and times of disillusion *etc*, I can see similar motions in my own heart and memory.

I take it as axiomatic that revolutionaries in any countries do not necessarily make good Governments, as witnessed by the post-revolutionary histories of the above named countries. Such seems also to be the case in other countries presently in stages of revolution and reconstruction.

This book will bring vividly to life the processes operating in PNG over the 30-40 years from about Independence to the present day. This is done with flair with reference to the peoples and cultures of that country. These cultures and these people are givens that impose themselves upon any temporary visitors or long term stayers, such as missionaries, alike.

The book tells the story of the Mountain (as a symbol of any part of PNG) and through a long term dynasty type treatment of ‘one’ family, immersed partly in the academic world of the University of Port Moresby, at Waigani, and on the other hand immersed partly in the clans of one particular place near Collingwood Bay, East of Popendetta. ‘One’ family is some-thing of a mis-nomer as it is almost impossible, even at the close of reading, and with a keen focus on the many characters who populate the pages, to determine exactly the true (‘blood’) relationship of the key characters: particularly Aaron, the *hapkas* and Rika, his surrogate mother (?).

Putting this aside, the book does immerse the reader in the customs and cultures, and feeling for place from Port Moresby (mainly Waigani) to Popendetta to the Mountain and the Fjord coast above Collingwood Bay: microcosms of the whole PNG story. Tribal elders, academics,rawler-men, lumber getters, villagers, justice seekers, government officials, Kiaps, ‘*wantoks*’, environmentalists, ‘*rascols’*—all jostle together with the youth, old and wise women, and children of the clans. It’s at least colourful.

Long term relationships with Australia are explored:

Don’t be fooled, you are students well able to understand the history of colonialism and the complexity of this moment. Our relationship with Australia is changing, not ending, and we must understand why and how. If nothing else, understand this: Australia will always play this place of ours to its advantage, which right now is to recast its relationship with Asia. p.178.

That could have been written about our relationships in 2013—the PNG ‘Solution’—not 1975! 1942! 1883!

Personal agency and loss are dwelt upon, societal change illustrated:

Milton (a University lecturer) tells the story (to a local middle-grade teacher) of a student of average ability who became rich and sent his son, also of average ability to Martyrs, where Milton had him for Literature. He was a lazy boy who never read the text and who copied the essays from other students. He was no better in other classes, and one day Milton took him for long walk along the road, spoke to him
about the riches of literature and the possibilities of life ahead. To no avail. When he failed
the year, his politician father arrived at the school waving a fistful of notes, demanding the
that boy’s teachers, including Milton, give a distinction to his lazy bully of a son, who
boasted that he need do nothing, for his future did not depend on his grades. Milton talked to
his father of the Literature they had read together in class and the life lessons it had taught. The
father didn’t remember. Everything he had learned in literature had been a waste of time,
of no used to anyone. Literature doesn’t make money. Look at you, he said to Milton and
Milton nodded! (p. 381)

_Touche!
_Questions are asked which, for me, unlock questions of my own heart about my motivation and the effectiveness of my missioning:

Sitting there, she sees the link she’d missed, the uncomfortable truth that connects her to her fellow travellers, and then and now: We used a different language, she thinks, but were no different, all of us who came with ‘dreams of things longed for’ and hearts to be unlocked? The fact that we wrapped our dreams as gifts and offered them in the spirit of service, or dressed as research, or Art or Film, (or religion!) doesn’t make them any less potent or greedy or blind. Weren’t our dreams driven by some hidden something inside ourselves? Our own covetousness. Our own lack of ground, our dissatisfaction with where we came from. Our emptiness, perhaps. (p.390)

Answers to post-today’s questions about ‘Where to from here?’ are hinted at. I liked its comment on discrimination:

It’s easy enough for you, she says to Martha, living in Sydney, to buy the liberal version. Easy enough to say that all these cultural manifestations are equally valid, equally important. It’s another form of racism to say it’s fine if a young man dies for a cultural belief that wilfully prefers witchcraft over medical science. Is that what Martha wants? For us to say, fine, you go one believing the world is flat and the stars are made from the souls of dead ancestors and we will say you are just as right as anyone else, and in the meantime those who have good resources will reap the rewards of your ignorance and make off with your resources. If we are not to become another post-colonial casualty, more of a post-colonial casualty, we have to discriminate. (Emphasis original) (p. 394)

I found it a hard book to ‘get into’ for its first 50 pages and a long enough read at 436 pages. Its style of writing, like the country and people it writes of, can be strange, disconcerting, and off-putting, and to me, the English expression does not flow, but often spurs out staccato fashion:

The government, is like a big bird, a bird that comes from somewhere else. It’s not a bird that knows this land, and when it comes to lay its eggs, the bird can’t get a grip upon the earth- it doesn’t know how to grip this soil, doesn’t know mountain, or fjord or swamp; it knows nothing of where to put an egg. So when the eggs come, they lie _nabaut, nabaut_, some in grassland where they are taken by bad men, _raskol_ men, who make off with them. Some land in the forest and when the chick pecks its way out, it doesn’t know where it is. Or people find it on the way to the garden, and they take it home to their village, and it grows there like a large and stupid child, knocking things over and cutting the wrong wood, planting the wrong seed. It sets up quarrels among the clans when no one can agree what to do with this big, clumsy creature. (original emphasis) (p.395)

The power of story! I recommend it to you.

—Vince Carroll MSC


Anyone who has the uneasy feeling that she is the only labourer in the vineyard, will be encouraged by this book. It is full of them. They (about 110) are the most wonderfully constructive lot. They are into just about everything: patching up civilians caught in the crossfire of Middle Eastern Wars, promoting democratic, pluralist, tolerant Islam in South East Asia, running a school on the Daly River
in the remote Northern Territory—give some idea of their work.

Life hasn’t been easy for many of them. Working for marginalised country women in Papua New Guinea, Monica Jeddah Otto writes ‘My officers have stood by me as I struggled to generate income for them’ p.86. Not that they were expecting things to be easy: ‘The Christian faith has never taught that life will be a bed of roses. What it proves is that we shall be given bread for the journey and that we never travel alone.’ p.144.

The book is composed of brief biographies and prayers followed by a commentary from men and women, some famous like Hans Kung, John Shelby Spong, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Rowan Williams, but most of them are not. There are Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians. What they have in common are service and prayer, although it is somewhat unclear whether the Buddhists are praying, exactly.

The editor, Rosalind Bradley, a convert from Judaism to Catholicism who lives in Sydney, has done an excellent job collecting this material.

There are some magnificent prayers, for example this one by William Edward Burghardt Du Bois

‘Mighty causes are calling us—the freeing of women, the training of children, the putting down of hate and murder and poverty—all these and more. But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say: I will go unto the King and if I perish, I perish.’ p.75.

The following is not so much a prayer as a reflection on spiritual practice, by Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, AM, on the Daly River, Northern Territory:

‘Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We wait on God too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his word clear to us’ p185.

There are deep springs within each of us, she comments, and within this deep spring is a sound, the Word of God.

Words of wisdom abound in this small book. Amina Wadud, an emeritus professor of Islamic Studies who has lived in five countries, including Egypt and Indonesia, and who has traveled to more than forty others as an international consultant on Islam, writes ‘there is a collective human need for guidance in attaining truth, forgiveness, and mercy’ p.189. How right she is!

There is much in common between these prayers from diverse backgrounds. Together they constitute a kind of communion of saints.

—Reg Naulty

BOOKS RECEIVED


The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the readings for Sundays between December 2013 and April 2014, from the First Sunday of Advent to the Second Sunday of Easter Year A. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

**Reading the Prophet Isaiah:** As we pick up what I wrote in the last edition of *Compass*, readings from Isaiah dominate this period (in Advent 1-4, Nativity, Baptism, OT 2-3). The Isaiah selections for Advent and Christmas are from what biblical scholars identify as *First Isaiah* penned in the 8th century BCE at a time of political crisis. The prophet looks to a hopeful future brought about by God’s presence through an anointed one, a future king. This king should not be interpreted as Jesus, but one from the immediate royal household of Isaiah’s time. Christians reflecting on the prophet saw in Jesus’ birth Isaiah’s vision expressed freshly for their own day.

**The Gospel of Matthew.** The *first Sunday of Advent* (Dec 1) also ushers in our first reading from the *Gospel according to Matthew* for the new liturgical Year A with the theme of ‘watchfulness’. Our communion with Matthew’s Jesus in Year A will sensitise us to what is happening around us, especially as we seek to remain faithful to God in all that happens. This is also the spirit that guided the original evangelist in the mid 80s of the first century CE, seeking to assist Jewish Jesus’ followers to comprehend and deal with traumatic change.

**The New Year:** As we move into the New Year, 2014, our first Sunday celebration is the *Epiphany* of Jesus (Jan 5). This feast celebrates the ‘manifestation’ (*epiphania* in Greek) of Jesus to the world. Rather than focussing on the historical or literal event of a star and its guidance of foreign magi to Jesus, in the early centuries this feast was so important that it outshone even Christmas. The Epiphany is the celebration of the universality of Jesus for a world in need of direction and spiritual nourishment. Epiphany is eternally relevant.

After the celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany, we move to celebrate the first eight Sundays of Ordinary Time (OT) and, on February 2, the Presentation of the Lord. OT 1 is always the feast of the Baptism of Jesus (Jan 12). This feast provides an opportunity to celebrate the gift of baptism and renew its call to a leadership of the baptised in our Church. The renewal of baptismal vows links all church ministries to baptism. This truth is important in faith communities looking to renew leadership and ministry. All ecclesial ministry, including presbyteral and episcopal, is grounded in baptism.

In the following Sundays of Ordinary Time (OT 3-8) that lead us to Lent we follow the opening chapters of Matthew’s Gospel: Jesus calls his disciples (OT 3) and teaches them (OT 4-8). The themes of the gospel over these Sundays echo and continue in their unique way the call to discipleship celebrated through baptism. The Sunday second readings are from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. His struggle with the divided Corinthian followers of Jesus reveals his passion to have them come to unity, guided by the spirit and wisdom of Jesus. Similar tensions exist in our churches today.

**Lent**

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

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

3. The Gospel readings during the Lenten period are either from Matthew or John (a gospel composed in the late first and early second centuries to an ethnically and theologically diverse community with a rich religious history).

· Lent 1 and 2 conventionally look at the stories of Jesus’ temptation and transfiguration. In both stories in Mt, Jesus is portrayed as a faithful Jew, committed to God in the midst of temptation and struggle. The highlight of Mt’s gospel proclamation comes on Passion Sunday and Easter, with the story of Jesus passion, death and resurrection. Jesus dies as king, and God raises him to life.

· Lent 3-5 focus on important stories from John’s Gospel. These help us reflect on the journey of faith. They raise the key themes and questions of our Christian lives: For what do we thirst? (Lent 3—The woman at the well) What drives and enlightens us? (Lent 4—the man born blind) What gives us life? (Lent 5—The story of Lazarus). These gospel themes are particularly pertinent to those candidates journeying through Lent and preparing themselves for full initiation into the Christian community at the Easter vigil.

A final word about the Easter Gospel (April 19 and 20) might be helpful. This is the most important gospel proclamation of the whole liturgical year. Matthew portrays the resurrection of Jesus as an event of victory in the face of evil and human machinations. Political power and military might, symbolised by the presence of the guards posted at the entrance of the tomb, are unable to prevent God’s action. This is an important and necessary truth we need to hear today, in a world and church entrapped by political power and might. God is the heart of everything and Matthew’s risen Jesus is testament to this fundamental truth.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

**Liturgical Year A**

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

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

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

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

December 29—Holy Family: Sir 3:2-6, 12-14. The Sage encourages wisdom that comes from the parents and openness from children to respect, honour and look after their parents, especially as they age. Col 3:12-21. This is a challenging reading, especially if the last part of the reading is proclaimed. The early part encourages the kinds of virtues and qualities typical of Jesus followers: compassion, humility and love. The final part, if it is proclaimed, must be situated in the patriarchal culture of the ancient Greco-Roman political structures in which intergenerational obedience and respect was expected. Mt 2:13-15, 19-23. Joseph is portrayed as a figure of wisdom: open, listening and obedient to God’s voice. Theme—Wisdom: We search for wisdom from various sources. The readings invite us to continue that search from those who guide, nurture and form us. Who are such figures today?

January 5, 2014—Epiphany of Jesus: Is 60:1-6. God’s light shines on creation and humanity. This makes a difference to how our world is perceived. Eph 3:2-3.5-6. The mystery of God’s universal and hospitable love means that we share in God’s life. Mt 2:1-12. The wise follow the stars; their eyes are on the heavens, their ear to the Scriptures and their desire on Jesus. Theme—Being Enlightened: At the core of every being is the inner light of God. We affirm our search for God and the way we draw close to God through Jesus. Epiphany is a continuous feast (however unrecognised) in the heart of every human being. Can we identify its manifestation today in the hearts of those we know?

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

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

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

**February 2—Presentation of the Lord:** Mal 3:1-4. God promises to send a messenger who will reveal truth, freedom and justice. Heb 2:14-18. Jesus is one with human beings, is of our nature, and knows suffering and temptation. Lk 2:22-40. Jesus is one with the people of Israel. He is offered to God in the temple, acknowledged as the saving presence of God, and grows in wisdom. **Theme—One with Us:** The celebration of this Feast is a reminder, through the readings, of Jesus’ solidarity with humanity. He is one of us; he is with us. It is his very humanness that makes him able to be one with us, to accompany us in our struggles and reveal God to us.

**February 9—Ordinary Time 5:** Is 58:7-10. The prophet reminds his people of the essentials of religious practice: justice and alleviation of poverty. 1 Cor 2:1-5. Paul preaches not from an elitist position, but with sensitivity to God’s Spirit. Mt 5:13-16. Disciples are salt and light to the world. **Theme—Commitment to the World:** God’s presence to the world is revealed through committed disciples who are people of justice, peace, light and truth. Several examples of such commitment abound in our faith communities.

**February 16—Ordinary Time 6:** Sir 15:15-20. In this First Testament wisdom book the writer reveals God’s wisdom that enables faithful people to live with freedom. 1 Cor 2:6-10. Paul celebrates the wisdom of God, once hidden, now revealed in Jesus. Mt 5:17-37. Jesus affirms the teachings and wisdom of the OT and deepens their meaning for Matthew’s Jewish audience. Rather than showing Jesus’ teaching as antithetic to the OT, Mt emphasises Jesus in harmony with the OT and Torah teaching. The ‘but’ in the translation is neither accurate nor helpful. **Theme—Wisdom:** We all desire wisdom to live rightly, happily, in harmony with others and our world. All today’s readings celebrate this search and locate true wisdom in God (Sirach) and Jesus. (1 Cor; Mt). What are signs of wisdom acting in our world? Who can we celebrate among us that reveal true wisdom to us?

**February 23—Ordinary Time 7:** Lv 19:1-2. 17-18. The Israelites are reminded that they are called to holiness. This spills over into community friendliness. 1 Cor 3:16-23. Paul teaches the Corinthian followers of Jesus that they are God’s temples, revealers of God’s holiness and possessors of God’s spirit. They belong to God. Mt 5:38-48. Generosity and enemy forgiveness are essential qualities of discipleship. **Theme—The call to holiness:** We are all called to holiness, a theme affirmed in the Second Vatican Council. This call finds its origins in the story of Israel, Jesus and his disciples. It is expressed through the way we live, act graciously and forgive.

**March 2—Ordinary Time 8:** Is 49:14-15. God seeks to remember, console and celebrate. 1 Cor 4:1-5. Paul’s relationship with God lies at the heart of everything he does. He will be judged simply by his fidelity to this relationship. Mt 6:24-34. Jesus teaches his disciples to trust in God and let go of unnecessary worries. **Theme—Trust in God:** Emphasis on material wealth and status can distract from true wealth and riches: one’s relationship and intimacy with Isaiah’s God, who wants to console and celebrate us. God is in love with us.

**March 9—Lent 1:** Gen 2:7f. Here is an ancient story that seeks to explain the presence of evil and human’s cooperation with it. Everyone gets blamed! Rom 5:12-19. Jesus is God’s obedient and righteous one in the plan.
of salvation. Mt 4:1-11Jesus is tempted by the devil and remains faithful to God. Theme—Evil and Fidelity: The great human experiences that cause suffering and misery are the focus for this first Sunday of Lent. The call to repentance and fidelity to God might typify the message to the local community.

March 16—Lent 2: Gen 12:1-4. God calls Abram and the story of Israel begins. 2 Tim 1:8-10. The writer invites us to bring our struggles into communion with Jesus. Mt 17:1-9. Jesus is transfigured. Theme—Change: Abram and Jesus are both theological models of sacred change….open to God and God’s call. Local renewal relies on the ability to be open to change.

March 23—Lent 3: 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 is our cause for hope. Jn 4:5-42. This is 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 is our deepest desire? Today’s gospel invites us to renew our relationship with the source of Living Water, who satisfies us deeply.

March 30—Lent 4: 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13. The anointing of David, the unexpected and unrecognised one, as king. Eph 5:8-14. We live in the light of God. Jn 9. Another great story: the gradual insight into Jesus of the man born blind. Theme—Light and Seeing: This Sunday can help us name the ways that we deeply see, interpret and know our lives and world. Today’s gospel invites us to come to the source of light, Jesus.


April 17—Holy Thursday. Ex 12:1-8,11-14. The Passover meal of deliverance. 1 Cor 11:23-26 Paul remembers Jesus’ last meal with his friends before death. Jn 13:1-15. Jesus’ act of foot-washing is a symbol of service and solidarity. Theme—Leadership: Jesus is the one who leads us to God. Leadership is the cry of our Church, world, community. Who reveals to us the most authentic values of human existence?


April 19 & 20—Easter: Mt 28:1-10. The Risen Jesus brings joy to the women who come to the tomb. Violence is overturned. Theme—Joy. In a world and among people who seem so sad and preoccupied with survival, this Easter message is central, offering a renewed vision: He is Risen!

April 27—Easter 2: Acts 2:42-47. The Jerusalem followers of Jesus are portrayed as sharing a common life. This is the fruit of Jesus’ spirit active amongst them. 1 Pet 1:3-9. The writer expresses the fruit of baptismal life. Jn 20:19-31. The Risen Jesus offers peace to the assembled disciples: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ Theme—Being Blessed. The Easter presence of Jesus brings God’s blessedness to human beings feeling terrorised by life and its demands, and in a church that struggles.

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