IN THE PAST couple of days, I was in touch with the editor of Compass, Barry Brundell MSC. He mentioned in his email that he had just returned home from hospital after the doctors had inserted a pacemaker. In my reply I said that if I could do anything to ease his burdens, he only had to say so, which he did. His response explains the reason for my name on the byline for this issue’s editorial.

I write this the day after the end of the G20. So much of the agenda for the G20 seems to be driven by a concern for justice: the gap between rich and poor, unemployment, international tax evasion by multi-nationals, global warming and the environment (and responsibility to future generations), assistance to the marginalized and poor in developing G20 countries. Agreements on most of these were indicated in the final communiqué from the conference. In many ways, these concerns are expressions of the search to enable the exercise of fundamental human rights.

The editorial in Saturday’s Weekend Australian is headed: ‘Four billion people look for G20 summit for growth.’ Words such as ‘growth’ and ‘development’ characterize these sorts of meetings and can tend to be seen only in economic terms. But we need to remember that justice is broader than that. Any economy and its development are not ends in themselves. They are at the service of other goods and values that a community must nourish if its members are to realize true development. The economy is for the sake of the human person and society ‘adequately considered’, in the words of Vatican II.

Aspects of this were highlighted in Pope Francis’ letter to Prime Minister Tony Abbott in the days leading up to the G20. He is very specific in what he says. ‘There are far too many women and men suffering severe malnutrition, a rise in the number of the unemployed, an extremely high percentage of young people without work and an increase in social exclusion, which can lead to criminal activity, and even the recruitment of terrorists.’ The Pope reminded us of the ‘constant assaults’ on the environment as a result of ‘unbridled consumerism.’

In calling for consensus among world leaders, his hope is that assessment of the G20’s results ‘will not be restricted to global indices, but will also take into account real improvements in the living conditions of poorer families and the reduction of all forms of unacceptable inequality.’ The Pope also used his letter to call on all G20 member states to be ‘examples of generosity’ in meeting the needs of victims of conflict, ‘especially [those] of refugees.’

Some of these concerns about justice and equality were captured in the last editorial of Compass on the impact of Christianity in history and on the Gospel’s imperative to work for justice and a fairer society. It is also encapsulated in Benedict XVI’s distinction in Caritas in Veritate between a Capitalist and Market Economy. In the former, the emphasis (and measure) is on maximising wealth and profits; in the latter, the economy is oriented to the common good incorporating values such as participation, equality and solidarity. Pope Benedict also called for a greater awareness of social capital (the gifts and resources of ordinary people and of the community) and how all have a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of all.

Again, the need for world leaders to meet is not only central in a globalised world of increasing mutual interdependence. It is also a reminder and a model of the central place of dialogue in political, social, religious and personal life. Paul VI sees it as constitutive of the human person. John Paul II picks up another angle in saying that ‘by dialogue we let God be present in our midst; for as we open our-
selves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God’ (Address to Members of Other Religions, Madras, 5 Feb. 1986).

As long as people keep talking with each other there is hope that solutions can be found. This reminds us that, with such occasions as the G20, the comment of Aquinas is pertinent: ‘all truth and goodness, whatever its source, is from the Holy Spirit.’ In such meetings, especially, where there is a genuine concern to address many issues that focus on human dignity, rights and victims, the presence of Spirit should not be forgotten. More importantly, given the sheer magnitude of the problems facing world and national leaders, human wisdom and effort needs the guidance and power of God’s Spirit at work in their deliberations.

Mind you, that does not mean dialogue is always peaceful and painless. At times, it needs to be, and even should be, ‘robust’—a well-worn word these days. Disagreements are part of the process. On this, we only have to think of the recent Synod of Bishops. Catholic social teaching has, until recently, been uneasy in approaching the role of conflict in society, no doubt in the light of the Marxist notion of class conflict. In Centesimus Annus, conflict and power were addressed briefly by John Paul II. While acknowledging their destructive potential, he recognised how respect for the human person and the common good can provide them guidance and direction. Carefully understood and exercised, there is a healthy side to conflict. It expresses human finitude but also creativity. The heated clash of ideas can generate something new and unexpected. Dialogue can develop in both depth and scope.

The concerns and context of the G20 are paralleled by some of the themes in this issue, for instance, a sense of social justice in Jesus, in the Magnificat and the early Church together with the different ‘faces’ of spirituality in our midst.

We cannot overlook media attention to two other events in the past week or so. The first was the installation of the new Archbishop of Sydney Anthony Fisher OP. For anyone in that position, it is both a demanding and daunting task. From his earlier roles in Sydney and Parramatta, he seems to bring a certain naturalness and poise to media interviews. He is very intelligent and competent and engages an interviewer honestly, courteously but also skilfully. It is striking how he openly appeals to his Dominican heritage and its specific perspective and practices in relation to the Christian Gospel. There is also something refreshing in the use of his Dominican habit as his principal mode of dress. Perhaps this practice is quietly subversive of an overly clerical image of the Church and its public leaders?

Finally, we cannot avoid a comment on Gough Whitlam’s state memorial service in Sydney. Generally, despite some understandable variations, commentators seemed to agree in their assessment. The occasion was marked by affection, vision and wit mixed with, as someone remarked, ‘a kind of sad fondness for a time lost and gone.’ It was also, perhaps, a moment of reconciliation going beyond the exceptional presentation of Noel Pearson. On the ABC Insiders programme last week David Marr offered a fine summing up which I develop a bit further here: it was just exceptional in Australian political and social life to see a gathering of such a diverse range of people, in their political, religious or non-religious allegiances, coming together to pay tribute to a national figure with both common cause and a common heart.

However one views him politically or historically, two of Whitlam’s endearing qualities (and perhaps a mark of greatness) resonate with the Christian Gospel: he took everyone seriously but never took himself too seriously. His self-deprecating attitude to himself is a reminder of Clive James’ definition of a sense of humour as common sense dancing.

—Tom Ryan SM, Guest Editor
IN THE GOSPELS, Jesus presents himself as the Son of God, namely the revelation of God’s graciousness and compassion. For example, in John’s gospel Jesus says: ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). Yet, at the same time, Jesus reveals what it means to be human in a meaningful way. In that sense we may understand his words, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ (John 14:6). In fact, Jesus is saying: ‘I am the way towards a truly meaningful life.’

One way of better understanding the desires of Jesus’ Heart and our own deepest desires as well, is by going back to the time Jesus’ Heart was shaped, namely during his ‘hidden life’ as a child and a young man in Nazareth.

Growing Wisdom

After, at the age of twelve Jesus had stayed behind in Jerusalem, Luke summarizes Jesus’ life-journey from childhood until the age of thirty in one sentence: ‘Jesus went back to Nazareth with his parents and obeyed them… [He] became wise, and he grew strong. God was pleased with him and so were the people’ (Luke 2:51-52). Luke emphasizes Jesus’ wisdom and obedience. Among the Israelites, wisdom was regarded to be one of the highest virtues. Wisdom was connected with being rooted in obedience to God’s word. Through his obedience to Mary and Joseph, Jesus was obedient to his Heavenly Father, and so grew in wisdom.

Apparently, Jesus himself fully accepted to be a human person, in every aspect becoming ‘one of us’ (Hebrews 2:17). However, he did not accept his ‘being human’ as a fate to be endured, but as a vocation to be carried out in accordance with God’s will. Jesus immersed himself fully in daily life with his parents and relatives; he shared the life of his fellow villagers: as a child, he played with his friends, as a young man, he worked with Joseph, his dad. And the way Luke describes Jesus’ performance in Jerusalem at the age of twelve shows us that Jesus also engaged himself in studying Holy Scripture. Luke’s comment that Jesus grew in wisdom, indicates that he had learned to live ordinary life in a personal relationship with his Father. In the light of God’s word in the Bible, he reflected upon what happened around him.

Jesus in Nazareth

As James Martin notes in his book Jesus, a Pilgrimage today many biblical, archeological and historical studies tell us a good deal about daily family life in Nazareth and first-century Jewish religious practices. Nazareth was a small agrarian society, with a population of about three to five hundred people. People lived in homes clustered together around an open courtyard, forming an extended family. In the common courtyard, the cooking was done, grain was ground, water jars stored, and animals kept. The same small rooms were used for shelter, sleeping, giving birth and dying. So, we can imagine, there was almost no privacy, but the relationships were very close, certainly creat-
ing tensions and quarreling, but also joy and laughter.

Most of the ordinary people were not able to read or write in those days. But the fact that Jesus was able to read from the Scriptures, as Luke notes (4:16-17), shows us that his religious education was well taken care of by his family. This education certainly also included instructions regarding proper observance of the Jewish laws, keeping the Sabbath, observing the purification rituals before eating, keeping religious fasting, abstaining from impure food and avoiding people deemed to be ‘unclean’. Later on, Jesus would challenge some of these customs.

We may assume that already in Nazareth, through prayer and meditation on Scripture readings, he began to realize that too much focus on external rituals could make people blind to the real designs of his Heavenly Father regarding humankind. Particularly, he learned that staying away from some people who were regarded as sinners for the reason of observing religious rules, was totally contrary to the practice of love and compassion demanded by his Heavenly Father, who let his sun shine for everyone.

**Poverty and Injustice**

The Gospels call Jesus a ‘tekton’, usually translated as ‘carpenter’. In fact, it might have included all the work needed to build simple houses, with wooden beams as well as walls and roofs of straw and dirt. Justin Martyr, a second century theologian, calls Jesus a maker of yokes. In those days, making a good yoke to fit the team of oxen demanded a fair level of technical skill. Yet, Jesus would have known what it meant to be poor, to work hard, in difficult circumstances, at the whims of overlords, the weather and diseases. From firsthand experience he knew the lives of those on the edges of society. His compassion for the poor and the handicapped shown during his public ministry had certainly been fostered by his experience of living so many years in the lower class society of Nazareth and Galilee.

Jesus experienced how the men and women of his village were overloaded by the burden of daily life. In addition, he also saw how ordinary people were being exploited. Most of them were small farmers, who rented land from rich landowners usually living in Jerusalem or nearby Sepphoris. These landlords often demanded a great part of the harvest of the tenants. Besides, all residents were forced to pay three kinds of taxes: one tax to the Roman rulers, another tax to Herod’s palace and his building projects, and a third tax to the Priests of the temple in Jerusalem. So, there existed a great disparity between the indebted poor in the countryside and the wealthy people in the cities. In Jerusalem some families of priests belonged to the richest families in the country. They collected the taxes to maintain the Temple cult, and received substantial parts of the offerings of the numerous pilgrims.

**The Desires of his Heavenly Father**

Every Sabbath and on special feast days Jesus attended the services in the synagogue together with the village community. In these services, parts of Holy Scriptures were read and Psalms sung. There, Jesus also reflected on the suffering of his fellow citizens. Through observation, Scripture readings and prayer, he became aware of the fact that so much suffering of his neighbors was unnecessary and inhumane. Moreover, the shameful inequality be-
tween the social classes was totally contrary to the plan of his Heavenly Father concerning humankind.

Jesus was convinced that God his Father, by creating the human race, expected people to live together in solidarity and to share and enjoy the abundance of the earth together. With a sad heart, Jesus noticed that his Father's plans were not known or totally ignored. Certainly, Jesus understood that human life always involves suffering that can be very painful, such as sickness and death, bereavement due to the loss of a loved one, or the suffering caused by natural disasters. However, so much other suffering could be prevented if only people would live in accordance with the Father's will and participate in the plans of the Father concerning humankind.

A Distorted Understanding of God's Will

Many poor and handicapped were totally depending on their family (e.g. Mark 2:1-12), or reduced to beggary (e.g. Mark 8:22-26). Some chronically sick or mentally ill people were even considered to be possessed by unclean spirits. And Jesus certainly also met people who were really possessed by the devil. Jesus observed how the economically poor, the severely sick or handicapped, and the people regarded as possessed, suffered both physically and spiritually. Besides having to bear the hardships of daily life, they also felt their miserable condition as a curse of God. God, they believed to be the heavenly Judge, always ready to condemn people in regard to any violation of the law. Due to this false God-image and their inability to abide by all the regulations of the law, they believed their physical or mental disabilities to be God's punishment. Accordingly, these people lacked any form of self-confidence and felt themselves powerless to bring about any change in their miserable condition.

Jesus was above all appalled by the fact that religious leaders reinforced the view that dire poverty and physical disability were God's punishment for sin, either personal sin, known or unknown, or sins of the parents (e.g. John 9: 1-3). Instead of helping poor people to cope with their misery, and to fight against injustice, the religious leaders made peoples’ suffering even worse by their unsupportive teaching. Due to this false teaching, the poor and the handicapped even doubted whether the God, in whom they believed, really took care of them. They accepted their situation as a fate, which they were doomed to suffer until the end of their lives and even in their after-lives.

So, later on, during his public life, Jesus will blame the scribes and Pharisees, saying that ‘they tie onto people's backs loads that are heavy and hard to carry, yet they aren't willing even to lift a finger to help them carry those loads’ (Matt. 23:4), and they neglect to practice ‘the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice, mercy and honesty¨ (Matt. 23:23). The Evangelist Matthew very accurately describes the people, who in droves came looking for Jesus, by saying: ‘they were troubled and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd’ (Matt. 9: 36).

The Desires of Jesus’ Heart

Now we may better understand the deeper desires of Jesus’ Heart. First of all, Jesus desired to involve himself in people’s life situation not as an outsider, but as someone who really wanted to share the worrying conditions of oppressed people. He felt a great compassion for people who had to endure the demanding circumstances of ordinary human life and, on top of it, unnecessary suffering. So much suffering was inflicted upon them by people, who exploited them and treated them unjustly.

However, Jesus did not join one of the political movements of his day which attempted to liberate the Jewish people from Roman occupation, the tyranny of King Herod, or the corruption of the priestly cast in Jerusalem. His deepest desire was to redeem the poor
and handicapped from their distorted understanding of God’s will. He wanted to replace such false understanding by an experience of God, which would generate joy and gratefulness, courage and hope. Jesus felt himself strengthened by his unconditional trust in God his Father, and he wanted to share this trust with others, especially those struck by enduring misery. Therefore, he longed to empower people so that they would be able to bear their suffering in a new way. In short, he desired to give them greater joy in life.

Moreover, from the Prophets of Jewish Scriptures, he had learned that God did not desire ritual sacrifices or the observance of external religious practices, but compassion and solidarity among his sons and daughters. Religion should help people to look beyond the borders of tribal relationships and social classes by becoming a movement of compassion and care.

\textit{A Spirituality of the Heart for Today}

By attentively contemplating the hidden life of Jesus in Nazareth, we learned how Jesus grew in wisdom, by living, what we now call, a Spirituality of the Heart. It should become a model for the formation of our own way of living a Spirituality of the Heart. By taking the Heart of Jesus as a model, we should first of all live a Spirituality of the Heart as an incarnational Spirituality. Without any reserve, Jesus embraced humanity and associated with the people. He became one of them and shared their lives. He used their language and symbols, and listened to their stories. He joined in their daily struggle for life, worked hard, and celebrated and prayed with them as well.

And in the middle of all these activities, Jesus contemplated both on God’s word and on the life of the people. So, to live a Spirituality of the Heart as Jesus did, means also for us, to be involved in the life of ordinary people, to learn of their aspirations, to empathize with their concerns and sorrows, and to listen to God’s message in the midst of people’s joy and hope, fear and distress. Or, with the words of Pope Francis, we should become shepherds, who take on ‘the smell of the sheep’ (\textit{EG} n. 24).

In his Heart, Jesus intensely empathized with the suffering of the people around him. He discovered his mission and vocation by contemplating on it during his time of prayer. Not unlike Jesus and together with him, we also are called to accompany people in their daily struggle for life. By being with them, we will redeem them from feeling alone and desperate in their suffering. Helping people to cope with their pain, to liberate them from unnecessary suffering, to make their life more meaningful and joyful as Jesus did - that is also our mission in living a Spirituality of the Heart. A Spirituality of the Heart is a missionary Spirituality which arouses in our hearts a great concern for the poor and the lonely. Through our involvement in the struggle for life of our fellow human beings, wherever they are, and by reflecting on God’s word, we will also become aware of our mission.

With Jesus, we surely accept that not all suffering can be prevented or removed. Suffering caused by the concerns of daily life, untreatable diseases; the decline of energy in old age, bereavement when losing a loved one – such suffering is inherent in our existence as human beings. And where people love one another, anxiety and suffering are nearby. However, with Jesus, we also understand that it makes a big difference whether people are able to endure such a suffering strengthened by trust in God or, on the contrary, in loneliness, without any faith at all. Many people may also nurture a misleading faith, and so feel left on their own in their pain. Therefore, by taking Jesus’ Heart as a model, we want to bring a true understanding of God’s will in people’s lives.

Not unlike Jesus, we also witness that people inflict much unnecessary suffering upon one another, due to injustice, exploitation and violence. Most scandalous is the fact that so much injustice is done on behalf of God, whose
will is totally misunderstood. Such a wrong understanding of God’s intentions also creates a false perception of the role of religion in society. Therefore, it should become a core element of our mission to pass on the real meaning of God’s presence among us, as well as the true role of religion.

Not unlike Jesus, we should proclaim that God challenges people to reach out to one another, without any discrimination; that God sends us to build bridges between the different tribes, classes and religions. Certainly, the development of a worldwide family in which all people live as brothers and sisters of one another will always remain a unreachable horizon. But together with Jesus, we try to realize the ideal of the coming of God’s reign on earth, step by step, encounter after encounter. It will lead us to new priorities in the practice of religion. Not a religion concentrating on the application of rules and laws which only can be observed by a few people, and create divisions among people, but a religion of the heart, based on trust in God and mercy to one another, Not a religion for private consolation only, but a religion, which establishes unity and solidarity among all peoples.

A Misguided Image of God in Public Life

The situation of today’s world shows us how urgent it is to give witness to a true understanding of God’s relationship with the universe and humanity. So many people still keep God at a distance from their real life. Instead of finding strength in their belief in God at a time of pain and distress, often people even blame God for their worries and sorrow. Time and again, their experience of God is not a source of support and happiness, but of anger and aversion. By doing so, they increase their own suffering.

Today also, there are people, who for the sake of the glory of God's name, feel entitled to oppress and persecute their fellow human beings, to terrorize and maltreat them, and even to torture and kill them. There are people, who consider themselves representatives of God when sentencing to death anyone who according to their opinion violates the rules of divine law. That happened in the past as well as in the present.

Moreover, in today’s society so much suffering is caused by human crimes often committed by people who believe that God is on their side. Even people calling themselves Christians or Catholics are often involved in wars, unjust behavior, greed, and the destruction of the natural environment. And there are still believers, including Christians, who tend to look at natural disasters or tragedies in their personal life as punishments of God for people’s sins.

Therefore, by living a Spirituality of the Heart, we should be committed to spreading a true understanding of God’s presence among humankind, as revealed by Jesus. Not a belief in a divine presence that creates self-righteousness, while alienating believers from non-believers, but a belief that generates humility and solidarity.

NOTES

2. James Martin, op. cit.

‘[The Scribes and Pharisees] tie onto people’s backs loads that are heavy and hard to carry, yet they aren’t willing to lift even a finger to help them carry those loads’ (Mth 23.23).
THE MAGNIFICAT AS SOCIAL DOCUMENT

SUSAN CONNELLY rsj

THE MAGNIFICAT is a hymn used every day in the Church as part of the Prayer of the Church, often called the Breviary. Its name comes from the first word in its Latin translation, and the first line is: ‘My soul proclaims Your greatness, O my God’. It is the song of Mary in St Luke’s Gospel, proclaimed when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth after she had been told that she was to be the mother of Jesus, and that Elizabeth was to have a child too. It’s actually very like the hymn which Hannah sang in the old Testament when she found that she was to be the mother of Samuel. It is a song of praise of God and an act of faith in all the promises that God makes to the people.

Unfortunately, we often present a very wrong picture of Mary in the Church. Art, music and homilies more often than not emphasise her submission to God’s will as passivity, her obedience as subjection, and her ‘Yes’ to God as something sweet, small and feeble.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the Magnificat is quite a subversive song, so much so that during the 1980s the government of Guatemala banned its public recitation.1 When the evangelical Anglican missionary Henry Martyn went out to Calcutta as chaplain to the East India Company in 1805, he was appalled to discover that the British authorities had banned the recitation of the Magnificat at Evensong.12 ‘….the Magnificat was banned in Argentina after the Mothers of the Disappeared used it to call for nonviolent resistance to the ruling military junta in mid-1970s’.3

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran theologian killed by the Nazis in 1945, wrote: The song of Mary is the oldest Advent hymn. It is at once the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. This is not the gentle, tender, dreamy Mary whom we sometimes see in paintings; this is the passionate, surrendered, proud, enthusiastic Mary who speaks out here….. This song…..is a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind. These are the tones of the women prophets of the Old Testament that now come to life in Mary’s mouth.4

Perhaps there’s something here that we the Church need to look into. The Magnificat hasn’t been banned in Church, but perhaps something worse has happened to it. Perhaps it’s just rattled off, its words like wet cardboard in the mouth: dull, tasteless and best gone.

What we sometimes do is give it a totally ‘spiritual’ meaning, and thus we cut it off at the knees. The tendency to spiritualise earthly problems is the constant temptation faced by religious people. It is actually a way of not having to deal with them. It is ever so easy to say prayers for the poor and then to head for a warm bed on a full stomach. It is also easy to write and deliver talks on the ills of the world and not be prepared to put one’s effort into addressing the issues.

The Magnificat is a whole world-view. It is the perception of a person who is thoroughly steeped in God, and if its message escapes us, or fails to ignite us, then that says a great deal about us.

The Magnificat is thoroughly traditional in its expression of the Jewish faith in a God who hears the cry of the poor, the God who exalts the lowly, the God who brings life out
of sterility. It is also thoroughly traditional in the Christian sense in its expression of the Resurrection faith in the God of Reversal, in its announcing in a nutshell the program of Jesus.

A superficial reading of the Magnificat finds that it is contrary to experience completely. When you look around the world today, we can't say that God has filled the hungry with good things and has sent the rich away empty. Or that the princes have been pulled from their thrones. They're there all right, planning all the time to work it so that they remain in power.

But a closer look reveals Mary's faith in the reality of God's love for her which impels her to declare to the hungry and the powerless what she herself knows from her own experience: that the status of being a nobody, a woman in an oppressed society, is the very cause of her being favoured by God, and hence of her sense of being filled, fulfilled and fruitful. She tells us unequivocally, as Jesus did, that God's favourites are the despised and the exploited and she asserts, again as Jesus did, that God will always have the last word. God does take sides.

Mary is convinced of God's power of reversal. The last are first, the weak are strong, the Crucified is Risen.

She says that the mighty are not mighty at all—they are all sprawling on the throne-room floor. They are ridiculous. It is no wonder ridicule of rulers is outlawed in totalitarian states. Ridicule is a consequence of insight, it comes from being able to see clearly. Remember Hannah's prayer on which Mary's is based, 'My mouth laughs at my enemies.' (1Sam. 2:1) As always, the cartoonists are the very best of commentators. We have the duty to ridicule, and thus undermine, those in public life, either in Church or State, whose use of power involves attacking or ignoring those whom God favours: the weak, the vulnerable. We can only do that with integrity though, if we are willing to look at ourselves in the mirror, and laugh heartily.

How we treat our fellow human beings is a question that we must address to ourselves, not to God. The checklist for the Last Judgement exists, and it makes clear that we are not going to be asked how many church rubrics we faithfully observed, or whether we were left or right, conservative or progressive. We're going to be asked how we welcomed the stranger, visited the detention centres, housed the homeless, stood up for asylum seekers. We'll be asked whether we followed the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the dictates of media owners, media personalities and commentators. We'll be asked whether we thought carefully about what a Christian response to the world's evils entails, and whether we prayed for the grace to make such a response, and whether we then made it.

The Australian Government's 'stop the boats' project has been hailed as a great 'success', because the boats have stopped. Other effects are not mentioned by Government officials, e.g. the harm done to Australia's integrity or its international standing as a civilised nation governed by the rule of law. Worse still, nothing has been said about the psychological harm done to people, including children, and the fear of being returned to danger.

How challenged do we allow ourselves to be by the highly accessible Pope Francis, who has burst onto the world's stage like a tornado of compassion, common-sense and conviction. In 2008 he prayed at Lampedusa in Italy, where asylum seekers had been drowned. He said:

Who among us has wept for these things, and things like this? Who has wept for the deaths

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of these brothers and sisters? Who has wept for the people who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who wanted something to support their families? We are a society that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of ‘suffering with’: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! …..

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty in the world, in ourselves, and even in those who anonymously make socio-economic decisions that open the way to tragedies like this. ‘Who has wept? Who in today’s world has wept?’

How is my weeping program? How’s yours?

Mary’s song reminds us that there are always the poor, there are always the lowly and the needy who are to be exalted. There will always be the rich and the powerful to unseat. We undertake the path of transformation, the path of inner integrity, the path of Jesus. Transformation does not fix things. Even the death and resurrection of Jesus has not ‘fixed’ the world in the ordinary sense of the word. The hungry are not all fed, and brute power reigns. We are fixated on fixing things. In one sense that’s good because we want what is good, we want to work for the Kingdom. But all that does not entail the necessity of us being there at the finish, or having the satisfaction of experiencing success. Some sow, others reap.

It is the process which transforms, entailing effort and commitment, first of all of the individual person and then of communities. Mary’s song highlights the importance of the individual, whose relationship with God brings the perception which reverses self-centred thinking and acting, knowing that the outcome, in all probability, will be the same as it was for Jesus.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one man who saw clearly what the challenge of Jesus, and of Mary’s song, meant for him in his time. This anecdote is set in 1934. There were many influential people who still thought Hitler might be reasoned with. The Second World War, the concentration camps and the Final Solution were a long way off. They thought that Hitler might not be as mad as he appeared, and might be converted. Bonhoeffer thought differently. In a letter to a friend he wrote:

Hitler has shown himself quite plainly for what he is, and the church ought to know with whom it has to reckon... We have tried often enough—to make Hitler aware of what is going on... Hitler is not in a position to listen to us; he is obdurate, and as such he must compel us to listen—it’s that way around. It is naïve... to try and convert Hitler—a ridiculous failure to recognise what is going on. We are the ones to be converted, not Hitler.

The words of Bonhoeffer remind me of an episode of ‘Living with the Enemy’ which was shown recently on SBS. A man goes to live with a Muslim family in Sydney for a week, to find out how they tick. He goes to the Mosque and sits with the men, discussing. He raises the point that non-Muslims are not allowed into Mecca, that holiest city. He tells his hearers that on the contrary, Pope Francis was seen washing the feet of a Muslim woman at Easter, and he draws contrasts with the two scenarios. I suspect that he may have meant that the Pope’s lesson shows that Muslims should be open to everyone, like the Pope is. However, I don’t think the Pope meant that at all. I think the Pope was more likely to be teaching Christians about how Christians ought to act.

The primary and most proper response to the evils we see around us, from the abuse of children, to terrorists, to the power hungry lies of Governments, to the greed which wracks our world, is that we listen, and are converted once again and constantly, to Jesus. These realities compel us to listen. We are not here to solve all crises and maintain equilibrium. We are to listen, to see what is going on, and to be converted, converted to the utter single-mindedness of following Jesus in whatever situation. Only within the endless cycle of conversion will we know what to do.
But do we must. We cannot settle for an over-spiritualisation of Jesus’ words, or Mary’s. Let us not dress up timidity as prudence. Let us be willing to sing in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘the passionate, wild and revolutionary song of Mary’ as it should be sung, with full voice, exulting in God, reckless in the knowledge that we are loved, committed to the total ongoing personal and communal conversion required by the Gospel, and to act from the stance of joyful but weeping disciples.

My soul proclaims your greatness, O my God and my spirit exults in you, my Saviour, for your regard has blessed me, poor, and a serving woman.

NOTES

2. http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/5th-december-2009/20/what-is-it-about-mary
4. Quote from ‘The Mystery of Holy Night’ a compilation of Bonhoeffer’s sermons and writings on Christmas.

RESPONSE

KRISH MATHAVAN MSC

WE HAVE HEARD the Magnificat as the subversive song of Mary who far from being a gentle, passive and helpless voice, expressed herself (in the words of Bonhoeffer) wildly and passionately in the spirit of the OT prophets regarding the power of God acting on behalf of the powerless. This was her experience as a woman in an oppressed society and yet still favoured by God. Therefore the Magnificat read and listened to in the right spirit challenges us primarily because it presents a different world-view of reversal, of collapsing thrones and humbled lords, of God favouring and rescuing the poor and oppressed. Yet it is not a prayer of wishful thinking but a prayer of faith by Mary in the reality of God’s love and mercy having the last word.

But more than just words to recite, or a spiritualization of worldly issues, the Magnificat calls forth and stirs us into action to be God’s instruments to help bring about what is promised. In this sense it anticipates the program of Jesus who heralds the coming of God’s reign on earth here and now. Susan
COMPASS

has mentioned two active ways we can bring this about which stand out for me, so let me reflect with you on their implications.

One is a duty to ridicule, which is a consequence of being able to see clearly with faith the plight of the poor in their concrete suffering experiences, and how God has acted and will act in reversing their situations. Such a ridicule can be directed at those in public office in Church or State when these leaders choose to neglect or worse still persecute the weak and vulnerable whom they are supposed to protect. Perhaps we have seen this best in the widespread outcry to the budget proposed by the government, who demanded cuts that would have undermined the welfare of the young, the sick and the unemployed.

Another way of bringing about God’s reign on earth is through weeping. A program to weep can be timely in situations where we are helpless to make an immediate difference, for example in response to the brutalization and dehumanization of asylum seekers in offshore processing centres. Weeping is an expression of shared humanity and suffering with the pain of others, as well as a nonviolent protest against injustice. In the words of Joan Chittister, ‘it is tears alone that stop us where we stand in life and demand that we assess it one more time with the sort of reflection that sees more than anyone can see’. I believe this was the motivation for different Christian leaders to come together and stage a recent sit-in at the offices of the immigration and foreign ministers in protest against the harsh policies against asylum seekers. Such gestures and the like are not optional extras to be carried out by a passionate few, but surely a moral obligation for all who are serious and creative in living the Magnificat and the Gospel.

So the Magnificat suggests our faith is not one of individual piety but one with social implications on the national and world stage. As Susan points out, there are always the poor and powerless to exalt and the rich and powerful to unseat, and to be able to see this and act on it through ridicule or tears requires one to go down the narrow path of conversion individually and communally.

It is not about fixing things and people as we sometimes wish we could, but about being present prophetically to God’s saving action and grace in the world as Mary was. Central to living the Magnificat is the need to be converted from our self-centred ways in an ongoing manner so that we can truly identify with the poor and be ‘in touch with their wounds’. This can mean looking hard at what is proud and mighty and rich in us that can get in the way of what we truly hunger for, and what makes us powerless. Only then can we truly follow Jesus and go against the grain of society, exult in God amid our lowly state, and actively commit to God’s vision for humanity even when the reality shows otherwise. This requires courage and perseverance, and one can end up being very alone in one’s stance of ridicule and weeping.

In this we can look to the apt example given of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. During the Second World War, Bonhoeffer showed staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to Hitler’s euthanasia program and genocidal persecution of the Jews, resulting in him being imprisoned in a concentration camp and later executed. Yet Bonhoeffer in his nonviolent resistance would leave behind a legacy that would inspire Christians across all denominations in subsequent ages, such as Martin Luther King Jnr and the civil rights movement in America, and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.
We do not start from scratch in this work for justice. God’s spirit already moves within and continues to spur us on in what we need to say and do. The Magnificat does not call us to withdraw or be indifferent but it really emboldens us to engage because it recognizes it is all God’s work and we just respond like Mary to ‘live inside God’s imagination’. In fact one of the most striking points Susan alluded to and we keep returning to was how we are called to listen, to listen to and through the signs and even evils of our times, and respond ever more faithfully to the subtle voice of the Spirit as we seek to build the reign of God here on earth.

At this time of much turmoil in the world, I couldn’t help but reflect on the two current global issues that have caused much angst and sadness in me. One is the increasingly obvious impact and growing awareness of climate change in the world, in contrast with the continuing indifference showed by the current government; and the other is the emerging extremism of Islam in the Middle East in the form of terrorist groups that have caused worldwide paranoia and provoked military retaliation, with ramifications on the Muslim community and how they are increasingly perceived. There is now a lot of hatred and vitriol in public discourse based on fear and ignorance, and I wonder how we as individuals and as Church can and should respond to these issues in the nonviolent spirit of the Magnificat. Perhaps it will take an international ridicule of our political leaders before they start to take climate change seriously, and perhaps it will require us to walk and weep with our Muslim brothers and sisters and wait on God to lift us up together from our powerlessness.

Whatever the case I have realized the revolution must start first of all in us, at which point we can then sing wildly and passionately with Mary about how our souls cannot but proclaim the greatness of God. In this way the Magnificat can become for us a manifesto of both individual and social transformation. Its content is definitely worth our reading and re-reading, and a continual reflecting of it in our lives.

**Today in our situation the authenticity of the people of God goes by way of poverty and justice: they are the touchstone of the truth of the faith that is professed and of the genuineness of life as it is lived out:**

— poverty, which involves incarnating all our efforts and incarnating ourselves in the reality of the oppressed majorities, and that will necessarily entail a voluntary impoverishment and abnegation on the part of those who wield power;

— justice, which involves giving to the people what belongs to the people and struggling to uproot injustice and exploitation, and to establish a new earth, wherein the life of the new human may be possible.

—Ignacio Ellacuría SJ, martyred in El Salvador 1989
AFTEJDISCUSfING desire in the last issue of Compass, we now consider our pathway to God through the senses. Augustine’s Confessions sets the scene. Once he finds the ‘Beauty so ancient and so new’ after his, at times, misguided quest, he does not deny but rather appeals to the language of the senses:

You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;
you flared, blazed, banished my blindness;
you lavished your fragrance, I gasped; and now I pant for you;
I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst;
you touched me, and I burned for your peace.

Clearly, Augustine is not saying that God, as immaterial, can be known by the physical senses in a way that resembles knowledge of material objects. Augustine suggests two points. Our senses give access to the world around us. Understood thus, they are doorways through which we can detect traces of God’s presence in creation, events and people.

But, Augustine is also alluding to a figurative use of the five senses, namely, as metaphors for different modes of perception, desire and response to God and to spiritual realities. Both appeals to the human sensorium are found in the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms, to express (and nourish) the desire for God. They both lie at the core of Jesus’ manner of teaching in the Gospels, with his constant recourse to sense experience (e.g., of nature) and to image and metaphor (e.g., seeing/blindness; hearing/deafness) to tap human yearnings and resistances while revealing God’s desires for us.

Consider 1 John 1: 1-4 where the author draws on the different senses to speak of the visible reality of the Word made flesh:

Something that has existed from the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched our hands; the Word who is life…

This text reveals how seriously God takes the material world and, especially, our bodies. We are reminded later that in Jesus’ ‘body lives the fullness of divinity, and, in Him, too you find your own fulfillment’ (Col. 2:9). It is through Jesus’ humanity that the fullness of the divinity is revealed to us. Further, through sharing in Jesus’ humanity as the divine Image, we cooperate in the divine action whereby we are slowly transformed into the divine likeness.

This provides the setting of our first pathway to God: the sense of sight. I would like to explore two themes: first, seeing and not-seeing God (and associated areas of the kataphatic, the apophatic and theology of the cross); second, seeing/being seen and seeking God.1

Seeing and Not-Seeing God

The Christian spiritual tradition has consistently used sensory language to express human encounters with the divine. One of its central themes, namely, the complementary modes of perception (seeing/not seeing), find an early expression in the Book of Exodus in three scenes. Our concern here is not the level of historical memory preserved in these stories. It is, rather, that these scenes offer small dramatic dialogues illuminating an aspect of religious truth that is the overarching purpose of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

The first scene is Exodus 3: 1-6: 13-14: (Burning Bush and revelation of the divine name). Spend a few minutes reading it.

What do we find? Moses recognizes the
holiness of the place; he hears his name spoken; he meets the God of his ancestors who reveals the divine name. First, the story reveals the Jewish sense of God’s holiness.

To say God is ‘holy’ denotes a being ‘Wholly other’, ‘totally different’ from creatures and creation. An encounter with the ‘holy’ prompts a response to the *mysterium fascinans et tremendum*, (in the words of Rudolf Otto)². We are captured by awe and wonder. We feel both excited and afraid. We tremble, not in abject fear, but because we are *lost for words*. We are reduced to silence and reverence before a mystery immeasurably beyond us. This is God as *transcendent*—totally unlike any other being.

Second, Moses is addressed personally (to be explored later). More importantly, the divine name precisely as *personal* (YHWH) is revealed to Moses, one among other names for God within the evolving Hebrew religious consciousness.³ This name for God was regarded as sacred. It was not written or spoken in Hebrew but instead was replaced by *Adonai* (an analogous practice recently revived).⁴ Two things need noting here.

First, in Semitic cultures, to reveal one’s name was a form of gift. It was placing oneself in the hands of another, hence, in a way, in their power. Again, God is unique but (importantly) is a personal being who acts and who wants to have a relationship with Moses, Israel and with us. The God who discloses the divine name and in so doing is vulnerable to, for instance, rejection, is also the God who will be there for us. The precise meaning of the divine name *Ego Eimi ho on*, ‘I Am Who I Am,’ continues to be obscure but it has something to do with the verb ‘to be.’ It denotes actively causing, for instance, creation.

Jesuit theologian, John Courtenay Murray (significant in drafting the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* of Vatican II), has suggested that the Greek ‘*Ego Eimi ho on*’ could be translated in palindromic form as ‘I shall be there as who I am shall be there.’ This is the God of the Covenant—who will always be *here for us*, is always faithful, has carved our names on the palm of His hand.

Murray also offers a theological analysis of this text as containing a threefold revelation: God’s immanence or presence in history (‘I shall be there’); God’s transcendence to history, the mystery of God’s own being (‘I shall be there as who I am’) where the divine mystery is ‘a mode of absence’; finally, divine transparence through history in that, despite the divine absence in mystery, God will reveal himself through saving action, ‘through the saving events of the sacred history of Israel’. God’s will is revealed but his being and nature, the depths of the divine ‘self’ remain unknown.⁵ In all this, divine intimacy balances and reveals God’s holiness. One could even say that, in Moses, we see a gradual sense of feeling ‘safe’ to gaze at the mystery of the all holy God such that the Lord God ‘would speak with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Ex. 33;11).

This is expanded in our second text, Exodus 24: 12-18 (Moses and Elders on the mountain). Note the final sentences: ‘He laid no hand on these notables of the sons of Israel: they gazed on God. They ate and they drank.’ This text is a beautiful confluence of how God is utterly beyond us yet closer to us than we are to ourselves. We have seen the friendship between God and Moses.

The Elders’ relationship with God has another element. They are protected by the rules of hospitality. In being accepted into the family of the clan chief, these seventy leaders can
share a meal in the presence of the divine host. They are ‘safe’ to gaze on God, to enter into an intimate domain that will not overwhelm them. This is an anticipation of the Eucharist. God’s protecting hand will ‘shade’ them, an image that brings us to our third text and a question.

What of the other side of the experience of God, namely, that which we can describe as ‘non-seeing’? We have touched on this briefly in speaking of God’s transcendence to history. But let’s consider Exodus 33: 12-23.

In the first part of this passage, again we find the personal interaction between Moses and God. Moses is God’s friend since he has won God’s favour, because God knows him ‘by name’, and importantly, God’s name has been revealed to and through Moses. This is probed further. In the dialogue, When Moses asks to be shown the divine ‘glory’ he is given a two-layered response. The signs of the divine presence (‘face’) have been revealed through Moses, in God’s reconciliation with Israel through the divine mercy. Moses is told that he cannot see God’s face ‘for man cannot see me and live.’ This can be an expression of divine freedom. It can also throw another light on the holiness of God. It is not that God is destructive. It is rather that the reality of God is too vast and profound for us to grasp. As we cannot look directly at the sun for too long without being blinded, so it is with God.

The scene mirrors this divine sensitivity. As the divine glory passes by, God’s ‘hand’ shades and, once removed, Moses can see God’s ‘back’ disappearing into the shadows. The divine presence, its all-encompassing mystery, becomes transparent by being filtered in creation, in events and people. This is consonant with God as tender, compassionate and, while holy, is intent on intimacy with us. God protects us from a reality utterly beyond us and enables us to approach it ‘safely.’ The mystery of Truth’s beauty is captured in similar language by Emily Dickinson.

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant-
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth’s superb surprise.

As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually-
Or every man be blind

**Kataphatic and Apophatic: Light and Darkness**

Seeing and not-seeing, then, are two complementary sides to the experience of God. There is one of light, the positive or kataphatic ‘way’ in which images, ideas, symbols and language are sources that help nourish and express the relationship with God. The other is a path of darkness or the apophatic way where, traced back to the Pseudo-Dionysius, the experience of the darkness of unknowing is a path into the mysteries of God that lie in ‘hidden silence.’ Here, a person finds such imaginal, conceptual, sensate and linguistic supports lose their effectiveness or appeal. There is a deepening yearning for God but it is met by a divine presence that seems to be in a form of ‘luminous darkness.’

This is the pattern of spiritual development whereby the cooperating heart moves towards presence before God through the momentum of desire. ‘Way’ can be misleading since it gives the impression that one chooses one of these ‘ways’ to seek God. It is true that temperament, personal preference and development are important considerations in how one follows the spiritual path, especially in one’s style of prayer. But there is a sense that, if the spiritual quest is primarily, and increasingly, the work of God, any ‘way’ is something that chooses us.

Again, this two-sided aspect is integral to the work of theology. While there is a natural desire to see God and faith is already a participation in the divine light, our knowledge is still ‘through a glass darkly.’ At the very start of his *Summa*, Aquinas captures this thorough
the image of a bat using radar-like soundings to find its way through its world without sun or light. God so far surpasses the human intellect that it resembles, ‘the sun, which is supremely visible, cannot be seen by the bat by reason of its excess of light.’

Similarly, Denys Turner points out, in trying to understand God and God’s ways, we get to a point where we are talking too much or just run out of words. We can only be silent. We can neither ‘see’ nor speak. We can only gaze, wordless, before the unutterable mystery of God. Of Aquinas he notes:

There is no doubt at all that for Thomas all theological speech is in principle grounded in that silence from which it first emerged, and into which it inevitably falls helplessly back.

**Theology at the Foot of the Cross**

Finally, Martin Luther is helpful here with a theology in which ‘the cross puts everything to the test.’ So far, we have talked about seeing which can be expressed as the ‘light of faith’ and, alternatively, the ‘darkness of faith’ that cannot see or see clearly. Understood in this way, theology’s role in articulating faith has to grapple with the fact that, as Alister McGrath says,

...we cannot grasp God fully; we are walking in the dark, rather than in the light; our grip on reality is only partial and deeply ambivalent; we are assaulted by temptation, doubt, despair.

In fact, McGrath notes that Luther, in trying to capture the theologian’s task, uses for his controlling image the one found above of God passing and disappearing into the shadows (Ex. 33). ‘The one who sees the visible rearward parts of God as seen in suffering and the cross deserves to be called a theologian.’

McGrath goes on to say that Luther’s point is that we do not walk alone but we are accompanied by the One who suffered and died for us and who will never abandon us.

The cross, like Mount Sinai, may be enfolded by clouds and darkness. Yet God remains present in this darkness, transcending both our capacity to discern him and our willingness to trust him.

McGrath uses CS Lewis as an example. Lewis’ rational efforts of a faith trying to make sense of suffering in *The Problem of Pain* in 1940 crumble with his loss and grief at the death of his wife Joy, twenty years later, in *A Grief Observed* (1961). Earlier, the man of faith who tried to bring a rational approach to suffering and pain did so more in terms of abstract ideas. Later, he came to realize how ‘a rational faith can fall to pieces when it is confronted by suffering as a personal reality.’ Lewis rediscovered his faith through his own suffering. He turned to God and found the door slammed in his face ‘and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.’ This impelled him to theology done at ‘the foot of the Cross.’

McGrath reminds us that we must not abandon Lewis’ delight ‘in the capacity of Christian faith to make sense of things.’ But neither should we so misunderstand this that the ‘Christian sun illuminates every aspect of the landscape so that no shadows remain.’ Luther’s concern is that many aspects of that landscape remain ‘shrouded in darkness.’ His theology of the cross, of faith amidst darkness is, McGrath suggests, ‘a critical theology’ in which we ‘recognize the limitations under which faith exists in the world.’

**Seeing and Being Seen**

We come to our second theme where seeing is associated both with being seen and seeking.

Desire for God is often conveyed through the image of sight and specifically the yearning to see the face of God. The Psalmist prays ‘let us see your face and we shall be saved [or safe]’ (Ps 79:3).

There is a close connection between seeing God’s face and the gracious presence of God that brings salvation or shalom. The latter is not simply peace. It is wholeness or wellbeing in oneself and with others. Alternatively, the Psalmist prays that he not be rejected or incur divine displeasure—‘do not hide your
face from me’ (27:9).

It seems that the shining of God’s face had its original setting in Jewish worship. In surrounding ‘pagan’ cultures, the statues of temple gods were uncovered as the climax of the liturgy. This was borrowed by the Jews to express a ‘cultic theophany’, namely, the personal experience of the living, active Lord God realized in liturgical action.13

With Jesus, seeing God moves to another level. The transparency of God, limited to God’s will and action in history in the book of Exodus now expands to give access to the being and nature of God. While the depths of God are ‘rich’ (Rom. 11:38), we now have Jesus the ‘image of the unseen God’, the divine prototype through whom all else is created (Col. 1:15).

Consider 1 John 3: 1-2. The Father’s love is ‘lavished’ on us so that we are members of the divine family. Though John’s main focus is on future glory, it has implications now. Through a life of faith, we already ‘see’ the face of God in Jesus. The more we gaze on Jesus, the more we become like him.

This reflects a common theme in the Greek religious tradition, namely that ‘like would know like.’ The human being who sees God knows God and is divinized, namely, shares somehow in God’s life and becomes ‘godlike.’14 Paul expresses it thus: ‘And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect’ (1 Cor. 3: 18).

St. Irenaeus is helpful here. We often read his phrase ‘the glory of the God is the human person fully alive.’ We rarely see the following words that answer an implied question: ‘what does fully alive mean?’ They are visio dei—‘the vision of God’, ‘beholding God’, ‘living in the presence of God.’ We are only completely alive and happy through a life centered on God.15

There are two things to note here. First, ‘vision’ means being ‘up-close and personal’ with God. ‘Knowing’ here has the biblical sense of an intimate relationship. Second, the Latin word for ‘vision’ means more than knowing an object ‘out there.’ It is knowledge in which what we know (and love) becomes part of us. As a result, my horizon is expanded. I come to see and love everything through God’s eyes and with God’s heart.

But what place does ‘being seen’ have here, especially in the Scriptural presentation of faith in the context of the Risen Jesus? As Anthony J Kelly notes, citing NT Wright, the appearances ‘bear the stamp of an objective and interpersonal encounter in which the subjectivity of the witnesses is laid bare, and their perceptions transformed.’16 While reflection on these appearances gives understandable attention to the disciples’ ‘seeing’, Kelly suggests that what is often overlooked in those experiences is the ‘quality of “being seen through” by him who sees into the heart.’ The disciples of Jesus are present to Him both as they ‘really “are” but also as they are “called to be.” And so the transparency of the disciples to the gaze of Jesus is a summons to conversion—especially at the point where faith had been lacking, or waned or even dead.’17

A more specific picture of the transformative gaze of Jesus is suggested by John of the Cross. The gaze of the risen Jesus is universally available and, notes Iain Matthews, ‘guarantees the possibility of prayer.’ It is Simon Peter in Luke’s Gospel who, under the gaze of Jesus, offers the possibility for such prayer: on his first meeting with Jesus when, acknowledging his sinfulness, he is reassured by Jesus’ ‘do not be afraid’ (Lk 5: 1-11); when Jesus sees through Peter’s protestations of loyalty yet offers hope that he will grow strong (22:32); in Peter’s denial and, undone by the gaze of Jesus, he weeps bitterly (22:62); the final cryptic report that the Lord had appeared to Simon (24:34). Matthews’ summing up captures it perfectly:

‘Risen indeed’, and so alive in each person’s history, gazing into each one’s story, not just benignly, but effectively. As John’s own history
had taught him, 'For God, to gaze is to love and to work favours.' His love acts. It makes us ‘worthy and capable of his love’. His gaze is his love and his love does things. 'God's gaze works four blessings in the soul: it cleanses her, makes her beautiful, enriches and enlightens her.'

When we pray, when we turn to God in friendship, desiring him, no matter how bleak or dry it appears, something is always happening. God is ‘taking us into himself and making us like himself.’ How is prayer possible for me, at any time, no matter how empty it seems? ‘Because Christ's loving gaze is constantly upon us, and he makes it possible.’

The Face as Image for Others

As we seek to see God’s face, it is Jesus, then, whose gaze of love draws us to Himself and transforms us. At the same time, Jesus is the ultimate filter given to us. He enables us to feel secure enough to be in the presence of the all holy God. Divine love adapts to our needs. In Jesus, with God close to us, we can gaze into the depths of divine holiness in wonder and love.

However, we get another insight into this in terms of the human face from Edward Schillebeeckx.

The human face in particular—man never sees his own face—already indicates that man is directed towards others, is destined for others and not for himself. The face is an image of ourselves for others.

This highlights a final aspect of ‘seeing’ the face of God. The face of Jesus is pointed to others—to the Father, to us, to the world. This is also true for us since we are made in the divine image. To seek and to see God’s face is not just a solitary quest. We share the divine life which is about three persons in a relationship. It resonates in our attitudes and actions. Spirituality and morality are inseparable. Levinas, for instance, has expanded our understanding of ethical life in response to the face of the Other.

Michael Downey points out that the life of the Trinity is not about propositions but prepositions—to, for, with, in, from. The Trinity is for each other and for others. That is the fuller meaning of seeing God’s face. It is a knowing and loving which shares in the Trinitarian life and spreads out to others and to creation. As Andrew Louth notes, divinization (theosis) represents ‘what is and remains God’s intention: the creation of the cosmos that, through humankind, is destined to share in the divine life, to be deified.’

Conclusion

There are many other perspectives about sight and God that are beyond the scope of this discussion. There are, for instance, points of intersection between apophasis and the postmodern emphasis on God as ‘other’ and the sense of God’s absence that run in parallel with modernity’s loss of certainties. Again, as Neil Brown has discussed in this journal, we must learn from the ‘new atheism.’ We are reminded that the sincere quest for meaning and fullness of life may be involve a rejection of distorted, even of damaging, images of God. As Rahner reminded us, the expression of ‘anguished atheism’ may, in reality, be ‘a sharing in the desolation of the cross.’

In reflecting on seeing and seeking God’s face, this Jewish blessing may now have a deeper meaning for us and offer something final to ponder:

May Yahweh bless you and keep you.
May Yahweh let his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
May Yahweh uncover his face to you and bring you peace (Num. 6: 24-6)

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OUR PATHWAY TO GOD: SIGHT

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1. This article is an expanded version of one topic in a series Our Senses: Five Pathways to God published in the NZ Marist Messenger August 2008-May 2009. My thanks to its present Editor.
2. This is explored in Rudolf Otto’s The Idea of the Holy where he aims at developing an understanding of the ‘numinous’ which he also refers to as the ‘Wholly Other.’ This is later used by dialectical theologians post Bultmann and Barth to denote an objective absolute dependence on a transcendent being. This is to distance our discussion from any suggestion of rejection of analogy in speaking about God (as through the figurative use of the senses).
3. For instance, Elohim (Utterly different but with human qualities); El Shaddai (Almighty, alluding to the Home of the Gods in the mountains of the North).
4. Sensitivity to this Jewish tradition is recognized today by the use of ‘Lord God’ in Catholic and other Christian worship.
17. Ibid., 183.
19. Ibid. 141.

The mark of a healthy spirituality is that the person is seized by the tenderness an compassion of God for all his creatures. A sign of any unhealthy spirituality is a dichotomy between prayer and life, the natural and the supernatural, body and spirit, often characterized by a greater preoccupation with the devil and with evil than with the love and goodness of God, coupled with a curious inability of people to see the evil in the social, economic and political systems they so often support.

—Gerard Hughes SJ
THE CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

Pope Francis’ Assessment of its Challenges

FRANK CUMBO

A note to the reader: the direct quotes from Pope Francis’ address in this article are taken from the English translation of the address provided in the papal documents section of the Vatican website. For ease of reading, text from this source has been placed in quotation marks but is not succeeded by parentheses specifying its source. All other direct quotes have their sources specified in this way.

A First Look at the Text

Pope Francis’ June 2014 address to the 37th National Convocation of Renewal in the Holy Spirit challenges leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, hereafter termed the CCR, to abandon attitudes and practices which the pontiff contends have contributed to ‘infighting’ within and amongst CCR groups. Given the brevity of this address and its focus on identifying and critiquing the root cause of this discord it contains only two examples of divisive attitudes and practices which the pontiff contends have contributed to ‘infighting’ within and amongst CCR groups. Instead, Pope Francis uses the two examples he discusses as evidence in support of his central contention: that the disunity in the contemporary CCR is symptomatic of an unnecessary and damaging effort on the part of its leaders to control its activities.

The first example discussed in this address pertains to leadership of entire CCR groups. Pope Francis admonishes leaders in the CCR who exceed the role of facilitators and instead attempt to direct the activity of CCR groups without due regard for other members’ discernment of the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis borrows the phrase ‘the danger of getting too organised’ to refer to this first factor contributing to the disharmony in the contemporary CCR, but it is perhaps more readily understood as the executive approach to leadership. The pontiff contends that adopting this approach causes a leader in the CCR to think ‘of himself or herself as being more important or greater than the others’. In place of this executive model of leadership, Pope Francis’ address promotes a return to the servant leadership model which characterised the early CCR. He argues that this latter model allows the Holy Spirit to lead the CCR and therefore promotes harmony ‘because unity comes from the Holy Spirit’.

The second divisive attitude which Pope Francis discusses is related to the first. Having identified the need to return to a ‘servant leadership’ model with respect to entire CCR groups, Pope Francis identifies the need for change with regard to the approach taken to leadership of individuals in the CCR. The pontiff admonishes those leaders of the CCR who have sought to become what he terms ‘arbiters of God’s grace’ taking upon themselves the right to determine who may receive ‘the prayer of outpouring or Baptism in the Spirit’. Pope Francis clearly feels, therefore, that the ‘executive approach to leadership’ must not be adopted towards an individual wishing to experience charismatic prayer or become initiated into the CCR. Pope Francis presses this point by contending that this attitude is not in
keeping with the freedom with which the earliest members of the CCR received charisms, engaged in ecumenical activities and evangelised.

**Placing This Address in (an) Historical Context**

Notably, Pope Francis’s address does not make explicit what he believes precipitated the change away from servant leadership in the CCR. However, sections of this address do allude to a cause when they are read in the context of the historical development of the CCR. Moreover, it would seem that Pope Francis intended this address to be understood with this background in mind, since he intersperses references to the development of the CCR in it *passim*.

The early history of the CCR can be categorised in two phases. The first of these two phases, the ‘movement’s birth’, did not include any significant theological reflection on the CCR’s mission and place within the broader Catholic Church. The overriding concern for those involved in this first phase of the CCR was sharing what they described as a powerful and life-transforming outpouring of the Holy Spirit which was first experienced in the context of a Protestant, Pentecostal prayer group.

The seminal work on this first phase of the CCR *Catholic Pentecostals*, written by Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan and published in 1969, is an ideal source for evaluating Pope Francis’ portrayal of the early CCR. Not only does it describe the initial structures and activities of the CCR during its early years in detail, it is also listed as recommended reading in the works of Cardinal Suenens, whose texts and contribution to the development of the CCR Pope Francis praises in this address. Moreover, *Catholic Pentecostals* is referenced in the statutes of the ICCRS, a body whose ‘service of the worldwide renewal’ is also praised in the pontiff’s address.

*Catholic Pentecostals* depicts the CCR as a movement intent on promoting a strong affective response to shared prayer, which it terms Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Each of the many testimonies the Ranaghans reproduce in their text recounts how the experience of Baptism in the Holy Spirit imbued the person providing the testimony with certain gifts and prompted in that person a strong desire to share this experience with others. The most frequently referenced charism described as a manifestation of Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Ranaghans’ work is glossolalia, a ‘spontaneous verbal expression, in which syllables succeed one another, forming phrases that are unintelligible’. (Leo Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *A New Pentecost?* 1974, 99). However, *Catholic Pentecostals* does not present ‘speaking in tongues’ as an absolute indicator that ‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit’ has occurred since this experience and the discernment of charisms is presented as an entirely subjective process.

Nevertheless, the Ranaghans do outline a method for obtaining Baptism in the Holy Spirit. They direct anyone seeking renewal to gather with others to ask Christ in prayer to ‘renew in him the gifts and fruits bestowed in baptism but not fully actualized in a living way’. (*Catholic Pentecostals*, 144) While it is made clear in subsequent passages that this prayer for renewal is just that: ‘a prayer, not a sacrament,’ (*Catholic Pentecostals*, 150) this seems to be more a concession to the demands of orthodoxy rather than a point of conviction, as evidenced by the subsequent addition of ‘if such a radical distinction needs to be made’.

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Indeed, many of the testimonies the Ranaghans reproduce in *Catholic Pentecostals* contain passages which suggest that, in the first phase of the CCR’s history Baptism in the Holy Spirit was understood in a way that is inconsistent with the Catholic understanding of the Sacrament of Confirmation. To provide but one example, while describing part of the student retreat conducted at Duquesne University in 1967 during the weeks immediately following the founding of the CCR, one of the participants, David Mangan, states that he ‘realized what my reception of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation was supposed to be and how I didn’t participate in it’. (*Catholic Pentecostals*, 25) This account, and many of the others which were published and promoted in *Catholic Pentecostals*, therefore implies that the reception of grace at Confirmation is contingent on an act of the will on the part of the one being confirmed.

Their weak protest to the contrary notwithstanding, throughout *Catholic Pentecostals*, the Ranaghans clearly present Baptism in the Holy Spirit as a means by which the Holy Spirit effects a change in the life of a Catholic which may not have been conferred through the reception of the Confirmation. This disregard of the objectively conferred, ontological change which occurs at Confirmation is inconsistent with Catholic theology and is the product of the entirely subjective approach to discernment and religious experience prevalent in this first phase of the CCR.

The lack of theological reflection which characterised the activity of the early years of the CCR was seen as a dangerous omission by Cardinal Suenens, whose involvement in the CCR began the second phase in its early history, approximately six years after the first CCR retreat at Duquesne University. Suenens saw the deficiencies in the sacramental understanding of the early CCR as symptomatic of its origins in Protestant Pentecostalism and the exclusive emphasis on subjective experience therein:

*On the level of actual experience, we can and indeed must admire classical Pentecostals for their faith in the action of the Holy Spirit. However, as everyone knows, as Catholics we cannot follow them on a doctrinal and exegetical level in their interpretation of ‘baptism in the Spirit’ nor in the matter of speaking in tongues* (*A New Pentecost?* 79)

Hence, this second phase in the CCR’s early development was characterised by the effort to safeguard the CCR from the danger of syncretism. Suenens and others who shared his concerned attempted to achieve this through the introduction of what can be termed ‘an objective theological framework’ which would allow the subjective experiences in the CCR to be evaluated and expressed in terms which were more consistent with Catholic theology.

Suenens sought to introduce this objective theological framework by emphasising two key aspects of the Catholic understanding of charisms not evident in the first phase of the early CCR. Firstly, Suenens sought to ensure that charisms were understood as gifts which the Holy Spirit imparts primarily for the good not of the individual, but of the whole Church. This was explored briefly at the Second Vatican Council in the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which defines charisms as the means by which ‘faithful of every rank’ may ‘contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church’. (*Lumen Gentium*, par 12) Secondly, Suenens sought to promote awareness of the need for objective discernment of charisms by ‘those who are appointed leaders in the Church, to whose special competence it belongs’. (*Lumen Gentium*, par 12) This was a topic of no small import to Suenens, who recounts in his text *A New Pentecost?* that he had strongly advocated for the inclusion of this section on charisms in *Lumen Gentium* while acting as a moderator of the Second Vatican Council. (*A New Pentecost?* 25)

*A New Pentecost?* was written partially as a response to *Catholic Pentecostals* and therefore outlines some aspects of early CCR
thought which he considered theologically problematic. Specifically, while taking great care to commend many of the laudable aspects of the work of those involved in the first phase of the CCR, Suenens rejected the contention that glossolalia is in every instance a charism. Instead, Suenens situates it ‘on a natural plane’ (A New Pentecost? 101) and only concedes that it might, rarely, have been an instance of a supernatural gift.

For Suenens, the lack of a direct corporate, ecclesiological benefit of glossolalia is the primary reason that it is to be considered more properly as one ‘among the fruits of grace’. (A New Pentecost? 104) When describing how he came to arrive at this understanding of glossolalia, Suenens specifies that he first ‘had to disassociate it from a vocabulary and theology which had their origins in classical Pentecostalism’. (A New Pentecost? 223) Clearly, Suenens felt that this vocabulary and theology were present in the CCR when he first encountered it, and hence that glossolalia was considered at least by some in the CCR to be ‘an infused gift enabling someone to pray in a real language which he himself does not understand’. (A New Pentecost? 99)

In place of what Suenens termed ‘classical Pentecostal’ theology, which considers subjective affect as paramount, Suenens sought to promote in the CCR an understanding that the subjective benefit an individual derives from receiving charisms is superseded by the primary benefit of charisms; meeting the objective needs of the Catholic Church as a whole. For Suenens, affirming the primacy of the objective was not equivalent to a rejection of the subjective dimension of charisms. To the contrary, in A New Pentecost? he describes in detail the significant affirmation he received through his experiences of glossolalia and Baptism in the Holy Spirit. However, of greater import to Suenens was the need to safeguard the integrity of the Sacraments in the Catholic Church.; Hence, Suenens argues that, for Catholics, Baptism in the Holy Spirit must be understood as nothing more than a ‘reaffirman-
through the introduction of objective discernment of charisms have changed. Although the pontiff does not explicitly state this position in his address, Pope Francis clearly contends that the CCR no longer lacks the theological reflection which led to the heterodox understandings Suenens observed in the CCR of his time.

In his address the pontiff makes several references to the wealth of theological reflection available to the contemporary CCR. Pope Francis refers his audience to Suenens’ work and to the ongoing contribution of the ICCRS and Catholic Fraternity, two organisations whose service of the worldwide renewal the pontiff praises. Additionally, the theological guidance offered by contemporary CCR theologians such as Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, whom Pope Francis also praises and quotes in his address, is clearly seen by the pontiff as a sufficient safeguard against the re-emergence of heterodox theological positions in the CCR.

The second observation included in his address which demonstrates that the objective discernment of charisms is deleterious to the contemporary CCR is that it has led to an egoism in the minds of some leaders which has stifled the ‘spontaneity and life of the renewal’ (A New Pentecost? 93) in precisely the way Suenens warned against. Accordingly, Pope Francis makes clear that the ICCRS and Catholic Fraternity must not operate out of an executive approach to leadership any more than individual leaders ought to, exhorting all members of the CCR:

Let yourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit, in freedom; and please, don’t put the Holy Spirit in a cage! Be free! Seek unity in the renewal, the unity which comes from the Trinity.

Awareness that Suenens’ work had been selectively read and misappropriated to serve as justification for the executive approach to leadership may well be the reason that Pope Francis elected to be circumspect about the origins of the executive approach to leadership in the CCR. Indeed, there is evidence to support the contention that Pope Francis deliberately sought to ensure that his criticism of the executive model of leadership was not conflated with a rejection of Suenens. Firstly, Suenens is one of only three theologians Pope Francis commends by name in this address. Secondly, the only texts explicitly recommended by the pontiff in this address are the ‘Malines Documents,’ two of which Suenens authored and one of which he co-authored with another bishop. Pope Francis encourages members of the CCR to utilise these Malines documents as ‘a guide, a reliable path to keep you from going astray’, specifying Suenens’ role in their composition in the process. Pope Francis can therefore be seen to have taken care to ensure that his rejection of some of Suenens’ concerns in this address was balanced by the inclusion of repeated positive appraisals of Suenens’ contribution to the development of the CCR.

In conclusion, the subtext of this address is a firm rebuke of those who see their knowledge of Catholic theology or experience in the CCR as license to direct the activity of the contemporary CCR or determine who is suitable for admission in CCR groups. Pope Francis clearly contends that this selective implementation of Suenens’ call for the introduction of objective discernment into the CCR is a damaging source of disunity in the contemporary CCR, ignores important caveats which Suenens explored in great detail in his works, and is, in any case no longer necessary.

Let yourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit, in freedom; and please, don’t put the Holy Spirit in a cage!

—Pope Francis
ANY PEOPLE in the Western World today, and statistics tell us their number is increasing, live without any belief in God. They live according to their own lights, take their values from wherever they can find them, receive the support they need from family and friends, ride the ups and downs of life, often give back to the community in many ways, and find sufficient meaning in their interests, enterprises, work, and from whatever modern culture is able to provide. In short, they would say, if asked, that they lead good and happy lives to the extent that fate allows.

In a post-Christian society, even though they may not give it much thought, many of their basic assumptions, values and moral principles, will be relics of what went before, such as the belief that human life has worth, that somehow the universe favours human efforts, and that love is the summit of human existence. Theirs is a shifting amalgam of value and meaning, in which nothing is ruled out and spirituality is a search for whatever might seem to enrich their lives. It does not matter whether it is something borrowed or something new.

Explicit atheism, on the other hand, is a thorough-going denial of the existence of God and soul, which seeks to sweep into the dustbin of history all relics and implications of previous theistic beliefs and to replace them with a more consistent set of meanings and values. What then does ‘spirituality’ look like in such a scenario?

Most dyed-in-the-wool atheists regard talking about spirituality as akin to supping with the devil—one slip of the tongue and you’re tasting the devil’s fare. Some brave ‘souls’, however do tempt fate!

Kerry Walters, for one, claims that while there can be no ‘intrinsic meaning’ for human life, a ‘significant life’ is worth pursuing, and can be the foundation for a ‘spirituality’. The real threat to such meaning is, of course, the transitoriness of life, when ‘my’ meaning ceases. But, he claims, faced honestly and courageously, this may add poignancy and enhanced appreciation to one’s life:

At the end of the day, the atheists’ search for meaning and purpose is inspired by Sisyphus’ courageous acknowledgement of the way the world is: celebrating its joys and beauty while accepting, as best one can, its tragedies. Meaning will always be provisional. Purpose will always be contingent. Narrative will never be completed. But for all that, life is worth living.

Even for an atheist, Walters says, peak experiences, being stirred to the depths, beauty and wonder, are important features of life. Is a sense of ‘mystery’ then possible? Richard Dawkins answers ‘no’, in that nothing is ‘forever ungraspable’. Walters maintains, however, that such experiences do point beyond themselves, not to God, but to something ungraspable—many people, he says,

think of themselves as spiritual because they
sense something in their experience that can’t be adequately captured by either traditional religious idioms or straightforward empirical descriptions. Instead it can only be gestured at with the evocative language of poetry, metaphor, and simile. Thoughtful atheists can accept this understanding of the spiritual.

This experience, he alleges, has previously been colonised by religion, but rather, from modern science, we can now understand it as
our sense of the interconnectedness of all things and of our place within the whole, our celebration of it, our wonder and gratitude at the intricacy, beauty, and mystery of it all, and our ‘puniness’ within it.6

Alain De Botton, like many before him, sees ‘culture’ as the solution to the gap left by religion’s demise. He believes ‘culture is more than adequately equipped to confront our dilemmas without having to rely on religious dogma.’6 The crucial issue, of course, is that modern culture is part of the spiritual problem, a fact which he, at least implicitly, recognises:

The signal danger of life in a godless society is that it lacks reminders of the transcendent and therefore leaves us unprepared for disappointment and eventual annihilation. When God is dead, human beings - much to their detriment—are at risk of taking psychological centre stage. They imagine themselves to be commanders of their own destinies, they trample upon nature, forget the rhythms of the earth, deny death and shy away from valuing all that slips through their grasp, until at last they collide catastrophically with the sharp edge of reality.7

The arts, however, he thinks, are capable of meeting the demand, even if under current conditions they do not always do so:

good art is the sensuous presentation of those ideas which matter most to the proper functioning of our souls—and yet which we are most inclined to forget, even though they are the basics for our capacity for contentment and virtue.8

A.C. Grayling’s The God Argument is more polemical in tone than the previous authors. He advocates a ‘humanism’ (not a spirituality) that calls upon ‘our most generous and sympathetic understanding of human nature and the human condition’9. This is brought about through ‘the arts and literature, through history and philosophy, through the magnificent endeavour of science, through attentive personal experience and reflection, through close relationships, through the conversation of mankind...’10

Fr. Neil Brown taught at the Catholic Institute of Sydney for thirty-four years. He is currently the Parish Priest of Bondi Beach in the Sydney Archdiocese.

He states:

it is a failure of imagination not to see that when people go to concerts or exhibitions, enjoy country walks, gardening, gathering with friends round a dinner table, reading, creating something, learning, working at something absorbing and worthwhile.. they are in different ways satisfying the need for creativity, recreation, community and friendship which are vital to lives well lived.11

Grayling shows no enthusiasm for any contribution of Christianity, in fact, he claims, if history had been different—

In place of Annunciations and Madonnas, Crucifixions and Resurrections, we would have more Apollos Pursuing Daphnes, more Death of Procris, more Dianas Bathing. By almost any standard apart from the macabre and gloomy ones of Catholic kitsch, an Aphrodite emerging from the Paphian foam is an infinitely more life-enhancing image than a Deposition from the Cross.12

De Botton, however, has a very different view, as he laments one of the greatest lacks of modern society:

Jesus’ story is a register of pain—betrayal, loneliness, self-doubt, torture—through which our own anguish can be mirrored and contextualized, and our impressions of its rarity corrected. Such impressions are of course not hard to form, given how vigorously society waves away our difficulties.13

If you leave aside any appeal to the arts and culture, scientifically minded Atheism seems to lead into a spiritual cul-de-sac, as Jesse Bering shows:
What’s it all for? In the end, that’s probably a false riddle. But never mind the mind of God. We can live for each other—here and now, before its’ too late, sympathetically sharing snapshots from inside our still conscious heads. But what you choose to do with your brief subjective existence is entirely up to you. If you choose to ignore this precautionary tale of a fleeting life without supernatural consequences, there will be no hell to pay. Only missed opportunities. And then you die.

Most artists simply assume that the arts and literature, together with the everyday expressiveness of life with family and friends, are able to provide for all our spiritual needs. This assumption, however, has to contend with the ‘art for art’s sake’ leitmotif of much of modern art—making it serve other purposes, many atheists say, would distort its integrity.

In Art As Therapy, Alain De Botton and the philosopher, John Armstrong, face this issue, suggesting perhaps the commissioning of art, as the Church has done, to help people be better versions of themselves. Art, they argue, has a manifold usefulness: as remembering, as inspiring hope, as reconciling us to the human condition, as rebalancing our lacks, as an aid to self-knowledge, as a means of personal growth, and as expanding our appreciation for life.

It is true that we learn widely and deeply and in many different ways from the arts and literature, but it is also true that in its current form modern culture is diffuse, indiscriminate and subject to market and consumer demands, rather than directly providing for the kinds of needs a spirituality requires. The fact still remains that the arts and literature have their own focus, and anything other is a fortunate by-product.

Terry Eagleton, himself an atheist, in Culture and the Death of God asks whether it is possible for culture, not withstanding all the value and meaning it brings, ‘to inherit the sceptre of religion’. His answer is ‘no’:

Culture is more likely to reflect social divisions than to reconcile them. Once those contentions begin to infiltrate the concept of culture itself—once value, language, symbol, kinship, heritage, identity and community become politically charged—culture ceases to be part of the solution and instead becomes part of the problem.

Charles Taylor shows that the rise of modern atheism has been accompanied with the belief that it is an act of courage to face the ultimate meaninglessness of human life. There is, then, always this dampening effect weighing down any flights of spirituality, and in many cases preventing it from taking off at all. Nobel Prize winner, Czeslaw Milosz warns that there is a danger involved here—‘boredom’:

One of the warning signs is boredom. Why read novelists and poets when I know what I shall find: another treatise on the insignificance of man, of that creature in whom all is illusory except for physical pleasure and pain.

Culture is indispensable to our humanity and to our spirituality. It is the springboard for a spirituality, but also its problematic. In our modern Western culture it must counter our acquisitive and consumer mentality, our lack of care for the earth, our narrow individualism, the growing divide between rich and poor, our propensity for violence, and the list goes on. This too is the challenge and measure for any religion which seeks to provide a spirituality to fit the present age, a test many religious attempts do not pass.

Spirituality is about meaning and value, integrity and wholeness, an exploration of what our humanity might be capable of. The arts, literature, and the humanities make an important contribution to this search. But for A. C. Grayling that is as far as we can go. He asks:

the point worth making here is this: 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? What work would such a notion do, in adding or changing anything about good, meaningful, satisfying, creative, relationship-based lives....

To answer Grayling’s question, ‘God’ introduces a totally new register for humanity,
which is released from the confinement of its own concepts and products and has opened up for it the possibilities of a radically different future. Even though those possibilities are not always realised, at times they are: Hans and Sophie Scholl were young Christian university students in Germany during the Second World War, whose faith led them, together with some of their friends, to form the ‘White Rose’, a non-violent resistance group opposed to Nazi atrocities and as a result they were executed at Stadeheim Prison in Munich in 1943. Such examples allow us to glimpse the attainable.

Speaking in the broadest terms, ‘God’ is:
• an answer to our unlimited questioning and wondering, an end to our ever increasing desiring for the ‘more’ of life, and for our ceaseless searching for a better self and a better world, all of which would otherwise remain locked in materiality, a pursuit of more and more of the same;
• a ground for the ultimate worth and seriousness of our human freedom and striving - our choices for good or ill matter because we have a future and our world has a future—a motive to cross the boundaries that divide our world and add to its pain and suffering;
• an offer of redemption for the victims of injustice and atrocity, for personal guilt and frailty, for the inextinguishable sense of loss and anguish, where no other answer is possible;
• a hope beyond mere optimism that allows us to see our struggle as worthwhile even when the odds seem insurmountable, as they did for Hans and Sophie Scholl and their friends;
• a vision of the universe, our world, our own lives and those of others as ‘gift’, a vision that frees us from the shackles of ‘insignificance’ and offers our relationships with one another new depth and meaning.

It seems that once you allow for the possibility of a spirituality it is very difficult to shut God out. Wonder, depth of meaning, mystery, and value, are all ‘wormholes’ for God to appear, as Terry Eagleton sees:

What Nietzsche recognises is that you can get rid of God only if you do away with innate meaning. The Almighty can survive tragedy, but not absurdity. As long as there appears to be some immanent sense to things, one can always inquire after the source from which it springs. Abolishing given meanings involves destroying the idea of depth, which in turn means rooting out beings like God who take shelter there.20

To remain consistent it seems, atheism must exclude or at least severely limit ‘spirituality’. The question then becomes: Can we attain the potential of human life in the world as it is, with all its shocks and travails, without a spirituality? We haven’t been able to in the past. In a ‘brave new world’ that may be possible, but at what human cost?

Can the Church learn anything from this discussion? Yes, in particular, that the spirituality it offers should not remain solely in the ‘temple’, as it has largely during the Counter Reformation centuries, but, like Jesus, should move out into the cities and towns, the highways and byways, to engage people where they are at in the culture, to engage the ‘wonder’ that the modern sciences awaken, and to address the lacks and wounds our culture has opened up.

NOTES

2. ibid., 155.
5. ibid., 169-176.
7. ibid., 200.
St Augustine said that we must return to our own heart to find God. We have to go down into the depths of our own soul to realize our profound personal need of life, of love and of meaning.

We must find through faith and reflection the answer to our own questioning in the Heart of Christ, i.e. in the depths of his personality, where human yearning and God’s graciousness meet in redemptive incarnation. Then, fashioned by these forces, our own heart will be an understanding heart, open to, feeling for, and giving to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We will not be disheartened or discouraged in the face of difficulties. We follow Christ who ‘loved with a human heart’…; he shared our humanness that we might know that over us all is the everlasting love of the Father.

In God’s good time the omnipotent love of God will have its way. It is in this love that we have learned to believe.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING:
THE WORD

EUGENE STOCKTON

THE PURSUIT of knowledge is going on in many fields in everyday life—in science, history, journalism, forensic investigation, etc. The intention is to establish facts, truths, through the exercise of the rational mind. A truth, a statement of fact, is formulated by identifying a predicate with a subject (A is B), which may or may not correspond with reality, and so the demand is for evidence to prove the stated fact. Truth in this sense can be described as a dialectic value (like good, right) which is delineated by its opposite, i.e. falsity. Such dualism is characteristic of the ordinary rational surface of consciousness.

To Patterns of the Truth

At a deeper level of perception such dualisms dissipate, where opposites are complementary, rather than contradictory. Whereas rational thought deals with essences, expressed as concepts, a deeper level of consciousness attends to relationships. Things in their relatedness constitute patterns. So at depth one recognises patterns, and the similarity of patterns, in subjective data registered as feelings, and expressed in art and similar figurative forms. The affirmation of likeness between patterns (A feels like B) is not true or false, but more or less. At depth the pursuit is not for truths, but for the True, a certain fullness of being. The True can be described as a transcendental value. It has no opposite to set its boundaries, for that would be non-being. It draws the seeker to itself, for the sake of itself. The True is akin to other transcendentals, the Good and the Beautiful. A seeker can possess something which is true, good or beautiful, but Beauty, Goodness and Truth are in themselves beyond our possession, reaching beyond our hands but drawing us towards themselves for no other reason than themselves. Enjoyable but unattainable, they are sheer gifts. One can only gaze in wonder.

The True, the Good, the Beautiful converge sublimely on the One. The One is nameless, simply affirming ‘I am’—though different religions use titles of convenience such as God, the Lord, Allah, etc. The Three in One draws us to reach out beyond ourselves, to transcend ourselves. This is the trajectory of all religions, even of the ‘religious atheist’ (!), as distinct from those whose sole concern is the here-and-now materialistic, seeking to become their own god, by enhancing their ego through the pursuit of wealth, power, pleasure or fame.

In the pursuit of the transcendent, it is imperative to find meaning in the multiplicity of the here-and-now. There is a simple sense of the word ‘meaning’, as in consulting a dictionary, of finding a synonym or paraphrase equivalent to the word in question. More broadly, for example in life situations, the search is to recognise patterns out of the jumble of elements which make up the situation in question. Meaning is not a definition (as in surface rationality), it does not establish or prove a truth, it does not add to what is already there. Where initially there is a meaningless jumble of conflicting feelings and their figures, meaning seeks to extract order from disorder, to relate parts to parts and parts to the whole. Meaning instinctively looks for direction (‘the way ahead’) and for value (‘is it worthwhile’). It uses one pattern to throw light on another, so that the second is seen to have meaning in the light of the first. This
meaning is a new way of looking at a (confused) situation, ending with the reflection ‘Now this makes sense to me’. It is as when a cacophony of sound is rearranged into elegant music.

The pianist, from the range of notes in a piano, chooses some in a harmonious arrangement to create something meaningful. The painter, from the collection of pigments on his palette, chooses and mixes certain colours and arranges them in a meaningful whole.

Psychology

Modell links the metaphoric processing of feelings in creative imagination to meaningfulness in human behaviour through human intentionality. All living beings show some kind of intent, the urge to survive and procreate. In humans the intent is of a higher order, namely self-actuation, which in some cases may over-ride the instinctive urge of animals. The human selects what is of value that is congruent to the chosen goal, guided by feelings as markers of value. Hart shows that intentionality is found in all human perception, that is, the capacity of the mind to be directed to a goal, filtering out of the flood of experiences only what is conducive to its purpose. So one moves forward in a confident, sure-footed way.

A similar parallel can be seen in the intuitive, pre-conceptual stage of scientific investigation. Once the scientist has assembled the mass of data, each represented by a ‘mental image’ (or some other analogue of sense perception), he seeks to find order in the chaos. Then he ‘plays with ideas’, arranging and rearranging the assemblage in different juxtapositions, until he sees the right ‘fit’. This he then translates into words in rational sequence. Once he has found meaning in the mass of data, then he can go ahead to verify empirically what intuition has already presented as a possibility. So the scientist might propose a model or paradigm which can be tested by experimentation, to the satisfaction of his peers, towards the intended goal. Meaning has shown the way to the end and recognised the value of the exercise.

On a very different plane of thought, Painter claims that spirituality can be considered a search for meaning in life: ‘it can provide an orientation to our lives, a set of values to live by, a sense of direction and a basis of hope’. She quotes Viktor Frankl in describing this search for meaning in one’s life as ‘the primary motivational force’ in persons. In his classic Man’s Search for Meaning, Frankl recorded his experiences in a concentration camp and his observation that those who created a sense of meaningfulness were better able to survive the horrors of camp life. From this he developed a school of therapy dubbed ‘logotherapy’ (from the Greek logos understood as ‘meaning’) to assist patients to find meaning in their lives (‘what he longs for in the depth of his being’), emphasising the role of responsibility in taking charge of one’s life, forgetting self in reaching out to something/someone other than self (in creativeness, love, triumph over tragedy). It is saying ‘Yes’ to life in spite of suffering, guilt or mortal transitoriness.

Our inner life is a seething cauldron of formless feelings, each registering our subjective experience of the world outside us. These feelings take on form in types or figures, like the mental images in the playground of the mind, where we can play with ideas to put forward various configurations in the search for meaning. The arts play an important role in supplying possible patterns of meaning. The
myths of different cultures, far from being blatant lies, bring together their story elements in patterns which meaningfully mirror those of human or natural behaviour. Jesus in his teaching made use of similar devices, his parables, to portray patterns of moral behaviour leading to meaningful life under God, his vision of the Kingdom of God.

**Biblical Typology**

The Bible is largely a typological narrative to understand one’s own spiritual journey. I like to describe it as a map of life, as one might consult a map to locate confidently one’s position and direction. A prime example is the Paschal Mystery, foreshadowed in the Exodus and fulfilled in Jesus’ passage through death to resurrection, which is a pattern one can resort to in times of suffering, sorrow or hardship: the deadliness is not taken away, but is made bearable, or even desirable, in the vision ahead.

The Long March to the Promised Land, both in the biblical account and in Maoist ideology, has been an inspiration to millions, not least in Negro Spirituals and in the longing of the Pilgrim Fathers in America. Job querying God over the affliction he suffered as an innocent man, received an answer, which was not a direct answer, when God showed him the wonders of creation. All he could respond was, in effect ‘Now I see’.

So in the light of patterns depicted in the biblical narrative, puzzles in one’s life begin to make sense. The Fathers of the Church richly drew on the typology of the bible in their commentaries. *Lectio Divina* was a monastic exercise contemplating the sacred text to make sense of their lives as they corresponded to biblical patterns.

The word ‘contemplate’, to reflect, to look at attentively, is said to be derived from the Latin *templum*, the place where this happens. One might offer another etymology, namely *template*, a pattern or mould, so that contemplation brings together templates as described above. The verb also has a future orientation, to have a purpose, to have something in mind as a probable intention. So meaning not only makes sense of the present but also points to direction in the future.

St. Luke’s Gospel lends itself to contemplation. Often Luke explicitly records Jesus at prayer (Lk. 3:21; 4:42; 6:12; 11:1; 22:41-6) and how he taught his disciples to pray as John the Baptist had done (Lk. 11:1-13). Mary, the mother of Jesus, is set before us a prime example of the faithful follower of Jesus: twice it is emphasised that she ‘remembered all these things and pondered them in her heart’ (Lk. 2:19,51). This Gospel records a number of incidents which stand out from the general narrative as scenarios or tableaux to be pondered. They are like parables reflecting the communal life of the infant Church.

—The Temptations in the Desert (Lk. 4:1-13): Jesus spurns the temptation to usurp the authority of God, redressing the fall of Adam (Gen. 3, cf Phil. 2:5-11).

—The Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-36): a vision of Jesus’ future Resurrection glory, the culmination of the Law and Prophets (the O.T).

—The Feeding of the Multitude (Lk. 9:10-17): Jesus in his compassion providing for the needs of many, making use of the poor resources and ministry available—an image of the Church as a whole on one level, and of the Eucharist on another.

—The Visit to Martha and Mary (Lk. 10:38-42, itself a prelude to teaching on prayer Lk. 11:1-13): an allusion to the institution of deacons in the early Church (Ac. 6:1-7), underlining the distinction between *logos* (word) and *diakonein* (serve).

St. John’s Gospel is even more the stuff of contemplation, from the one aptly named the Theologian by Christians of the east. His is the classic use of biblical typology, where the O.T. types are seen to prefigure and be fulfilled in Jesus, the Word of God.

—The sacrificial lamb (Exod. 12:1) fulfilled in the Lamb of God and his Paschal Sacrifice (Jn. 1:29; 19:34).
The new temple (Ezek. 40-44) fulfilled in the resurrected body of Jesus (Jn. 2:13-22).

The brazen serpent raised up in the desert (Num. 21:4-9) and the raising up of Jesus for all to behold for healing (Jn. 3:14; 12:32).

The manna in the desert (Exod. 16) prefigures the true bread from heaven (Jn. 6).

The rock-source of water (Exod. 17:1-7; Ezek. 47) is fulfilled in Jesus, the fountain of living water (Holy Spirit), (Jn. 7:37-9).

Moses wrangling with the Israelites in the desert (Exod. 32: Num. 11; 14) mirrors the controversy of Jesus with the Jews (Jn. 5:19-47; 8:12-59).

The shepherd-kings of Israel (Ezek. 34) and the Good Shepherd of N.T. (Jn. 10:1-21).

These signs, identified in the Book of Signs (Jn. 1-13), converge on and are seen fulfilled in the Book of Glory (Jn. 14-20). The Discourse of the Last Supper can be read as a reflective response in the heart of the Beloved Disciple, echoing the heartbeat of the one against whose breast he reclined (Jn. 13:22-25). In this discourse Jesus is revealed as ‘the Way, the Truth and the Life’ (Jn. 14:6). The Greek can be paraphrased ‘The Way (hodos), both as Truth and Life, to the Father’. In this context, the Spirit of Truth is promised ‘to guide (hodogesei) you into the whole truth’. (Jn. 16:13).

The Fourth Gospel begins with the majestic Hymn of the Word of God (Jn. 1:1-18) in whom is found the fullness of meaning. Whatever the origins of the N.T. term, undoubtedly Jewish Christians would have equated it with the Sophia of O.T. wisdom literature, while Gentile Christians would have heard echoes of the Logos of Greek philosophy, the principle of intelligibility in the world. The nameless ‘I am’ of the Godhead in uttering the Word, eternally expressed Godself, and in time by the Word gave rise to finite creation: ‘all things through him . . . and in him came to be’. That is, the Word was God’s instrument and blueprint (or template) of creation, and ‘in him was the life . . . and light of man’. From the womb of the deity ‘the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth’. Those who accepted the light of the Word, becoming God’s children, ‘received of that fullness, grace upon grace’. The final stanza of the hymn, recapped the mounting stanzas preceding it, proclaimed that the incarnate Word from the bosom of the Father has revealed . . . (?). The Greek verb exegesato (from which is derived our word exegesis, explanation) has no object and so is open ended. I am inclined to translate it ‘he (Jesus) has made full sense’, so suggesting that the Jesus of history is the exegesis of the Word.

For Christians, our search for meaning, our pursuit of the True, the Good and the Beautiful, finds its fulfilment in the Incarnate Word, Jesus. He is the one for whom we hunger (Jn. 6) and thirst (Jn. 7:37-39). The great Sign of the Gospel, in which all the other signs are subsumed, is the Glory as Jesus is ‘raised up’—on the cross and in resurrection.

‘And I, when I am lifted up from earth, will draw you all to myself’ (Jn. 12:32).

ENDNOTES


In the beginning was the Word;  
the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.  

He was with God in the beginning.  
Through him all things came into being,  
not one thing came into being except through him.  
What has come into being in him was life,  
life that was the light of men;  
and light shines in darkness,  
and darkness could not overpower it. (...)  

The Word became flesh,  
he lived among us,  
and we saw his glory.  

—John 1:1-5, 14
THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT
IN THE EARLY CHURCH

DAVID W T BRATTSTON

The Old Testament commandment to ‘Honour thy father and thy mother’ recurs frequently in early Christian teaching. It is on the lips of Jesus in Matthew 15.4, Matthew 19.19, Mark 10.19, and Luke 18.20. Paul the Apostle cites it in Ephesians 6.2. Far from being confined to Jews or the Jewish milieu in which the Bible was written, it was restated as a precept of Christian behaviour by two Christian philosophers in Greece—one in AD 125 (Aristides Apology 15), and the other around AD 177 (Athenagoras Treatise on the Resurrection 23)—as also by Bishop Theophilus of Antioch (To Autolycus 3.9) about the same time as Athenagoras, and by Bishop Irenaeus in France in the AD 180s (Against Heresies 4.12.5). Also in the second century AD, the command to honour one’s parents was included in a consolidation of the four Gospels and other direct teachings of Jesus into a single continuous narrative (Diatessaron 28.46). This became the standard text of the gospel in the Syrian church until the fifth century. The present article examines the extent and parameters of such honour in the light of the wider context of the New Testament.

These second-century authors enjoyed an advantage over us because they lived in an era when unwritten teachings and Bible interpretations of Jesus and His apostles were still fresh in Christian memory, and before there had been time for Christian observances and understanding of the law of Christ to be significantly altered. Irenaeus is a good case in point. His early Christian training came from men who had personally learned from and worked with the Apostle John, one of whom was probably ‘the angel of the church in Smyrna’ addressed in Revelation 2.8, where ‘angel’ means any message-bearer, human or supernatural.

Origen Adamantius was another important witness to early Christian understanding. Raised in a Christian home, he became dean of the world’s foremost institute of Christian higher learning at an early age, and later the most outstanding Bible scholar, preacher, and teacher of the first half of the third century. Being called upon by bishops throughout the Middle East as an expert on the Faith, he travelled extensively and was therefore better able to observe and record church practice in different countries and regions than any other Christian author. In Christianity’s first book of systematic theology (On First Principles 2.4.2), and his Commentaries on Matthew (11.9), on Romans (2.9.1), and on Ephesians (6.1-3), he stated the commandment to honour one’s parents was still binding in his day. Just before the AD 250s, which coincides with the end of Origen’s ministry, an anonymous compilation of Christian precepts repeats the Fourth Commandment as still operative (Three Books of Testimonies 3.70).

Origen and his teacher Clement are known for their allegorical, or spiritual, method of interpreting Scripture. It posits that, whenever possible, an interpreter should look beyond the plain, literal sense of a passage to uncover the deeper, spiritual meaning—especially when a passage is unclear or difficult, or appears to contradict another part of the Bible. However, Origen taught, some biblical commands are so plain on their face that they require no deeper investigation but are to be understood literally. One such is the Fourth Command-
ment, which he characterized as ‘useful, apart from all allegorical meaning, and ought to be observed’ (On First Principles 4.1.19; ANF 4.368).

The Command to Hate and Love

On the other hand, Jesus also taught that His followers are to hate their parents rather than love them (Luke 14.26). He also prophesied that the gospel will divide families and pit some household members into conflict against others (Matthew 10.34-37). These two passages were also quoted by His disciples, but seldom by the above-mentioned ones that counselled honouring one’s parents. Nor did most of those that restated the Fourth Commandment refer to Matthew 10.36f or Luke 14.26.

In the late second or early third century, both passages were regarded as binding by Tertullian (De Corona 11; On Prayer 8; Scorpiace 10). He had been a prominent lawyer in a system of secular law that prized the cohesion of the family and the authority of fathers over it, much more than the Mosaic Law or our own. After being converted, he became a prolific Christian author and the founder of Latin Christian literature. Somewhat strangely, De Corona 11 states that we are both to ‘honour’ and ‘love’ our parents—one of only two references to loving them in Christian writings before the mass apostasy and decimating epidemic of AD 249-251.

The other reference is in the Gospel of Thomas in the second half of the second century. As often with the contents of this Gospel, sayings on parents are ambiguous and contradictory. According to Saying 101, Jesus taught that whoever does not hate their parents cannot be a Christian, but then states that whoever does not love them as He does cannot be a disciple either. Saying 55 repeats the command to hate mother, father, and siblings. Nowhere does this Gospel touch on honouring them.

Attempts to Reconcile the Precepts

Can we love our parents and hate them at the same time? More apropos to our main topic: can we honour them without loving them?

Origen’s predecessor was Clement, who was the principal Christian writer of the AD 190s. He pointed out that a literal interpretation of Luke 14.26 would conflict with Christ’s other directives to love one’s enemies. If we are to love our enemies, wrote Clement, it stands to reason that we must love our families; and if we hate those nearest to us by natural affection, even more so would we hate our enemies.

Clement explained that even a literal interpretation of Luke 14.26 conveys a consistent intention. A Christian is to oppose and resist, even hate, anyone who tempts them to do anything detrimental to their soul’s salvation, or who constitutes ‘a hindrance to faith and an impediment to the higher life’ (Quis Dives Salvetur 22; ANF 2.597), be they family member or an enemy on other grounds. The key factor is whether they lead one to or away from Christ (Quis Dives Salvetur 23). I imagine the same could be said of honouring.

Clement did, however, deal directly with the seeming contradiction between the commandment to honour one’s parents and the command to hate them, but produced an allegorical interpretation that does not really answer the question. Clement’s harmonizing of the two produced the advice not to allow oneself to go astray through evil customs and irrational impulses, including sexual impulses.
(Stromata 3.15 [97]). Origen later commented that Christians should sever relations with parents that hamper or retard their spiritual lives (Commentary on Matthew 13.25).

Thus, quoting different Gospel verses led to two lines of thought within ancient Christianity. Nevertheless, nobody before AD 250 said that the Fourth Commandment was no longer binding. Apparently, a Christian may hate their parents so long as s/he honours them.

*What Honour Entails: General*

We can determine where to draw the line, and what sorts of behaviour fulfil the duty of honouring, if we examine specific actions and attitudes that New Testament and near-Biblical writers said we should practise in relation to our parents. Then, to tease out the full scope and meaning of the Fourth Commandment, the present article will consider categories of other people that ancient Christian sources said we are to honour, and apply the implications of such honouring to relations with one’s parents.

Early Christian literature, both New Testament and post-biblical, contains a number of specific precepts as to how Christians are to treat their parents, which presumably indicate what is entailed in honouring them. Starting with the strongest and most obvious, we are not to murder them. This is attested by 1 Timothy 1.19, the Christian philosopher Aristides of Athens AD 125 (Apology 9), Bishop Melito of Sardis in the third quarter of the second century (De Pascha 52), the Syriac recension of the anonymous Oratio ad Graecos in the first half of the third century, and the mid-second century Acts of John 48 (an account of the deeds and preaching of the Apostle John). Tertullian especially condemned ‘parricidal lust’ (On Modesty 14; ANF 4.90).

Melito also preached against assaulting one’s father (De Pascha 51).

Jesus forbade cursing one’s parents and speaking evil of them (Matthew 15.4; Mark 7.10). He and Origen condemned annuity trust fund arrangements whereby an adult child could evade the obligation to support their parents in old age (Matthew 15.5; Mark 7.11f; Origen Commentary on Matthew 11.9f).

Ridiculing one’s father and dishonouring one’s mother are condemned by the Christian Sibylline Oracles (1.75), a collection of teachings ascribed to a pagan prophetess as predicting the coming of Christ alongside the Jewish prophets, into which collection Christian material was inserted. The Sibyl also denounced abandoning parents in old age (2.274), disrespectfully talking back to them (2.276), and hostility to them because of money matters (2.118).

On the positive side, the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, also known as 3 Baruch, implies that sons owe a duty to pity or have mercy on their fathers (4.17). This book was composed in the first or second century AD and was received as Scripture by some early Christians.

*What Honour Entails: Obedience*

Obedience to parents was inculcated by a few sources: Ephesians 6.1; Colossians 3.20; Tertullian (Apologeticum 3); and Origen (Commentary on Ephesians 6.1-3; Homilies on Luke 20.5). On the reverse side of the coin, disobedience by either Christians or non-Christians was condemned: Romans 1.30; 2 Timothy 3.2; Sibylline Oracles 2.275; and Origen Homilies on Judges 4.3.41-43. They included limits, qualifications, restrictions, and other factors relevant to such obedience. For instance, Origen pointed out that Ephesians 6.1 reads ‘obey your parents in the Lord’ rather than ‘obey your parents in the flesh’ and indicated that children are to obey only when father and mother command something that accords with God’s will; they are not to obey their ‘parents in the flesh’ who command something contrary to it.

A problem arises when somebody outside
the family has an equal or greater claim on a Christian’s obedience than parents. Hebrews 13.7 speaks of ‘them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God’, which can indicate only office-bearers in the church. A decade or two later, this was reinforced by Bishop Ignatius of Antioch when he exhorted: ‘obey the bishop and the presbytery with an undivided mind’ (Letter to the Ephesians 20.2; ANF 1.58), and said of a deacon in another congregation: ‘whose friendship may I ever enjoy, inasmuch as he is subject to the bishop as to the grace of God, and to the presbytery as to the law of Jesus Christ’ (Letter to the Magnesians 2; ANF 1.59).

In the mid-second century, the oldest surviving Christian sermon outside the New Testament predicted a hellish afterlife for people that ‘knew not and believed not and obeyed not the elders who show us plainly of our salvation.’ (2 Clement 17.5; ANF 10.255f).

In the AD 180s, Irenaeus stated that it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church,—those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. (Against Heresies 4.26.2; ANF 1.497)

Complicating the matter is the attribution to Jesus in the mid-second century that all Christians are to love and obey each other (Epistle of the Apostles 18). The Apostle Peter would have us obey every human ordinance, not only Christian ones (1 Peter 2.13).

**Honour Others**

Similarly, Christians are to honour people other than their father and mother. Here too are many categories of positions, roles, and offices in society and church that the ancient sources said should be honoured. By observing who these categories were, we can ascertain how and to what extent parents are to be honoured in our time and our lives. If we take our cue from the way our own parents behave towards people in these categories, we will fulfil the duty to honour mother and father by treating our parents exactly as our parents treat these people.

First of all, Christians are to honour the clergy. Origen preached that, at a minimum, believers are to bow and exhibit courtesy to them and to ‘other servants of God’ (H homilies on Joshua 10.3; p. 112). Just as Jesus Christ submitted to Joseph and the Virgin Mary, so Christians are to be subject, not only to fathers, but also to their bishop and presbyters/church elders (Origen Homilies on Luke 20.5). A first-century manual of church and personal Christian practice mandated: ‘My child, him that speaketh to thee the word of God remember night and day; and thou shalt honour him as the Lord.’ (Didache 4.1; ANF 7.378). This manual was the Didache, which may have been composed before the Gospel of Matthew. About the same era, Hebrews 13.7 called for remembering rulers of the church who spoke the word of God to its readers. First Thessalonians 5.12f is to the same effect. In the opening years of the second century, Ignatius of Antioch wrote: ‘It is well to reverence both God and the bishop. He who honours the bishop has been honoured by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop, does [in reality] serve the devil.’ (Letter to the Smyrneans 9.1; ANF 1.90)

‘Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.’ (1 Timothy 5.17) Does this mean double honour to church elders/presbyters, and apparently only single honour to parents? What acts manifest a ‘double honour’? Describing a practice to which he was hostile, Tertullian around AD 210 deplored that for majority Christians it meant giving a presbyter twice as much food and drink at a church supper than to a layperson (On Fasting 17). This is corroborated by a Syrian church manual compiled in the first three decades of the third century, which inci-
dentally coincides with the first half of Origen’s writing ministry and is roughly the time when Tertullian made his comment. According to the church manual, deacons are to be given twice the helping of ‘widows’ (fore-runners of nuns), and the presbyters four times as much, ‘for they ought to be honoured as the Apostles’ (Didascalia 9). When honouring was done by way of food, parents were accorded no such privileged status.

The phrase ‘double honour’ calls for further examination, especially in light of the wide array of persons Christians were obliged to honour. Ought father and mother be honoured specially or more than other people? The ancient Christian evidence is mixed. Tertullian stated that Christian law demands that we ‘honour and love next to God Himself’ mother, fathers, and nearest kinfolk (De Corona 11). The Sibylline Oracles agrees. ‘First, honour God, then your parents.’ (1.60) On the other hand, the Sentences of Sextus has ‘After God, honour the sage.’ (244). A collection of practical maxims and instructions for the Christian life, the Sentences of Sextus proved very popular among Christians after its composition in the mid-second century and was often translated into other languages. Comparing it to Tertullian and the Sibyl reveals that there was not the agreement as to the degree and priority of honour due to parents that there was to the sentiment that they be honoured in some fashion.

However, if presbyters and other clergy hold the place of God in relation to an individual Christian, there is no conflict. This would render the Sibyl as directing: ‘First, honour your clergy, then your parents’, and Tertullian as ‘honour and love parents next to clergy.’

Christianity before the mass apostasy and epidemic of AD 249-251 required that honour be shown toward all elders, not just holders of the office of church elder. In the middle or late first century, when some apostles were still alive, the church at Rome exhorted that at Corinth: ‘Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us; let us esteem those who have the rule over us; let us honour the aged among us’ (1 Clement 21.6; ANF 1.11). Describing relations within the Christian community about a century later, Athenagoras noted that believers regarded their age-mates as brothers and sisters, ‘and to the more advanced in life we give the honour due to fathers and mothers.’ (Legatio 32; ANF 2.146). Such honour included taking care that the older people remain free of sexual sins, such as kissing for pleasure (Legatio 32).

Husbands have a duty to ‘honour’ their wives (1 Peter 3.7). Both the Apostle Paul and Origen considered it ‘fitting’ that wives submit to (obey) their husbands (Colossians 3.18; Homilies on Exodus 13.5).

There are yet other categories of people Christians are to honour. First Timothy 5.3 instructs that well-behaved widows/nuns be honoured, as does Three Books of Testimonies 3.74. Origen called on Christian brothers to honour everyone that performs good works in the churches, especially women (Commentary on Romans 10.17.2). Sextus opined that anybody that does not honour seekers of knowledge and wisdom show ingratitude to God (Sentences of Sextus 229).

According to 1 Peter 2.13f and 17 and Origen (Commentary on Romans 9.29), Christians are to honour and submit to kings and other secular rulers. In our own day, Members of Parliament and cabinet ministers bear the title ‘Honourable’ in front of their names, and state lieutenant-governors and some judges are addressed as ‘Your Honour’.

Indeed, all Christians have a duty to honour each other (Romans 12.10). Quoting Psalm 15.4, Origen preached that honour will be shown to all who fear God (Homilies on Jeremiah 16.6.2)

As if this were not broad enough, 1 Peter 2.17 commands ‘Honour all people’ in a context that indicates that it is to be shown to non-Christians as well. In a presentation of Christian ways to a pagan readership, Tatian
the Assyrian in the mid-second century wrote that ‘Man is to be honoured as a fellow-man’ (Address to the Greeks 4; ANF 2.66). The Apostle Paul would have a Christian honour his or her own body of flesh (1 Thessalonians 4.4).

**Conclusion**

There thus appears great diversity and a wide range as to who is to be honoured and to what extent. Keeping this scope and variety in mind when we examine all New Testament writings in their Christian context as a whole, we must select the closest dictionary meanings of the verb ‘honour’ for the Fourth Commandment. These are ‘respect’, ‘esteem’, and ‘be courteous toward’. A person can exhibit all these to one person without diminishing those to another, and more honour can be displayed to one person than to another. Twice as much respect, esteem, and courtesy (‘double honour’) can be demonstrated towards one person or category of persons, and is compatible with showing a lesser degree to others.

In neither dictionaries nor early Christian literature does the Fourth Commandment require obedience or submission. Still less does it require an internal contest in priorities as to obeying one person or category of persons when another person or category mandates the opposite, for the answer in any such contest would be clear and automatic.

The thrust and meaning of the many exhortations to honour your father and mothers indicate, and require no more than, being civil to your parents and refraining from needlessly harming them. No more honour, respect, esteem, or courtesy need be shown to them than other people. Underage children, at least, are to render obedience to them, but only if it does not conflict with a higher duty of obedience to someone else. Except in the sense that Christians are to love their neighbours and everyone else, loving one’s parents is not mandatory for salvation, for it is advocated only by later authors rather than Scripture, and is contraindicated by others. Filial love is merely an elective, and applicable only when it promotes your spiritual growth.

**NOTES**


The quotation from the Didascalia is from Didascalia apostolorum: The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments by R. Hugh Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929) p. 90

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**Can we love our parents and hate them at the same time?**  
**More apropos to our main topic: can we honour them without loving them?**


This book focuses on divine righteousness as the basis for all other notions of righteousness—the right order of the world, justice, steadfast love, loyalty, truth, fidelity, compassion, mercy, sin and disorder, chaos. ‘Right world order is a key manifestation of righteousness that has its origins in and is dependent on divine righteousness—God’s right relationship with creation’ (p.265). The theme is explored in the Pentateuch, the Prophetic Books, the Psalter and the Book of Job.


People in various faith communities tell the stories of faith communities that promote greater fairness in New Zealand. They relate their efforts to overcome inequalities in society—environmental issues, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, effects of migration, imprisonment, racism and sexism.

They ask the questions: How can they face the challenge of supporting people in need? What is fair, and where to start? This book gives encouragement and ideas for action in the struggle to reduce inequality in society. It provides a resource to educate and encourage Christians in the 21st century.


Edmund Campion tells the stories of people from Australia’s Catholic history—approximately seventy men and women, priests, religious and laypeople, recent and from the past. This collection has been compiled over a period of forty years. The book is a history told in stories that present a colourful and vigorous picture of Australian Catholic Church life.

Edmund Campion has been a priest for sixty-two years. He taught history at the Catholic Institute of Sydney and was chair of the Literature Board of the Australian Council.


This book is a collection of reflections, speeches and stories of personal experiences in Catholic education over a period of more than thirty-five years. The author reflects on the vocation of a teacher and provides inspirational messages for young students. He provides a valuable resource for educators, parents and students. Wayne Tinsey is Executive Director of Edmund Rice Education Australia.

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

From January to April 2015

From the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of Jesus (New Year’s Day) to the Fourth Sunday of Easter (Year B)

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of Jesus (New Year’s Day) to the Fourth Sunday of Easter in Year B. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

As we move into a new year we continue celebrating the Season of Christmas. The Feast of the Epiphany (January 4) allows us to celebrate Jesus who is the focus of every person’s deep but perhaps unexpressed quest. Matthew’s magi are gospel characters that help us focus on those people and events that encourage us to search for Jesus more deeply in our lives, church and world. This search allows us to pick up a similar thread in the opening scene of John’s gospel as we return to Ordinary Time readings on January 18. Potential disciples seek Jesus, too. But they need a guide.

On the Sunday following (OT 3) we finally return to the gospel of Year B, The Gospel According to Mark. Mk’s gospel is written for a struggling urban gathering of Jesus disciples possibly in Rome around 70 CE. Mark seeks to address serious issues concerned with fidelity to Jesus, internal division and religious compromise that have seen some of Mark’s Jesus householders placed under arrest, even executed. The struggles and divisions experienced by Mark’s first century household in a world of political and religious tensions reflect our own. This makes Mark’s gospel as relevant for Australian Christians in 2015 as it was for Roman followers of Jesus in the first century CE.

• In the readings for Ordinary Time (from January 25, OT 3) the gospel selection from Mark continues with Jesus’ call of his first disciples and ‘the first days’ of his healing and teaching ministry. His proclamation in word and deed reveals that God is present and active amongst human beings, especially revealed in Jesus’ response to the rejected and excluded. The first readings in February echo similar themes about God’s action amongst the Israelite people in their life struggles (Job, OT 5) and purity sanctions (Leviticus, OT 6). The second readings are drawn from Paul’s writings to the Corinthian followers of Jesus. He writes to encourage their unity (OT 6)—a key concern in the Jesus household at Corinth. There was great division amongst its members. Before we begin Lent, all the readings over Ordinary Time in this early part of the year are replete with rich themes that reflect on the heart of faith in God and Jesus.

During Lent, the scripture readings invite particular focus as we prepare for the highlight of the liturgical year, Holy Week.

• The first readings of the first three Sundays of Lent celebrate an aspect of salvation history: God’s initiative in committing to a liberating covenant with all of the cosmos (Lent 1), Abraham’s faith (Lent 2), and God’s response to the desert wandering Israelites (Lent 3). The second reading over these first three Sundays continue to proclaim aspects that reflect on the mystery of God: liberating love (Lent 1), total commitment to humanity (Lent 2) and God’s expression in Jesus (Lent 3). The Gospels of the first two Sundays take up the
classical themes of Lent as reflected through Mark’s Gospel: Jesus’ Baptism (Lent 1) and Transfiguration (Lent 2).

- The Gospel readings from John over Lent 3-5 emphasise the religious and faith-filled dynamic that comes through people’s encounters with the figure of Jesus in John’s Gospel. Though alternative extracts are offered (and a brief word on each is added below), the usually preferred readings are from Jn 4, Jn 9, and Jn 11. These readings are central for our reflection and celebration of Lent and touch at the most essential aspects of religious living: our thirst for God (in the story of the woman at the well, Lent 3), our need for spiritual insight into God’s life within that will deeply touch our hearts (in the story of the man born blind, Lent 4), and our search for ultimate life (the raising of Lazarus, Lent 5).

- The First Testament readings (Old Testament) for Lent 3-5 explore themes linked to John’s Gospel and form part of the story of the Israelite community (water, light, life). The second readings (Rom and Eph) continue to celebrate aspects of the mystery of God reflected in Jesus.

Readings of the central Liturgical Celebrations of Holy Week.

- The two gospel readings from Passion/Palm Sunday and Easter allow us to reflect on Jesus from Mark’s perspective. These readings offer us the climax of Mark’s Gospel: Jesus, the abandoned and lonely one—isolated from family and disciples, even experiencing abandonment from God (‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’)—enters into his suffering and death with fidelity. Nothing sways him from his commitment to God, despite abandonment. Passion/Palm Sunday invites us to enter into Mark’s narrative of the suffering and dying Jesus, be with him and identity with how he is misunderstood and rejected. In the Easter Gospel notice how the angelic young man points the women to the place of solitude, absence and isolation: the empty tomb: ‘He has been raised. He is not here. See / contemplate, where they laid him!’.

The tomb is the symbol of emptiness and ‘nothingness’. It is, in many respects, our own lives as we struggle with life’s emptiness and, at times, spiritual darkness. The tomb’s contemplation prepares for God’s act, resurrection. In other words, for Mark’s household of disciples and our own, failure rather than success lays the possibility of the future encounter with the resurrected Jesus. When one has nothing, what is there left?

- This view of Mark’s Gospel at the beginning and end of Holy Week create a contrasting frame to what occurs in the Gospel readings in the middle of Holy Week, with the Mass of the Lord’s Supper and the Celebration of the Lord’s Passion. Here John’s Gospel is centre stage. Rather than Mark’s solitary figure, we have John’s Jesus who is confident, aware of God’s presence and in charge of the events that surround his passion. He commissions his disciples to lead through service (Holy Thursday). The passion in John’s Gospel (on Good Friday) is the moment of victory, glorification and enthronement. It is as though, for John, the faithful reader cannot distinguish between Jesus’ death and Resurrection. They are two aspects of the one event celebrated in the Passion.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

January 1—New Year’s Day—Solemnity of Mary, Mother of Jesus: Num 6:22-27. God’s blessing is poured out upon a priestly people. Gal 4:4-7. Paul affirms Jesus’ human birth through Mary and his subjugation to life’s limitations. Through Jesus we come to know that our relationship to God is the same as his. Lk 2:16-21. The shepherds come to see the child lying in a place of feeding. Theme—God’s Blessing. The blessing of the first reading could be the heart of our celebration at the beginning of this New Year. What is it that we
seek from God? What is the blessing we would like God to pour upon us, our family, friends, church and world?

January 4 — Epiphany: Is 60:1-6. The people of God will be blest with God’s light and they will attract to themselves all the nations of the earth. Eph 3:2-3.5-6. God’s gift of solidarity with humanity (‘grace’) is now affirmed and revealed, even to the most unexpected of peoples (‘Gentiles’). Mt 2:1-12. The magi, kingly servants, seek out Jesus through their observance of the heavens and their consultation of the Jewish scriptures. And remember, despite one of our most beloved songs, Mt does not mention three magi! Theme — The Search. Every person is on a search. The ultimate search is for God. Epiphany celebrates and affirms our ongoing search for God revealed in Jesus. The search becomes affirmed and clarified through meditating on our history, the cosmos, the heavens and Scripture.

January 11—Baptism of Jesus: There is an optional first reading (Is 12.2-3, 4) however Is 55: 1-11 reflects on God as the source of wisdom and life, for which we all thirst and desire. 1 Jn 5: 1-9. Faith in Jesus reveals God’s love for us and the ability to follow God’s path. Mk 1: 14-20. Jesus’ first words in Mk’s gospel encourage a change of attitude (‘repent’) and an openness to God’s call (‘believe in the gospel’) revealed in Jesus. These become the essential qualities of discipleship throughout the whole of Mk’s gospel. Theme — Openness. Both Jonah and Mark encourage a spirit of repentance. This is not the breast-beating attitude of one who should feel guilty or sense permanent moral corruption. Rather ‘repentance’ (metanoia, in Mk’s Greek) is an attitude of the person who is open to change, especially of the heart, so that God’s project (as expressed by Paul) can shape one’s life.

February 1— Ordinary Time 4: Dt 18:15-20. God promises a prophet who will lead and instruct the people about what is important and essential. 1 Cor 7:17, 32-35. Paul wants his audience to live happily without worry. This attitude, revealed by God, shapes every relationship. Mk 1:21-28. Jesus heals someone possessed by an unclean spirit. The healing occurs in a religious setting. Theme — Happiness. The second reading offers a way of confirming that God’s intention for us, as perceived by Paul, was to live without worry. The gospel dramatises God’s intention of human liberation through Jesus’ act of exorcism. What today keeps us locked into worry, which needs healing and liberation?

February 8—Ordinary Time 5: Job 7:1-4.6-7. Job laments the struggles of daily life. 1Cor
9:16-19.22-23. Paul reflects on his mission for all. Mk 1:29-39. A daily snapshot of Jesus’ healing ministry in the opening chapter of Mk. Theme—Daily Living: Struggle, boredom and toil are part of our day to day lives. Job reflects upon such a life and Jesus ministers healing within this context. These images, drawn from Job and Mk, provide a way of celebrating human existence, honouring people’s struggles and recognizing the possibility of God’s healing presence through an inclusive and hospitable faith community.

February 15—Ordinary Time 6: Lev 13:1-2, 45-46. Purity regulations especially for contractible skin conditions are spelt out to protect the sanctity of a close-knit community. 1 Cor 10:23-11:1. Unity rather than individuality should guide the actions of Jesus followers. Mk 1:40-45. Jesus heals a person with chronic psoriasis and overcomes the regulations that keep people from community. Theme—Healing in Community. Every contemporary faith community has the potential to become a tangible expression and experience of how barriers are overcome. How is it expressed locally? Who are modelling ways of overcoming oppression and exclusion? Who are our healers today?

February 22—Lent 1: Gen 9:8-15. In the story of Noah, God formally establishes a covenant of love with creation and humanity. 1 Pet 3:18-22. The writer reflects on the image of ‘water’ from the story of Noah and applies it to the act of baptism. Mk 1:12-15. The first words of Jesus in Mk, highlighting the essential characteristics of discipleship, especially the ability to be totally open (translated as ‘conversion’). Theme—Openness. This first week of Lent invites us to a profound openness to God and the whole of creation. How can this openness be tangibly expressed? Who locally expresses such openness?

March 1—Lent 2: Gen 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18. The great ancestor of the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Islam and Christianity), Abraham, demonstrates his absolute faith in God. Rom 8:31-35, 37. Paul celebrates God’s loving commitment to us, revealed in Jesus. Mk 9:2-10. In the face of imminent suffering and death, Jesus communes with God and is transfigured. Theme—Faith: Trust in God is reflected in the way we are with others. Abraham and Jesus exercise a profound faith in their God. What are signs around us of people showing similar faith? What keeps us from trusting God completely?

March 8—Lent 3: Ex 20:1-7. God reveals to Moses the ten great words by which Israel’s covenant with God will be lived out. At the heart of these commandments are implications for relating with God and other people. 1 Cor 1:18, 22-25. Through Jesus’ death, God subverts the conventional wisdom about power and privilege. Jn 4. A Samaritan woman seeks water to quench her thirst. Jesus offers himself as the real source of life, the eternal water. [Alternative Jn 2:13-25. Jesus’ confronts the religious leaders and their institutions that prevent people drawing close to God. The renewal of the temple anticipates the renewal that will come about through the ‘temple’ of Jesus’ body.] Theme—Covenant Renewal. God’s fidelity to Israel (first reading) is echoed by Jesus’ fidelity to God (Gospel) who draws out the woman’s desire for God. This religious desire lies at the heart of everyone and is the basis for a renewed covenantal life with God. Lent becomes a time to ponder our covenant with God and affirm ways of deepening it.

March 15—Lent 4: 2 Chron 36:14-17, 19-23. A snapshot of the events surrounding Israel’s exile, couched in theological terms. Eph 2:4-10. The writer celebrates God’s grace of liberation to us revealed through Jesus. Jn 9. One of the great dramatic stories in the gospels: the story of the gradual insight into Jesus of a man born blind [Alternative Jn 3:14-21. The key statement of John’s theodicy: God is in love with creation and us.] Theme—God’s love: The teaching of Jn, which summarises God’s disposition towards creation and humanity, urges our response to God. Lent provides the mo-
ment to articulate this response, especially through deeds of penance, the sacrament of reconciliation or communal rites of penance. These acts open our eyes to see God.

March 22—Lent 5 Jer 31:31-34. God promises to offer a totally revolutionary new covenant, one which will be inscribed in the human heart, where people will ‘know’ God. Heb 5:7-9. Jesus ‘cries loudly’ to God and becomes ‘the source of salvation.’ Jn 11. Jesus offers us eternal life. He raises Lazarus from death. [Alternative Jn 12: 20-33. Jesus invites those who follow him to know that suffering and death await him, and through his death he will glorify God.] Theme—Jesus’ Life. The second reading and the gospel invite us to focus on Jesus, his utter fidelity to God that brings him to cry loudly (Heb) and to recognise that suffering and death are paths to life with God. Who suffers and cries aloud today in our midst? Who seek to be alive in our communities and churches? What brings tears to our eyes?

March 29—Passion/Palm: Mk 11:1-10. Jesus’ disciples welcome him into Jerusalem. Is 50:4-7. God’s servant is attentive and trusts God, despite rejection and suffering. Phil 2:6-11. One of the great songs of Holy Week: Jesus is God’s servant, who chooses to be like all human beings, and God exalts him. Mk 14-15. This is the climax of Mk, the passion story of Jesus’ suffering and ultimate abandonment. Theme—Abandonment. Jesus comes to claim his people as their leader and his leadership is one of suffering; Jesus’ who dies abandoned is able to identify with all who feel abandoned, desolate and lonely. Mk’s Jesus is not an exalted figure, but misunderstood and rejected. The passion story from Mk offers an opportunity to identify with Jesus in this week, and to be with those who experience abandonment and isolation in our world. What is the loneliness that I experience?

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April 2—The Lord’s Supper: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14. The first Passover is remembered: God delivers Israel through the blood of the Passover Lamb. 1 Cor 11:23-26. Paul reminds the divided household of Jesus followers at Corinth about what lies at the heart of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Jn 13:1-15. In the act of washing his disciples’ feet, John’s Jesus offers the model of active, community service. Theme—Service: This celebration reaches into the heart of every parish and faith community: selfless service focused on the Eucharist. How can we celebrate this happening in our midst and encourage it to deepen?

April 3—Good Friday: Is 52:13-53:12. This is the climactic ‘servant song’ celebrating the vicarious nature of the servant’s suffering, for the welfare of all. Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Jesus is the compassionate High Priest, with God, who knows our sufferings and weaknesses. Jn 18:1-19:42. John’s passion narrative, unlike Mk’s, is a true celebration of victory over death. In fourteen dramatic scenes Jesus is presented as Lamb, judge, victor, source of Church’s life. Theme—Victory: Jesus, as the Passover Lamb who brings people to life, is victorious over death. Rather than a sombre or mournful liturgy, the readings encourage a confidence in God who is able to bring victory from death. This is a much-needed focus in a world preoccupied with war and retaliation. What are the suffering and death-dealing experiences from which I seek release by the God of Jesus?

April 4/5—Easter: Feast of the Resurrection: Mk 16:1-8. This is the most important gospel proclamation in the whole year: Mark’s Jesus is resurrected and the women are encouraged to ponder the place of emptiness, the tomb (see above). Resurrection occurs in the most unlikely setting and moment—the place of death and hopelessness. Where would I like God to bring me life?

April 12—Easter 2: Acts 4:32-35. The power of the resurrection is evident in the fledgling Jesus household of Jerusalem disciples. 1 Jn 5:1-6. Faith in Jesus and his resurrection makes us ‘begotten by God.’ We are in tune with God and experience God’s life within. Jn 20:19-31. The resurrected Jesus offers his frightened disciples peace. He empowers them with au-
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authority to forgive sin. Theme—Forgiveness. The resurrected Jesus continues to breathe into his community today the spirit of peace and forgiveness. Where is this seen, identified and celebrated? What is my sin from which I seek forgiveness and release?

April 19—Easter 3. Acts 3:13-15, 17-19. Peter’s first sermon to the Jerusalemites is a summary of the gospel of Luke (the writer of Acts) and an invitation to a spirit of ongoing ‘conversion.’ 1 Jn 2:1-5. Even sin cannot separate us from God because of Jesus’ advocacy. Lk 24:35-48. The risen Jesus appears in the midst of his frightened disciples and eats a meal with them. The evangelist underscores the reality of the resurrection. Theme—Reality of Resurrection. In Luke’s gospel, the disciples first think that they are seeing a ghost (in Greek ‘phantasmos’) when Jesus appears among them. The resurrection is not a myth or invention by well-meaning believers. That Jesus rose from death is a historical truth. It is a reality that affects our being, the universe and the soul of our communities. What are some of the signs of resurrectional life in our midst? What can we celebrate?

April 26—Easter 4: Acts 4: 8-12. Peter announces to all (and us): An experience of goodness and healing is an encounter with the Risen Jesus. 1 Jn 3: 1-2. We are God’s beloved daughters and sons; God will be revealed to us fully, transparently, happily. Jn 10: 11-18. Jesus is like a shepherd to us. He cares about us, protects us, loves us and ‘knows’ us. God is intimately close to us. Theme—God’s Close-ness. God is revealed through Jesus who is present in our world through signs of goodness and acts of kindness (First reading). God’s intimacy with us revealed through Jesus (gospel) makes us whole and happy. What images of God do I find sustaining? What helps me deepen my friendship with Jesus?

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The readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone, for they are an element of the greatest importance in the liturgy. Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture the Word of God is addressed to all people of whatever era and is understandable to them, a fuller understanding and a greater efficaciousness of the word is nevertheless fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, by the homily, as part of the liturgical action.

— General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 29.