NOTHER MAJOR crisis of our time—another, that is, besides the sex-abuse crisis—is the refugee crisis. 51.3 million people are currently displaced globally. Three million refugees have been produced by the Syrian war. Six and a half million, or one-third, of Syrian people are displaced. Half of these refugees are children.

Europe at this time is experiencing historical migrations and refugee waves. It is the worst refugee crisis since World War II. More than 250,000 people have landed in Europe this year and thousands more have died in desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean.

We in Australia cannot remain unaffected by all this. The announcement that Australia will be taking an extra 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq on a temporary basis is a welcome response to the crisis. But one wonders how generous our nation will be, given our relatively recent poor track record.

In our newspapers, on the radio, on television, we hear a language of deterrence and fear: talk of ‘illegal immigrants’, ‘queue jumpers’, ‘undocumented boat people’, ‘boarder protection’. Such language de-personalises the people, men, women and children, who are in desperate need of our welcome and support. It suggests that boat people are not really people at all. A suggestion that became a plain assertion in the false ‘children overboard’ claim—asylum seekers were depicted as something less than human.

Further, we have developed intricate policies to deter asylum seekers arriving by boat. For several decades, successive Australian governments have continued to implement increasingly harsh measures which punish asylum seekers in the hope that this will stop them arriving.

For over twenty years both political parties have maintained a policy of indefinite mandatory immigration detention. Most detention facilities are in very remote areas and harsh environments. And many reports show that such detention causes significant psychological harm, especially to children.

All this is justified by claiming that such policies will stop drownings at sea—that it will undermine the people smugglers’ business and so stop people taking risky journeys on unseaworthy boats. But, as Waleed Aly pointed out in his article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 16th October, p. 24, this is to sacrifice some people for the sake of others: ‘some people will be brutalised and occasionally destroyed, so that other lives may be saved.’ This is to use people as a means to an end—it is to punish one group of human beings in order to deter other people from attempting to come to Australia.

All this is unchristian. It is against Jesus’ teaching. It is ill-treatment of our brothers and sisters, an affront to their human dignity.

Today the biblical commandment to welcome with respect and solidarity the stranger in need—‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’—takes on particular significance in an age of such vast movements of people, such migration.

Our national response in recent decades has been in contrast with what we read of the responses in Europe at this time. They are confronted with historical migrations and waves of refugees. They are experiencing the worst refugee crisis since World War II. More than 250,000 people have landed in Europe this year and thousands more have died in desperate attempts to cross the Mediterranean.

The European countries are coming
together to try to find ways of welcoming these refugees. This is such a contrast to our Australian attitude.

As has been frequently pointed out, our present policies are a stark contrast to our own Australian policies during the 1970s and 1980s. We have a reputation of being a compassionate nation, based on our tradition of welcoming and providing assistance for Vietnamese, East Timorese and South American refugees. And migrants have made Australia what it is today.

We Catholics find ourselves at odds with our nation's practice. The Church speaks a different voice to that of our nation, Australia. The Church derives her voice from that of Christ: ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’, ‘Whenever you did this for one of the least of my followers you did to me’. (Mt 25:35-40).

The Catholic Church in her teaching and her practice is guided by Jesus' teaching.

The Catholic Church teaches that all people have the right to live a dignified life in their homeland. Tragically, over 45 million people around the world are displaced. War, natural calamities, persecution and discrimination of every kind have deprived millions of a home, employment, education, family and homeland.

The Catholic Church teaches that anyone whose life is threatened has the right to protection.

The social teaching of the church echoes the teaching of Jesus. But the Church's teaching simply reflects what we must feel as human beings for all these suffering people.

And are our political leaders underestimating the generosity of our Australian people? For many years religious groups have been supporting refugees and asylum seekers with housing, employment, food and clothing, education and counselling (cf. Catholic Religious Australia media release of October 15, 2015). And they are able to do this because people give them financial assistance.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

Immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death. That is how the headlines put it. When I first heard of this tragedy a few weeks ago, and realised that it happens all too frequently, it has constantly come back to me like a painful thorn in my heart. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity. And their cry rises up to God! ...

Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion—'suffering with' others: the globalisation of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!

—Pope Francis at Lampedusa

2
WE ARE ONCE again privileged to be approaching the great celebration of Christmas.

It doesn't seem to matter whether we are young or old, native born or from anywhere else, we all want to part of the joyful celebration of Christmas. It is often an exhausting time for families as they travel to be with family, or have family come and visit with them. Often it means travelling overseas to be part of the celebrations.

Gifts are chosen and exchanged; cards or emails of greeting are shared. [Sometimes with people we only have contact with on this one occasion in the year!]

The world seems to be a better and more joyful place as we celebrate this wonderful season of Christmas. We often wonder why it can't be like this all the time!!

Perhaps it is because we have forgotten what Christmas is, and why we celebrate it at all.

It seems sad when people stress that even though they like celebrating Christmas, they are in no way religious.

Some of my Aboriginal friends remind me that, 'When we forget the story, then we lose our identity. We don't understand who we are any more.'

Perhaps that is what's happening to us as a community, as we begin selling 'Christmas' cakes and decorations in late September. We advertise with such enthusiasm that people can be made to feel guilty if they don't give big and expensive presents to family and friends, even though they cannot afford them.

Sadly it seems that we have, as a community, forgotten the story...the historical fact that Jesus Christ came among us as a human being, as an act of indescribable love for us and for the world. This is the story and this is what we are celebrating. We are celebrating a feast of extraordinary love. Part of the story is that we are asked, because of this celebration, to love one another in the same wonderful and generous way.

Recently I shared with a family the death of their young university student son, who was killed in tragic circumstances. During the eulogy, his father spoke with amazing courage and incredible love. He pointed out to all of us that 'life is about love...that's all there is, so tell people you love that you love them.'

Having spoken of the life of his son as a pilgrimage of love, describing him as a 'warrior of peace' he then addressed the incredibly difficult challenge of forgiving those who caused his son's death.

He said, 'Whilst forgiveness will not alter the past for us, it will influence the future for our family.'

Apart from being inspired by the courage and the goodness of this father and his family, it reminded me of why we celebrate Christmas....the birth of the Prince of Peace and Lover of the world. This man was living the story; he knows and loves Jesus Christ whose birth day we celebrate again this CHRISTmas.

He may not be hurrying out to purchase presents for his family and friends just because they have been advertised for months. That is a different story, which has, in large part, forgotten its roots.

His message during that inspiring eulogy, is the real story and the real reason we celebrate this wonderful event of CHRISTmas and the very best gift he could have given to all of us who had the privilege of being present. He is living the story.

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ORDINATION HOMILY
ARCHBISHOP TIMOTHY COSTELLOE SDB

THIS MORNING here in the Cathedral we find ourselves caught up in a celebration which takes us to the very heart of our identity as Catholics. Our Catholic tradition has always recognized that Jesus, the living presence of God among us as one of us, is absolutely at the centre of our faith. To be a Christian is to live as a disciple, in a relationship of fidelity, commitment and love with Christ. And it is this living relationship which becomes the source of our ability to live according to the teachings, the spirit and the power of the gospel. It is not just what we do, but what inspires us and enables us to do what we do, that makes us Christians.

For us this living relationship with Jesus is strengthened and deepened through the gift of the Eucharist. We have only to reflect on the words of Jesus in St John's gospel, where he assures us that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will have life in him, to realize that the Eucharist is the very heart of our faith. Every time we gather to celebrate Mass we are drawn into the mystery of the Lord's gift of himself to us. We eat his flesh, we drink his blood, we become one with him, and he sends us out to be his body and his blood, his life-giving presence, to everyone we meet. 'Do this in memory of me' doesn't simply mean 'celebrate the Eucharist in memory of me'; it means 'be the Eucharist in memory of me'.

As ordained priests these men, our relatives, friends and colleagues, who come before us this morning, will be the ones who through their ministry, and especially through their celebration of the Eucharist, enable this profound communion with the Lord to happen. Our tradition tells us that priests are ordained to act in the person of Christ, the head of his body. When in the praying of the Eucharistic prayer they repeat the words Jesus spoke over the bread and wine at the Last Supper, they do so in the name of and even more in the person of Christ himself. It is he, through the power of his Spirit and the ministry of his priests, who consecrates the bread and the wine. It is he who says, 'Take and eat, take and drink—this is my body and my blood': it is he who hands himself over to us in this extraordinary gesture of love. Those ordained as priests are called to do the same thing: to hand themselves over to God's people in an extraordinary gesture of love.

To be called to such a ministry is an overpowering and even frightening thing. Who is worthy of such a task? Who would dare to presume to take this upon himself? Indeed who would be so presumptuous as to believe he was in any way equipped for this? It is vitally important then for our candidates this morning to have engraved on their hearts and on their minds some other words of Jesus: 'You did not choose me—no I chose you'. And in remembering those words our candidates should also remember the words of St Paul: 'God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong' (1 Cor 1:27). Our candidates for ordination today will grow into the good and faithful priests we need them to be if they remember these things: that it is all God's doing, all God's grace—and only God can make sense of our weakness and our foolishness and through them bring strength and wisdom to people's lives—but only if we let him. If we are convinced we are strong, and wise, and have been chosen because of our extraordinary talents, insights or capabilities, then there is little that God can do for us or in us. Our pride will make us obstacles to God's healing and saving presence in the lives of his people,
rather than the signs and bearers of his love that we are called to be.

Conor, Garner, Grant, Israel, Jeffey, Patrick, Simeon, and Stephen, as men who will act in the person of Christ, not only in your sacramental ministry but in every encounter you have with God's people, it is important to know, really know, and not just know about, the Christ you are called to bring to others.

And at this moment in the Church's history, as we prepare to enter into the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, I want to invite you to reflect deeply on the opening words of the Pope's letter announcing this special jubilee year: 'Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy’. You are being ordained as priests at this precise moment in our history. Your first full year of priestly ministry will unfold in the context of this graced year. In this I believe there is a divine providence at work. The Lord is calling to you, urgently and insistently, to commit yourselves to ensuring that the living out of your priesthood is deeply marked by this quality of divine mercy. He is calling you, as living icons of the Good Shepherd, to be, yourselves, in Jesus, ‘the face of the Father's mercy’. Pope Francis says of Jesus that 'everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion'. If the people with whom and for whom you will work in your priestly ministry can say this of you you will know that you are becoming the priests the Lord has called you to be and we need you to be.

It is for us, your brother priests, your fellow disciples of Jesus, those with whom and for whom you will live and work, to help, encourage and support you as you seek to unveil for us the merciful face of God. You will come to know if you are succeeding when, in your moments of prayer, you can recognize in yourself the traces of the face of Christ. You will know if you are succeeding, too, if you can see in the faces of those you encounter that spark of joy, or hope or peace which comes from an encounter with Christ. Learn to read in the faces of your people whether you are leading them to the God of mercy or leading them astray. Be unveilers, not obscurers, of the merciful face of the Father.

For this reason, and with this hope in our hearts, our prayer for you today is the prayer we pray at every ordination: May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, indeed, allows us to draw near to the Father with trust to have the certainty of his forgiveness. He is truly "rich in mercy" and extends it abundantly upon those who appeal to Him with a sincere heart.

Being here to experience his love, in any case, is above all a fruit of his grace. As the Apostle Paul reminded us, God never ceases to demonstrate the wealth of his mercy throughout the centuries. The transformation of the heart that leads us to confess our sins is a "gift from God". We cannot do it alone. The power to confess our sins is a gift from God, it is a gift, it is "his work" (cf. Eph 2:8-10).

—Pope Francis
A CUTELY AWARE aware of the extent of global anguish marking the 'signs of the times' of the twenty-first century, Pope Francis has proclaimed that an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy will offer the world a pastoral response to its grief in so far as:

We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his/her brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

The Jubilee of Mercy will begin on December 8th 2015, the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of Vatican Council II. The year of Mercy will conclude on the feast of Christ the King on November 20th 2016.

The date chosen for commencing this Jubilee testifies to God's abundant mercy in preparing Mary for her motherhood of the Word incarnate by virtue of her perfect redemption through preservation from 'original sin'. The closing celebration will include the Church's 'new' dedication of humanity and the whole cosmos to Christ's Lordship as universal Saviour. It will embody a pledge that in Christ, the visible 'face of the Father's mercy', justice will be seen to prevail amongst all nations.

* * *

The 'thread' of Mercy

The Jubilee will continue a 'thread' commenced when in opening Vatican Council II, Pope John XXIII indicated that 'Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity' and should 'show herself a loving mother to all; patient kind, moved by compassion and goodness toward her separated children. The 'thread' was taken up by Pope Paul VI whose closing speech at the Council emphasised how the model of Council's spirituality had been derived from the charity and mercy of the Good Samaritan. P. Paul VI is remembered as being the first to formulate the idea of the modern Church's creation of a 'culture of love'.

Pope John Paul II's personal experiences of the horrors of war, death camps and totalitarianism led to the 1980 encyclical, Dives in Misericordiae (Rich in Mercy) dedicated to the theme of the power of Mercy for healing endangered human beings. His canonisation of Sr. Faustina Kowalska has instigated worldwide promotion of her message of Divine Mercy as 'Easter's secret' and now celebrated on the first Sunday of Eastertide.

Pope Benedict XVI extended the 'thread' of Mercy in his 2006 encyclical Deus Caritas Est (God is Love), and again in 2009 with Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth) in which the Church's concern for Mercy was considered within the broad context of social justice.

Pope Francis' first exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) developed Pope Benedict's vision of the 'new evangelisation' within the context of Mercy:
'The church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel' (E.G. §114). In an interview shortly after his election, Pope Francis called upon Church leaders to be 'ministers of mercy above all' in evincing nearness and proximity in order to heal wounds and warm the hearts of the faithful within a Church recognised as mother and shepherdess.

**Mercy: Biblical Aspects**

Features of 'the face of the Father's mercy' are revealed throughout the Old Testament. English translations often mask the meaning of Hebrew terms affirming the depths YHWH's ever active relationship with the community of Israel: chesed may express God's mercy, loving kindness, compassion and steadfast love; derivatives of rechem express divine 'womb love'; tsedaqah and emet suggest righteousness, divine loyalty and faithfulness; mishpat indicates justice.

Modern scholarship points to a three-fold revelation of the dynamic revelation of divine Mercy. The first is God's abiding Presence (Exodus 6:7) intimated in the revelation of the divine name to Moses, 'I am who I am' (Ex 3:14) and more fully disclosed in the Covenant on Sinai (Ex.20:1-21). The second revelation is made when Moses intercedes for a stiff-necked people (Ex. 33:19) and the God of absolute sovereignty and irreducible freedom, promises mercy (rachamin) in giving the people a second chance to respect the Covenant. In the third instance, Moses encounters the divine presence in the midst of impenetrable cloud. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed: 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...' (Ex. 34:6)

Throughout centuries of national crises in Israel, prophets arose time and time again to remind God's people of the promises and social obligations of the Covenant.

It has been well said that 'Mercy is God's creative and fertile justice.' Prophetic warnings about the 'wrath' of God are frequently cited to suggest that YHWH was an angry God of vengeance. Such a theology is totally misguided. Old Testament 'wrath' is a way of expressing divine holiness which, of its very nature, asserts God's resistance to sin and evil. In prophetic terms, whenever divine 'wrath' is appeased, God's mercy offers yet another chance of forgiveness for infidelity; it betokens hope for a future of peace and messianic blessing:

*For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you....* (Isaiah 54:7-8)

Both prophetic writings and the psalms of the Old Testament include poignant expressions of lamentation and repentance for Israel's wanton infidelity to the Covenant. On the one hand, the genre of lamentation complains of divine abandonment and struggles to discover a merciful God in the midst of national distress (Is 34: 1-17). On the other hand, the mood of the great lamentations moves from despair to hope (Is. 51-57).

The enigmatic figure of the Isaiah's Suffering Servant Songs recalled every year in the Church's Liturgy of Good Friday, carries forward a theology that YHWH enters mercifully into the suffering of the people. In keeping with this theological sense of divine omnipotence, the Church's patristic tradition...
is distinct from a later scholastic metaphysical understanding of God as a-pathetic and incapable of suffering.\textsuperscript{14}

New Testament scriptures reveal that in Jesus the Christ, risen and glorified, 'the Word has become flesh and lived among us' (Jn. 1:14). The synoptic Gospels attributed to Mark, Matthew and Luke abound with narratives of the outreach of Jesus' mercy to those who suffer from all kinds of physical disability ('demons', epilepsy, leprosy, lameness, deafness, muteness and blindness), from hunger and homelessness and from mourning and grief. Jesus' mercy stretches beyond cultural taboos, in restoring life and health to a pubescent girl and a menopausal woman (Lk. 8: 40-55), in being an indiscriminate host (Lk. 14:1-12) and in his wise interpretation of Sabbath law (Mk. 2: 23-28; Mt 12:1-8).

English translations mask the fact of there being two distinct meanings regarding Jesus' ministry of mercy. On occasions when Jesus' healing is requested, as when the blind Bartimaeus shouted, 'Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!' (Mk. 10:47), the Greek verb used is \textit{eleeo}.

However, the verb used for Jesus' action in response for 'pity' is \textit{splagchnizomai}, implying very graphically, 'to be heaved in one's bowels'. Such was Jesus' response to the bereaved widow of Nain: 'When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' (Lk 7: 13).

Ancient Greek culture considered the bowels to be the seat of human passions. Thus Jesus' bestowal of mercy was, and always will be a profound visceral outpouring of steadfast love.

Gospel parables integrate a love-mercy-justice continuum explicitly developed in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament and reiterated by Jesus when questioned about 'the greatest commandment' (Mt. 22:34-40): 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Central to the Gospel of John is the evangelist's theology of 'the hour' of Jesus.\textsuperscript{16} As foretold in the Zechariah's prophetic image of Israel's 'mourning for the pierced one' with the promise that 'On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem...,'\textsuperscript{17} 'the hour' of Jesus reveals a perception of Mercy as an outpouring of divine love from the pierced heart of the Saviour.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{The Church, Sacrament of Mercy}

The flow of blood and water streaming from the side of Jesus on Calvary has become symbolic of the origin and growth of the Church.\textsuperscript{19} While every ecclesial sacrament is a source of divine grace and mercy, we focus here on the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist. However, we note Pope Francis' hope that the Jubilee year will encourage the Faithful to return to frequent practice of sacramental Reconciliation in order to experience the grandeur of God's mercy as a source of true interior peace.\textsuperscript{20}

Ancient portrayals of the Church as 'Mother' and the baptismal bath as the 'womb' of Mother Church, have received fresh emphases following the renewed rites of Baptism and Eucharist in the wake of Vatican Council II. We remember Jesus' words to Nicodemus about being born 'of water and the Spirit' (Jn. 3:5); we recall also St Augustine's interpretation of Jesus' pierced heart as 'The door to life... from which the sacraments of the Church flowed and without which one cannot attain the life that is true living.'\textsuperscript{21}

Australian Church architecture frequently fails to convey adequately how baptismal 'mercy' themes of sacramental birth, death, resurrection and incorporation into the mystical Body of Christ, are ritualised. Nevertheless, many churches do now provide opportunity either for baptismal immersion or have situated the baptismal font with 'living' water at the church's entrance to allow the Faithful symbolic 'passage' from the 'womb/
tomb' to the table of Eucharist.

The sacrament of Eucharist is 'the source and summit' of Christian life. All the other sacraments are oriented to Eucharist for here is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, the 'Real Presence' of Christ. How sublimely has this mystery been handed down by St Thomas Aquinas: 'O sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of his passion is renewed, our souls are filled with grace and a pledge of our future glory is given to us.'

Inclusion of a double *epiclesis* (invocation of the Holy Spirit) within the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass emphasises how the sacramental Body of Christ on the altar must be considered in correlation with the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. With hands extended over the bread and wine, the priest prays the first *epiclesis*: 'You are indeed holy, O Lord, the font of all holiness. Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The second *epiclesis* completes the first: 'Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we (i.e. the Church) may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.'

The Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass concludes with the 'Great Amen'. With one voice the community expresses joyful thanksgiving for God's Eucharistic presence allowing the Church to stand firmly in the 'space' of God's favour, fidelity and boundless mercy.

St. Augustine grasped the intrinsic relationship between the 'Great Amen' of the Eucharistic Prayer and the communicant's 'Amen':

If... you wish to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle as he says to the faithful: 'You are the body of Christ and his members' (1 Cor. 12:27). If, therefore, you are the body of Christ and his members, your mystery has been placed on the Lord's table; you receive your mystery. You reply 'Amen' to that which you are, and by replying, you consent. For you hear 'the Body of Christ', and you reply 'Amen'. Be then a member of the body of Christ so that your 'Amen' may be true.

**The Church's Mission of Mercy**

The final rite of every Eucharistic liturgy is a formal but brief *missa*: 'Go forth...' and be what you have become in the Eucharist—a 'face of Christ' to the world. In responding 'Thanks be to God', the community accepts its role of taking the Good News of Christ from 'in here' to 'out there'.

'Mission' indicates action on behalf of the entire Church—clergy, laity (of all ages) and consecrated religious. Works of Mercy are as diverse as feeding the 'hungry', giving drink to the 'thirsty', welcoming the 'stranger', clothing the 'naked' and visiting the 'sick' and the 'captive' (Mt. 25:34-40). These symbolic categories immediately evoke images of countless human beings dying from malnutrition and safe drinking water, displaced persons seeking asylum, the homeless, victims of persecution, abuse, addiction and torture of mind and body. Each category calls equally for one's care for 'neighbour' close to home—family, friends, associates and our indigenous sisters and brothers.

'Mission' involves commitment to the 'new evangelisation' of preaching, teaching and witnessing to the Gospel in ways allowing the mercy of Christ to become part of the fabric of society today. Its pastoral orientation invites those alienated from God or Church to discover God as graciously near, like the Father of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:1-24), or the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37). The 'new evangelisation' proclaims the deepest truth about God and about our own humanity.

'Mission' involves the Church's ongoing engagement with inter-faith and ecumenical dialogue in order to foster the 'dream' of Jesus that all people may be sanctified in the truth and that all who believe in his name may become 'completely one, so that the world may
know that you [Father] have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.' (Jn. 17:21-23)

Christian Spirituality and Mercy

The meaning of 'spirituality' is bandied about in all manner of secular ways today. As Christians, we understand it as 'Spirit-uality', as that 'life in the Spirit' so exquisitely described by St Paul in Chapter 8 of the Epistle to the Romans. There we find his magnificent hymn-like acclamation of God's love for us and our call to live according to the Spirit of Christ who dwells within us (Rom. 8:3-11). For Paul our minds, our bodies, emotions and daily activities are 'spiritual' if they share in our service of God in and by the Holy Spirit. 'Mercy' may therefore be recognised as a sub-text of Paul's 'Fruit of the Spirit': love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-24).

For many centuries veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus has influenced the Church's expression of 'Mercy' spirituality. In our age of religious scepticism, the 'doubting' Thomas's encounter with the heart-wound of the Risen Christ (Jn. 20:24-29) offers reassurance of the possibility of faith in the midst of the world's denial of what lies beyond physical discovery. The Eucharistic liturgy and the Divine Office for the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus demonstrate how divine Love became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus contains a strong strand of 'lamentation' or 'godly sorrow' as the Church acknowledges Jesus' words on his way to Calvary: Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children... for if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? (Lk. 23:28-31.)

In promulgating the Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis' thoughts turn to Mary as Mother of Mercy:

May the sweetness of her countenance watch over us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God's tenderness. No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of his love.

This response to Pope Francis' Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy has been an attempt to emphasise that 'mercy' must be understood as a verb! Let us pray with Pope Francis that the Church may become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end: 'Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been of old'. (Ps 25:6)

NOTES

2. MV §§ 1, 8.
6. To note: In deference to the use of the Divine Name, the new Revised Standard Version of the Bible translates YHWH as 'Lord; & thereby uses the masculine pronoun.
9. Kasper, Mercy, note III:16, p.231:‘God’s being is Being-for-his-People: God’s being as Pro-Existence is the wonderful mystery of his
Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought of how the Church may render more clear her mission to be a witness to mercy; and we have to make this journey. It is a journey which begins with spiritual conversion. Therefore, I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its centre the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live in the light of the word of the Lord: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (cf. Lk 6:36). And this especially applies to confessors! So much mercy!

This Holy Year will commence on the next Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will conclude on Sunday, 20 November 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe and living face of the Father's mercy....

I am confident that the whole Church, which is in such need of mercy for we are sinners, will be able to find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering and rendering fruitful God's mercy, with which we are all called to give comfort to every man and every woman of our time. Do not forget that God forgives all, and God forgives always. Let us never tire of asking forgiveness. Let us henceforth entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey: our penitential journey, our year-long journey with an open heart, to receive the indulgence of God, to receive the mercy of God.

—Pope Francis
CATHOLIC DEVOTION TO THE MOTHER OF GOD

Lessons from Newman's Letter to Pusey (1866)

ROBERT M. ANDREWS

Where our natural language would be, ‘God will do this or that,’ there it seems equally natural to Roman Catholics to say, ‘Mary will do it.’ At least, where we expect beforehand, in the unfinished sentence, to find ‘God,’ or ‘Jesus,’ we find ‘Mary.’

So wrote the nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholic luminary, Edward Bouverie Pusey, to his former Tractarian ally, John Henry Newman in 1865, part of a work—the Eirenicon—designed to propose the terms of reunion for the Anglican and Roman Churches. Newman had only recently been reunited with Pusey and John Keble, the nucleus of the Oxford Movement that had so shaken the Church of England in the 1830s. Their meeting at Keble’s rectory at Hursley, Hampshire, on 12 September 1865 after decades of separation following Newman’s conversion in 1866 was an emotional experience, yet it did not deter Newman’s desire months later to answer Pusey’s Anglo-Catholic critique of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Catholicism.

Pusey’s appraisal of Mariology—a polemic containing a mixture of historical, theological and anecdotal evidence—was, on the whole, untrue and mostly a caricature; yet as Newman would be forced to admit in his formal published reply to Pusey in 1866, the Letter to Pusey, there was partial veracity to his claim that at times Mariology, in some of its devotional outpourings, had obscured devotion to God, especially God’s loving mediation brought to humanity through the incarnation. By occasionally placing Mary in a role that was akin to the one scripture so clearly proclaimed to be our Lord’s, the legitimate question of whether the incarnation was even necessary raises itself. As some overly zealous apologists for our Lady have argued at various times: if God-including Christ—is too holy for sinful humanity to directly approach, then surely mortal men need a fellow human to advocate on their behalf. As Bernard of Clairvaux put it in the twelfth century, ‘we need a mediator in order to reach Christ our mediator, and we can find none better than our Lady.

Partly because of the theological contribution of Newman, Vatican II and its ecumenical heritage has rightly steered Catholics back to remembering that devotion to the Mother of God must always compliment God’s love for humanity as shown in the incarnation. Nonetheless, one still finds Catholic devotions that lean in an unorthodox direction. For instance, versions of Louis de Montfort’s early eighteenth-century manual of Marian piety, A Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, a work that reasserts St Bernard’s claim for the need of Mary’s intercession in light of Christ’s divinity, remain popular, especially within Traditionalist circles—as do non-Catholic objections similar to Pusey’s within Evangelicalism.

One of the great contributions Newman gave to nineteenth-century Catholic theology was a genuine and honest awareness of the Catholic faith as a body of thought that exists in human space and time. Catholic are humans; they live, grow and die within a world that is equally as temporal and transient. This may at first seem a facile observation, but the nineteenth century—an age where Charles...
Darwin shattered some of the certainties of Christians in a natural world—made Catholicism's more honest exponents confront the fact that some of the older approaches simply no longer worked, nor were convincing. Where Mariology was concerned, myth and legend—at the very least—had to be tempered with an honesty concerning the manner in which the pious (including the learned) made their love of the Virgin known. '[H]ere below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often,' Newman wrote famously in 1845. But part of this sentiment meant that change might involve the revision of certain expressions of Catholic piety—revision in light of the doctrines of the faith as they develop and become part of the Christian deposit.

In the Letter to Pusey Newman responded to his old friend's extensive quotations from contemporary writers whom Pusey regarded as promoting Marian devotions that either took away from Christ's salvific work or mediation. The foundation of this reply was a founding principle that asserted the distinction between faith and devotion. The faith of Mariology—its doctrines—could, in Newman's view, be defended on its own ground, especially in reference to the works of the Fathers, whose founding role in Catholic theology he regarded as indispensible. Devotion, on the other hand, was different—a transient phenomenon that grew and changed over time. It could develop into something worthy of genuine piety, or be corrupted. It was utopian to think that devotions could ever be kept free of error. Moreover, making use of the affections, they had to be understood not only in terms of the historical and cultural context in which they were being enunciated, but as the outpourings of devotional piety, which is very different from rational theology:

What is abstractedly extravagant, may in particular persons be becoming and beautiful, and only fall under blame when it is found in others who imitate them. When it is formalized into meditations or exercises, it is as repulsive as love-letters in a police report. Moreover, even holy minds readily adopt and become familiar with language which they would never have originated themselves, when it proceeds from a writer who has the same objects of devotion as they have; and, if they find a stranger ridicule or reprobate supplication or praise which has come to them so recommended, they feel it as keenly as if a direct insult were offered to those to whom that homage is addressed.

Given that the Virgin Mary 'bore, suckled, and handled the Eternal in the form of a child', 'the rush and flood of thoughts which such a doctrine involves' naturally could involve the enunciation of doctrinal error. Like lovers who are besotted with one another, doctrinal soundness could never be guaranteed. If this were true of canonized saints, it was even truer of the laity:

That in times and places it [Mariology] has fallen into abuse, that it has even become a superstition, I do not care to deny; for, as I have said above, the same process which brings
to maturity carries on to decay, and things that do not admit of abuse have very little life in them. This of course does not excuse such excesses, or justify us in making light of them, when they occur. I have no intention of doing so as regards the particular instances which you bring against us.14

The Letter to Pusey, however, was much more than simply a refutation of an old friend who continued to hold religious beliefs that Newman had long ago abandoned, coupled with a defence of Marian piety, it was additionally a commentary on the type of Catholicism then in vogue in England in the nineteenth century. It was significant to Newman that the only English writer Pusey had cited was F.W. Faber—an Anglican convert who, along with Cardinal Henry Edward Manning (also a convert), had become zealous apologists for the ultramontane school.15 Faber had been the first English writer to translate de Montfort’s True Devotion in 1863—a work that in 1865 Newman admitted he had not heard of.16 True Devotion had been one of Pusey's chief bodies of evidence against Marian piety. As has been mentioned, it contained a repetition of Bernard of Clairvaux's claims regarding humanity's need for a second—more human and approachable—mediator: namely, the mother of our Lord. This questionable Christology—one which Yves Congar rightly characterized in the twentieth century as monophysite (that is, as an implicit denial of an omnibenevolent human and divine Christ as the salvific means of human redemption)—had rightly led Pusey to think that some Catholics obscured Christ through their extravagant Marian theologies. For Newman Pusey had, to an extent, been given an unrepresentative view of English Catholicism by the zealous preaching of Faber. Faber had adopted a cultural style that was unintelligible to English men and women, whose approach to theology was far more literal and sober than the exuberance of continental piety.17 Pusey had not only confused doctrine with devotion, he had misunderstood the nature of English Catholicism.

I suppose we owe it to the national good sense, that English Catholics have been protected from the extravagances which are elsewhere to be found. And we owe it also to the wisdom and moderation of the Holy See, which, in giving us the pattern for our devotion, as well as the rule of our faith, has never indulged in those curiosities of thought which are both so attractive to undisciplined imaginations and so dangerous to grovelling hearts. In the case of our own common people I think such a forced style of devotion would be simply unintelligible; as to the educated, I doubt whether it can have more than an occasional or temporary influence. If the Catholic faith spreads in England, these peculiarities will not spread with it.18

Faber had himself complained of the English approach to Mariology in the preface to his translation of de Montfort. Frightened of Protestants, they had devalued Mary's rightful place in Catholic faith and piety. Here in England Mary is not half enough preached. Devotion to her is low and thin and poor. It is frightened out of its wits by the sneers of heresy. It is always invoking human respect and carnal prudence wishing to make Mary so little of a Mary that Protestants may feel at ease about her. Its ignorance of theology makes it unsubstantial and unworthy. It is not the prominent characteristic of our religion which it ought to be.19

Other historians have confirmed this restrained English approach to the place of our Lady in Catholic theology and piety. Inspired by centuries of Recusant piety—which had frequently been the subject of persecution, English Mariology had 'kept its head low'.20 If Faber was critical of this phenomenon, however, Newman was not. Even if Catholic emancipation had, for the most part, freed Catholic piety from its second-class status, 'the English style' was born not out of persecution, but good sense and a solid commitment to orthodox Catholic tradition. It was a required attribute for English sensibilities.
There is a healthy devotion to the Blessed Mary, and there is an artificial; it is possible to love her as a Mother, to honour her as a Virgin, to seek her as a Patron, and to exalt her as a Queen, without any injury to solid piety and Christian good sense—I cannot help calling this the English style. I wonder whether you find anything to displease you in the *Garden of the Soul*, the *Key of Heaven*, the *Vade Mecum*, the *Golden Manual*, or the *Crown of Jesus*. These are the books to which Anglicans ought to appeal, who would be fair to us in this matter. I do not observe anything in them which goes beyond the teaching of the Fathers, except so far as devotion goes beyond doctrine. 21

But Newman went further than simply arguing that all aspects of Marian devotion could be either accepted or rejected on the basis of cultural applicability. The truth was that in his view some Catholic writers had been promoting a Mariology that was, in truth, heretical. The classic example, already discussed, was the notion—as Newman put it—'that His [Christ's] present disposition towards sinners, as well as His Father's, is to reject them' and that 'Mary takes His place as an Advocate with Father and Son'.22 In light of this it may be asked: what is the point of the incarnation in such a theological scheme? How does such an idea relate to biblical passages such as Hebrews 10:19-23—especially when we approach the altar to receive the body and blood of Christ?23 A century earlier Newman was equally as critical:

Sentiments such as these I freely surrender to your animadversion; I never knew of them till I read your book, nor, as I think, do the vast majority of English Catholics know them. They seem to me like a bad dream. I could not have conceived them to be said. I know not to what authority to go for them, to Scripture, or to the Fathers, or to the decrees of Councils, or to the consent of schools, or to the tradition of the faithful, or to the Holy See, or to Reason. They defy all the loci theologici. There is nothing of them in the Missal, in the Roman Catechism, in the Roman Raccolta, in the *Imitation of Christ*, in Gother, Challoner, Milner or Wiseman, as far as I am aware. They do but scare and confuse me… [A]s spoken by man to man, in England, in the nineteenth century, I consider them calculated to prejudice inquirers, to frighten the unlearned, to unsettle consciences, to provoke blasphemy, and to work the loss of souls. 24

Though Catholics have every right to defend Mariology as being not only biblical but in conformity with good sense and Catholic tradition, they also need to remember the admonition of *Lumen Gentium* to 'assiduously keep away from whatever, either by word or deed, could lead separated brethren or any other into error regarding the true doctrine of the Church'.25 Though some Evangelicals fear it, our Lady is not another redeemer who replaces a distant and wrathful Christ.26 She is the 'handmaid of the Lord' (Luke 1:38); a human being who said 'yes' to God. As Newman put it when he was still an Anglican, she is 'our pattern of faith'27—a notion he would later elucidate after he became a Catholic. Like her we are also invited to say 'yes' to God. Our devotions to her need to reflect the Catholic idea of a loving God who, because of the gracious and salvific work of Christ, also desires us to love him and duly venerate the woman who brought him into this world.

NOTES

4. Yves M-J. Congar OP, *Christ, Our Lady and the
Fundamentalists are sometimes horrified when the Virgin Mary is referred to as the Mother of God. However, their reaction often rests upon a misapprehension of not only what this particular title of Mary signifies but also who Jesus was, and what their own theological forebears, the Protestant Reformers, had to say regarding this doctrine.

—’Mary, Mother of God’. Catholic Answers
Abstract: The omphalus of the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church is yet to be located and exposed. This paper struggles to provide a brief account of one attempted search and its findings.

The contours of silence that have surrounded the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church have been clearly defined in the work of Geoffrey Robertson (2010) and Kieran Tapsell (2014). We are left with no illusion—the Vatican has protected its culpable priests with the consequence that more and more children were abused. Central to this situation is the role played by Vatican regulation. For well nigh a century a series of Vatican proclamations has ruled that persons with professional knowledge of certain criminal behaviour by priests observe inviolably the strictest confidentiality, commonly known as The Secret of the Holy Office and later known as The Pontifical Secret. Although there have been revisions of the foundational 1922 Crimen Sollicitationis (see Tapsell, 2014, pp. 127-140), due to church rules and canon law, a culture of silence has been deeply embedded within the mind-set of the hierarchy who deal with allegations of clergy misbehaviour. In addition, the process of dismissal from the priesthood became almost impossible over time. Together with the centuries-old 'benefit of clergy' the foregoing has provided a shelter so enabling paedophiles amongst the clergy to remain without public detection.

The Vatican's secret (The Pontifical Secret) has not saved its priests. It has not prevented scandal. Indeed, it is itself a scandal. But something further to this issue of secrecy and silence must be thrown into bold relief. The implementation of the decree of secrecy has been the means by which the church has averted a profound theological crisis. To be more specific, the secret has functioned to avert a theological crisis. It provides the means by which the crisis has been avoided. Consequently, it marks a point that is productive of the most unwitting, intense defence by church personnel who garner the anger of both victims and of the general public in reaction to the revelations made as a result of numerous inquiries and commissions across the world. Exactly what is being defended here? The defence pertains to one of the most fundamental concepts within the church's vocabulary, namely, 'priest'. How is this so?

In the Name-of-the-Father

The term 'paedophile priest' is often employed in discussion focussed on the current crisis. This terminology suggests two separable concepts (i) paedophile and (ii) priest. In the instance of Catholic priests this separation cannot be made. If a priest sexually abuses a child he is then a paedophilepriest. I coin this term to give recognition to the crucial distinction to be drawn between a man who sexually abuses a child and a priest who sexually abuses a child. A priest who abuses does so specifically as a priest. By definition he uses his priesthood to gain access to the child and his priesthood, in the Catholic tradition, holds immense power and so persuasive capacity.

A priest is nominated by the word 'Father'. He stands as representative of the 'Father' and this 'Father' is not any father. He is the Father—the One who is held to be all in all, the Alpha
and the Omega. The priest, as priest, acts in the Name-of-the-Father. He says Mass in the Name-of-the-Father; forgives sin in the Name-of-the-Father; baptizes in the Name-of-the-Father; blesses in the Name-of-the-Father—he is perceived to live his life in the Name-of-the-Father. This is precisely what is held to set him apart from all others. So, when a priest sexually abuses a child, he does so in the Name-of-the-Father both in the ingenuous, non-discriminating mind of the child and in his own mind because he knows the nature of the power that his position holds over others and uses it to gain his own sexual advantage. Thus, when a priest sexually abuses a child he is nothing less than a paedophilepriest.

'The Impossible'

But, a paedophilepriest is a theological impossibility. A man cannot be both a paedophile and a priest simultaneously. If he is a paedophile he cannot be a priest, and if he is a priest he cannot be a paedophile—that is, unless the Father is perverse. The latter proposition is anathema within Catholic doctrine. It is a sheer impossibility.

Hence, to speak of a paedophilepriest brings us face to face with what can only be said to be a meaningless concept. A paedophilepriest is a word that carries no meaning. When faced with something that has no meaning we are in the field of trauma. We have nowhere to place the experience, no frame of reference from which it can gain meaning and so be managed by we who are first and foremost beings who speak. If we do not know what to do with this nameless experience, ultimately it will do with us. If the current frame of reference proves inadequate to the needs of experience it will eventually collapse and a new construction is necessitated. Yet, it is precisely this notion of trauma that has been averted by the church. How?

The Vatican secret allows the church to hide from itself that a paedophilepriest is not a priest and a paedophile. As far as the church is concerned, the priest can remain a priest while being treated for his paedophilia. The church splits 'the impossible' and so averts any recognition of what is real. Consequently, since 1922, the church has never acknowledged the truth of the paedophilepriest and so, for decade upon decade, has preserved the concept 'priest' as absolutely separate from that of paedophile. By so doing, it is enabled to maintain a theological frame that is in no way disturbed because the frame has not been subjected to 'the impossible' and been found wanting.

I need to make clear here that the argument of this paper applies to all abuse by Catholic priests, brothers and nuns alike. The only difference is that nuns and brothers are seen to be on a lower rung in the hierarchy than priests where closeness to the Father is concerned and are therefore considered of less theological consequence. Nonetheless, they are held to belong to the same holy and powerful family, all working and acting in the Name-of-the-Father. Hence, the same 'impossible' experience occurs for the victim of abuse in each instance.

Clearly the potential for a collapse of an inadequate theological framework for our times enters the realm of very high stakes. The church may have avoided the collapse of its own theological frame which supports and gives meaning to the concept 'priest', but the experience of this very same 'impossibility' resides elsewhere—namely, in the instigation of the trauma of the abused.

'The Impossible' Re-located

Victims of a paedophilepriest are those who...
are faced ultimately with an experience of 'the impossible'. When a paedophilepriest abuses a child, the latter experiences something for which there is no name, yet something that is absolutely and irrevocably real. The child is faced with a man who is believed, and claims, to act in the Name-of-the-Father. He bears the name 'Father' with the nomination being employed as a proper noun. He represents God. He stands in for God. Yet, he acts in a manner that is beyond the child's comprehension and the child is faced with 'the impossible' to say, 'the impossible' to bear.

A child cannot draw upon the Vatican's secret to avert the collapse of his or her world. All the familiar and anchoring coordinates that give meaning and stability to his existence are at risk of collapse and in many cases do collapse either at that point or at some time later. The victim cannot make sense of the experience wherein a 'supposed priest' abuses him or her sexually. In many such instances none of what takes place has meaning for the abused. 'Father' touching his or her body is akin to an invasion of self by an unknown and unnamed being from an unnamed elsewhere. Children, as is the case for all speaking beings, cannot deal with the meaningless dimension of their experience, in this context, an experience that harbours a strain of aggression, if not violence.

The consequence for each will be singular. Some experience a total collapse of their psychological hold on the world. Subsequently, they spend the remainder of their lives cobbling and re-cobbling together the psychological frame that provides them with an identity and the means of managing their fraught existence. Unexpectedly, their fragile worlds can unwind once more and they feel themselves slip helplessly into a void of pain-drenched inertia. Many are threatened by the paedophile and some believe themselves to be touched, if not penetrated, by evil. In an attempt to make at least partial sense of their experience some consider themselves evil. Such a construction may well save them from the abyss, but simultaneously carries within it the seeds of destruction.

In his evidence to The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Stephen Thomas Woods, a victim of both religious and clergy abuse, describes how he now understands the effect of his past upon his life. The collapse of his world and his failure to understand his situation are dominant themes throughout. As an intelligent young man he had to stop studying: "... after another breakdown... I was too tired and too exhausted to continue...". He reports the presence of a repetitive voice in the back of his mind reinforcing the ideas planted by his perpetrators that he was bad, that he was evil; "My self esteem was utterly shattered and ruined. I have also had a hyper awareness of potential threats which has only deepened my anxieties." He explains that when one perpetrator got off his charge in relation to his own case, "I had a total breakdown. I became suicidal...". Telling, too, is his reference to the quality of professional help he received. He mentions one competent clinical psychologist who "was brilliant at joining the dots that I couldn't, and making sense of some of the more obscure feelings and attitudes I had. That is, why I felt so bad and down about myself; why I kept pushing and falling, and pushing and falling" (Transcript Royal Commission, Day - C079, 8346-7, 21/5/15). The impact of 'the impossible' on his life, an 'impossible' that should have been acknowledged and dealt with at an institutional level, could hardly be more life-devouring. To listen to his evidence is to be exposed to the breadth and depth of what is at stake for those caught in the current of the re-located 'impossible'.

At the risk of over-simplification, suffice it to say in the present context that not all are damaged so severely—in some cases a victim's psychical structure remains firm. Consequently, such a victim is able to push the experience aside with the chance that he or she may deal with it at some later time.
Nevertheless, a price is always paid by the victim—for the traumatic experience has a life of its own and has a type of haunting presence that is never far away.

I have argued that the secrecy of the Vatican in regard to paedophilia has functioned to avert a theological crisis in reference to the concept 'priest'. By covering-up paedophilia, the church avoids a confrontation with 'the impossible' that the paedophilepriest presents to it. The truth of real paedophilepriests will not be silenced. It speaks within the lives of the victims who, as individuals, are fated to be confronted by 'the impossible' with all its devastating effects. The threat that pertains to the theological underpinnings of the institutional church has fallen with a vengeance into the laps of children. ‘The ‘impossible’ has been re-located and, not surprisingly, the responsibility for the outcome is a matter of great and growing community concern.

**Responsibility and Response-ability**

With marked reference to the Catholic Church, it is not by chance that the issue of responsibility has emerged repeatedly throughout the Victorian Senate Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organizations 2013, and throughout the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse currently under way. Precisely who bears the responsibility for the crimes of paedophilia committed by clergy—the individual criminal and/or the institutional church? I do not wish to venture into fine legal or other complex details here, but I do want to make two pertinent observations.

Archbishop Denis Hart was pressed on the issue of responsibility at the Victorian Senate Inquiry. In his closing address he publicly admitted to the church’s fault-line: "There is anger at the appalling harm that was done to children, anger at the grief and pain inflicted on parents who still live today with feelings of guilt, bewilderment and betrayal, and anger at the fact that the church failed its most vulnerable by letting this happen" (emphasis my own) (2013, p.51). Here he moves closer to the yet-to-be said by the institutional church. How did the church "let this happen"? Why did it "let this happen"? Did it let it happen or were its laws and regulations productive of its happening?

He continues thus: "I understand that the community is looking for someone to take responsibility for the terrible acts that occurred. I take responsibility" (p.51). What precisely does this mean in principle and in practice? Earlier in the interrogation he was insistent that all crimes were to be pinned back on the culpable person: "Obviously it became pretty clear that of all the cases that we have had in these years in Melbourne something like 58 per cent of all these evil things can be sheeted back to 12 priests. It is really shocking" (p.15). Yes, indeed, this does shock. But the shock is that a 'supposed priest' is the criminal. Here again we have the instance of the paedophilepriest—it shocks because it is 'impossible'. Further to this he says: "... these awful criminals are secretive and cunning and devious, and they have kept their evil deed secret" (p.15). But it is the church that kept these crimes secret, the church knew of "this awful evil"(p.15). So, in what sense does the Archbishop take responsibility for the terrible acts that occurred?

Notably, nowhere in his evidence does the Archbishop, on behalf of the institutional church, forthrightly acknowledge, or take responsibility for, the secrecy imposed by the Vatican which is at the root of "this awful evil". This is so, even though the issue of Vatican decrees was specifically raised. Archbishop Hart is not personally responsible for individual behaviour, but as a spokesperson for the institutional church he can and must take responsibility for the fact that this behaviour was possible for someone who bore the official title 'priest' with the full knowledge of the hierarchy.
Cardinal George Pell was likewise pressed on the issue of responsibility at the Royal Commission. Having accepted that the church is morally responsible for the sexual abuse of children by “church officials” (C041, C4499, 21/08/2014), he said that “what from a Christian point we might decide is inappropriate probably is totally appropriate in a legal sense...” (C4535). It was clear from his now infamous, misleading ‘trucking’ analogy that he did not consider the church legally responsible for the criminal behaviour of the offending individual. Crucial to all discussion is a matter that is completely missing in the evidence proffered—an acknowledgement of the Vatican's secret, both the root cause and overarching umbrella of the church's response to its self-knowledge.

Missing in the above is evidence that the institutional church holds itself to account for the sexual abuse of countless children. Missing is an open acknowledgement of the influence of the Vatican's secret and canon law in the shaping of the trauma borne throughout this past century by countless innocents, their families and communities. Until the institutional church reaches out and takes responsibility for making possible, if not probable, the criminal behaviour of some of its priests, it will be unable to employ its otherwise powerful and healing potential as an institution with an immense capacity for restorative and life-giving response-ability.

Conclusion

In Australia, as elsewhere in the world, the Catholic Church is currently being held to account for the criminal actions perpetrated by some amongst its clergy. To be held accountable is one thing. To hold oneself accountable, and consequently exhibit appropriate response-ability, is entirely another. With the revelation of the official secrecy of the Vatican one might imagine that the church would be forced to take responsibility in the instance of the paedophile conduct of its members, but this would bring it to the precipice, a situation the church resists at all costs. As matters now stand, the price for this resistance is paid by the victim, sometimes with his or her own life.

It is not only the cover-up that must be acknowledged. What must be admitted by the church is the way in which the cover-up functions to move, to transpose a potential crisis for it as an institution, to the world of the individual victim wherein it brings about a trauma of inestimable consequence. The cover-up of paedophilia, this protection of the key concept 'priest', is the genesis of a palpable defensiveness that permeates the genuine efforts made by the church to address the abuse scandal with compassion.

The institutional church will fail in its attempt to assuage the anger and pain caused by its action until this buried issue is brought into the open where it can be acknowledged and dealt with at an institutional level. The Pontifical Secret may be a secret no more, but the omphalos, the now fragile concept 'priest', remains unrecognized and so unchallenged as it continues to lie in wait....

REFERENCES


Transcript Case 28 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses To Child Sexual Abuse, C079, 21/05/2015. http://www.child abuseroyal commission.gov.au

In terms of the quality of life, one of the greatest threats is abuse of the young. Not only has it been a horrendous revelation in recent times that adults at home, in institutions and in organised rings have been physically and sexually assaulting children, but that members of churches and an alarmingly high number of clergy and members of religious congregations have been accused of this kind of activity and have been found guilty in courts and have been jailed.

This survey of films will confine itself to sexual molestation and abuse of minors, specifically young boys and adolescents, with reference to the church and secular cases.

Until the 1980s, most people did not think of going to the police to press criminal charges. There were very few precedents. We have come to learn that concerned parents did go to ecclesiastical authorities but that there was a lack of awareness about how serious the matters really were, that there were few protocols to guide church leaders on how to deal with clergy misconduct of this nature, that there was an immediate concern for the welfare of the accused rather than concern and compassion for the complainants and a belated switch to language of victims and perpetrators. The behaviour was secret, hidden, smoothed over with lying deceptions by perpetrators, the exercise of emotional blackmail and the reinforcing of guilt feelings in the victims. While errant clergy were moved from place to place to avoid scandal without much realisation that they would offend again, or were sent to institutes for therapy, there was little help, counselling or compensation for the victims, something which has been, to some extent, reversed more recently. In fact, worldwide, secular and church authorities are still trying to grapple with psychological understanding of the mind and emotions of an abuser.

While many dioceses and religious orders, especially in English-speaking countries, have taken some very serious steps to do the right thing for victims and to deal honestly and justly with the perpetrators, the American experience of 2002, which led to so many victims making accusations with consequent financial compensatory claims that have bankrupted several dioceses, has continued to impact on so many dimensions of church life: the role of the priest, the psychological and emotional health and maturity of men and women in responsible ecclesiastical roles, the erosion of trust among the faithful, the enormous anger and resentment, the long-term ill-effects of abuse of the victims.

The government investigation in Ireland over almost a decade, government enquiries and the Royal Commission in Australia, mean that the issues are continually before the public and will continue to be for some years to come.

There have been a number of movies dramatising this theme. It is 25 years since a television film about the first reported case of abuse of a boy in Louisiana in the mid-1980s, Judgment, was screened.

This article considers the five periods of five years over that quarter of a century, to highlight what was emerging in the public arena during those years and indicate some of the issues in the films which were made and released at that time. Cinema is a mirror of society rather than a shaper of society. A film
can be in pre-production, production and post-production for several years, so there is no instant reflection, as is possible in the print media, radio and television. Nevertheless, in these days when films are seen on television, can be rented or downloaded, and are continually repeated, it means that the films can make some contribution to awareness of sexual abuse.

1990-1995

Background

News of the sexual abuse of minors by clergy was not prominent at the beginning of the 1990s. During this period, however, more and more cases were revealed, especially in English-language countries, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia. It was also at this period, that the first case of a priest in Australia sentenced to prison was publicised.

Church officials responded with plans for the writing of a document, with protocols, as well as pastoral exhortations for the clergy. In 1994, Catholics in Europe commented adversely on sexual abuse of minors as a phenomenon of the English-speaking church, something that would not happen in Europe.

The films

As mentioned already, Judgment, a film for television was screened in 1990. It was concerned with the first reported case of abuse of a boy by a priest in Louisiana in the 1980s. David Strathairn played the priest in question. For audiences at the time, it was a strong and surprising drama, material that they were not used to seeing. David Strathairn's performance is well worth seeing as he embodies a range of emotions of a lonely priest, a predatory priest, an exposed priest. Judgment anticipated the huge outcry about church procedures in the United States in 2002. It also shows the response of the Bishop and his Vicar General, focusing on juridical issues before pastoral issues towards the victim and his family.

Soon after, 1992, the Canadian production, The Boys of St Vincent, dramatized the true story of an orphanage with some of the Brothers on the staff abusing their charges. As with Judgment, this was new on television screens, a certain amount of disbelief that such events could take place—only to be verified on a much more global scale a few years later. The impact of the film in Canada, with Canadians looking at their own scandal, led to a sequel in 1993, The Boys of St Vincent, 15 Years Later, which focused on the court cases against the staff and the traumatic effect abuse had had on the boys as they grow into adults.

A secular-themed television film worth noting is Bump in the Night, 1991, a story of a mother searching for her very little son who had been abducted. But the portrait of the abductor, a University literature professor, played by Christopher Reeve, enables the audience to understand something of the mentality of the paedophile, an adult man who seems to be comfortable only in the company of a child, taking him to the zoo, talking to him at his level, showing the emotional retardation of this kind of molester, playing with him as if he was a young boy himself, his appreciation of himself as being tender and loving to the boy. Later films will explore this mentality of
the paedophile.

There are also two different films from this period. *Lawnmower Man*, based on a Stephen King story, 1992, shows a physically abusive priest whose sadistic behaviour and beatings lead to his being violently killed by the victim, a simple gardener, whose name is significantly, Jobe. He lives behind the church, tends the grounds, talks to the crucifix as he cleans the church. The abuse theme is not to the fore but it is presented quite powerfully.

Justice and scandals were beginning to emerge, when the thriller, *Primal Fear*, was released in 1995. It is basically a courtroom drama and murder mystery. It uses a church scandal as a basis for the plot. An Archbishop in Chicago, is savagely murdered. It emerges that he had hired adolescents to perform sexual acts in front of a video camera. The killing is vengeful, retaliation for the humiliation and shame. This was quite shocking, the episcopal behaviour as well as the visualising of the performances. For a mainstream film, starring Richard Gere, It seemed to give permission for more explicit films to come.

A film about the relationship of an adult male with a young child, not explicitly sexual, but intimating the possibility, was *Man Without a Face*, 1993, a film directed by Mel Gibson who played the central character. At its release, it seemed to present intimations of the sinister.

For a comparison with the abuse of a pre-adolescent daughter by her father, and the consequences for the daughter and the mother, one of the best Stephen King adaptations, *Dolores Claiborne*, moved the general audience with horror at abuse in a non-religious context.

**1996–2000**

**Background**

In 1996, the Australian church, dioceses and religious congregations, published *Towards Healing*. It was striking at the time. The Archdiocese of Melbourne, with Archbishop Pell, decided to have its own protocols, *The Melbourne Response*, also promulgated late in 1996.

While *Towards Healing* was a breakthrough at the time, it can be seen in retrospect that many of those applying it had limited awareness, were prone to be concerned about the clergy, financial responsibilities and payments, more than concern about the victims. With the Australian Royal Commission, the criticisms and limitations of *Towards Healing* have been aired in considerable detail—perhaps obscuring stories which show the benefit of those who followed through with greater sensitivity.

In 1995–1996, the auxiliary Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn, Patrick Power, concerned about the issues with interest in the institutes in the United States for therapy for priest-offenders, went to St Luke's, Maryland, and participated in the three-month course to understand and appreciate what it was trying to do. The Australian Church set up *Encompass*.

**The films**

The 1996 release of an Italian film, *Pianese Nunzio, 14 a Maggio* / *Pianese Nunzio, 14 in May*, was more than surprising to an English-language audience. From the point of view of the film, Italians viewed paedophilia not nearly as stringently as those in English-speaking countries. The principal character is a crusading priest in Naples, a champion of the poor. He is confronted by criminal elements in the city as he fights for justice. In his personal life he is in a relationship with a 13-year-old boy. This relationship seems to be presented, if not favourably, at least without any explicit condemnation. But his enemies use the relationship to destroy him.

With many scandals are yet to come to light in some countries in Asia and Africa, it was surprising to see in 1999, an Indian film, *Split*.
Wide Open, about changes in lifestyle in Mumbai through the influence of media talkback shows from the West opening up Indian society to sex topics more explicitly. Yet also included was a sub-plot where a religious brother is presented sympathetically, praised for his work with street kids and social justice issues in the slums. He also has an intimate relationship with a young boy. Split White Open indicates how much could emerge from Asian countries. Already in the late 1980s, the Philippines most prominent director, Lino Brocka, and his associates made quite a number of films during the 1990s about the exploitation of boys and young men (including by military and naval personnel from the former US base at Subic Bay) the macho dancers, the prostitutes, many of whom are trying to raise money for their impoverished families. Brocka’s most notable film was Macho Dancer, 1989.

A comparison of how an American films treated this kind of infatuation and relationship, again in the secular setting, is seen in Happiness, 1999. Among a range of sexual issues was the attraction of a father to the schoolboy friends of his 11-year-old son. Dylan Baker’s performance portrayed the torment of this man, the tactics and rationalisations he used and the shame of his exposure. This character appears in a sequel, Life During Wartime (2009), this time played by Ciaran Hinds.

The principal American film this period was Sleepers, 1996, including a priest character. However, the basic story is secular. A group of young boys in a juvenile institution were assaulted by one of the supervisors. As adults, they combine to get their revenge by taking him to court, even persuading their priest friend from the neighbourhood, Robert De Niro, to perjure himself during the trial although what he said was the moral truth.

An important film for television, Indictment: The McMartin Trial, 1996, raised the issue about memories and false memories, based on actual events in California during the later 1980s. The McMartin family owns a pre-school, finds itself arrested and charged with a range of offences, many of which are bizarre. Three generations of women go to jail, but the main suspicion is on the son, a dropout who is good-natured but his track record of unreliability does his credibility a great deal of damage. The case went on for seven years, attracting huge media attention (and blame) until all the members of the family were acquitted.

Indictment sets its scene particularly well and shows that it is possible to have widespread abuse in the teaching situation. However, the film also highlights difficulties about memory and suggestion. The film shows how the whole case was initiated by a psychologically disturbed mother with family problems. The fears of abuse snowballed with parents up in arms and children making all kinds of accusations, many of them outlandish. A lynching atmosphere developed. The experts who worked with the children are ultimately shown to have had very limited training, used dubious methods to elicit information from the children and worked on the presumption of guilt on the part of the McMartins. The children, whose interviews were taped but not used in their entirety by the prosecuting team because of lack of time, tell more and more preposterous stories.

Indictment is a cautionary story concerning uncovering repressed memories, not often the subject of films, and concerning children’s being susceptible to suggestion.

2001-2005

Background

This was the time when sexual abuse cases were frequently in the headlines, the Catholic Church beginning to accept that this was a reality of the Church’s life and that it had to be faced, an examination of conscience.

This came to a head in 2002 when, after the
focus on prominent cases in the Archdiocese of Boston, the American church had its 'annus horribilis'. Many victims of abuse and molestation made themselves known to authorities. It was a harrowing year for these victims with their memories and hurts and for their families. It was also a harrowing year for many an authority in the Church, from bishops to diocesan directors of communication who had to find ways of responding to media demands while always offering compassion to those who suffered. It was a year of apologies. It was a year of judicial proceedings and attempts to formulate appropriate protocols in the American church. The bishops had to face up to the realities and the need for investigation, making the decision that there would be 'zero tolerance'. In 2003 there was a meeting, in the Vatican, of the American cardinals.

In Australia, there was an accusation made against Cardinal Pell and he showed bishops what should be done if they were the subject of complaint. He stood down until the case was resolved and he was able to resume his duties. A number of American bishops did not follow this example.

With the death of John Paul II in 2005, there was some consideration of how Cardinal Ratzinger handled cases at the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, and what he would do about the abuse scandals as Benedict XVI.

The films

This was the period in which quite a number of significant films were released, films focusing on the sexual abuse of minors, especially young boys.

Many of the scandals in Ireland had been. *Song for a Raggy Boy* (2003) was significant, based on a novel by Patrick Galvin who spoke about the effect of writing the book and of collaborating on the film as an 'exorcism' of the past for himself. The film is set in 1939 in a school reformatory for boys, some younger than 12, managed by the local bishop with a priest in charge and staffed by brothers. The brother-prefect is a stern disciplinarian who resorts to excessive physical punishment and humiliation of the boys. One brother is a sexual abuser. There is only one sequence of such abuse, visually reticent, but all the more horrendous because of this. It is a reminder of the pathology of the brother and, particularly, the pain of the reluctant victim who speaks of this in the confessional and is advised to keep what has happened to himself.

*Song for a Raggy Boy*, like other Irish films and their presentation of dominant clergy raise pertinent questions about the severity of the Irish Church, and the collaboration with the state in running institutions and using the same methods of discipline and punishment prevalent in those times in state and other institutions. The film is also a reminder that religious men and seminarians who entered in their mid-teens and underwent severe formation, absorbed it and saw it as the pattern for their ministry, applying it sometimes in unconscious compensation for their lack of emotional development. Two films about abuse of young women in Irish work institutions in the 1960s were *The Magdalene Sisters* and *Sinners* (both 2002).

Meanwhile in Spain, Pedro Almodovar, the country’s leading director, often provocative in his attitude towards the Catholic Church (critical of Opus Dei in his film, *Matador*). When Almodovar announced production of *Mal Educacion/Bad Education*, there were immediate claims that the film would be anti-clerical. it would be a film about his own experiences of Catholic education in the schools of the 1960s. However, Almodovar disclaimed the anti-clerical charge, saying that had he made the film 20 years earlier, it would have been quite anti-clerical. He said that he had mellowed and that, although he does not have what he calls the 'luxury of believing in God', he values much of what he experienced in the church (especially liturgies, celebrations and art). He also said that the priests at school said that watching films was a sin so he had to
choose sin. These themes are incorporated into *Bad Education*.

While the abuse issue is important, the director spends more time showing the emotional behaviour of the abusing priest, his obsession and emotional immaturity, and puts more blame on how the priest handles the situation and jealously exploits his authority and power within the school. Later we see the priest in real life, having left the priesthood and married, but still a sexual predator.

As with other directors from continental Europe, Almodovar shows some compassion for the emotions of the perpetrators. He creates a powerful scene where the priest rector of the school sits in rapt attention at the community table while the ten year old boy with whom he is infatuated sings a song for his birthday. While his sympathies are with the victims, he also raises questions about adolescent attitudes to sexuality, especially in the context of Catholic upbringing, Church teaching and a sense of sin. Audiences will have a great deal to think about concerning the characters, about what is real, about what is memory, about sexual orientation, about sexual intimacy, about childhood experiences and their effect on adult development or the impeding of development, about moral choices and about God and religion.

By 2005, a film had been made about several cases in Boston, *Our Fathers*, first screened on the US cable channel, *Showtime*, in May 2005.

*Our Fathers* was based on a book, *Our Fathers: the Secret Life of the Catholic Church in an Age of Scandal*, by David France who had covered the story when a senior editor at *Newsweek*. It is a dramatised interpretation of the year in Boston which began with the Father Geoghegan trial, continued with other priests being accused and ended with the resignation of Cardinal Bernard Law. The film is generally carefully written, giving voice to a range of perspectives. The legal aspects of the case are frequently centre-screened.

*Our Fathers* shows the victims of abuse in their adult years and the damage that they still bear, ranging from low self-esteem and marital difficulties, even to suicide. It uses discreetly filmed flashbacks (with the emphasis on verbal communication rather than visuals of the molestations) to bring home the reality of the abuse within the context of family life, school, church and the plausible pretexts that the clergy used to deceive parents and rationalize their behaviour with the children.

The film, which starts with Fr Geoghegan's ordination and the bishop asking the seminary rector whether this candidate was worthy, also fills in aspects of the accused priests' lives and behaviour. Opinions of fellow priests are indicated and their wariness. In dramatic terms, one of the most moving sequences has an adult character remember his experiences with Fr Birmingham and then reveal to his fellow-victims that he had visited the priest as he was dying in hospital thirteen years earlier to find some kind of forgiveness for his hatred of him.

Many critics blame lawyers for inflating the cases for the sake of greater financial compensation. This theme is tackled well in the film. Ted Danson portrays Mitchell Garabedian, the lawyer who found himself in deeper waters than he anticipated and pursued Fr Geoghegan. He is portrayed warts and all, his callow attitudes as well as his more personal involvement in the cases, his temptations to celebrity as well as his decent behaviour. The screenplay traces the steps he took to find evidence and documentation concerning the priests, letters written by complaining parishioners, a formal report from the 1980s commissioned by the church, which were not made available by Church authorities until a judge compelled them to. The decisions of *The Boston Globe* to pursue the issues and the people are also dramatized.

Christopher Plummer appears as Cardinal Law. He interprets the Cardinal in a complex way. He is a churchman of the old school who sees it as his duty to protect the church and
its reputation. He is a prelate who comes to realise that he has made grave mistakes in judgment—the scene where he speaks of his mistakes to Pope John Paul II has moving moments and takes us into the mind and heart of the Cardinal. The other sequences which repay viewing to try to understand how the Cardinal saw his role include a visit of one of the victims (who has been ignored and put off even when the Cardinal had said he would meet victims) confronts him in his residence and forces the Cardinal to listen and empathise as well as persuading him to attend a meeting of victims and families where he has a tough reception.

A sub-plot concerning a sometimes disgruntled priest, Fr Dominic Spagnolia (Brian Dennehy in a no-holds-barred performance) who speaks in his pulpit against Cardinal Law and demonstrates against him sometimes distracts from the main thrust of the film. Towards the end of the film, however, it becomes very serious as this priest has to face his own demons as well as allegations.

The end of 2015 will see a strong film, Spotlight, about the Boston Globe’s pursuit of these issues and the clergy.

Probably the best film so far to understand the psyche of the abuser is Gregg Araki’s Mysterious Skin (2004). He has adapted a novel by Scott Heim. The novel came out in 1995 when charges were beginning to surface more widely in various organisations, secular and religious. This film focuses on two families. The paedophile is the little league baseball coach. The setting is the late 1980s, early 1990s.

At this time, Mysterious Skin, proved helpful to many Christian audiences who found it difficult to understand how abuse could have happened within the church by showing abuse in a secular context, the world of the family and the sport’s coach.

The film is strong in its portrayal of sexual abuse. However, Araki keeps a balance between being prurient and showing the dramatic and dire impact of sexual abuse. The film is visually reticent, the directness being restricted to verbal frankness—which is often much easier to absorb than visual explicitness.

The film focuses on two very different boys. Neil (Joseph Gordon Levitt) is a young hustler. Brian (Brady Corbett) is an introverted young man who has no memory of being abused, no idea that he has been abused. He has so successfully created a psychological block that, when he sees a television program about UFOs, he begins to think that the missing hours of his life, that he has no way of accounting for, were caused by his being abducted by aliens. By the end of the film, when the two adolescents come together, they go to the house where the abuse happened and the hustler explains to the innocent boy what actually took place. This is a harrowing experience as the young man realises what has happened to him, the memories come back. This is the moment when the film ends, leaving the future for the two boys and a sense of wonder and anticipation as well as alarm for the audience.

The film is disturbing almost from its beginning. The initial focus is on Neil, speaking in voiceover and commenting on his attraction for the baseball coach and hinting at the implications of this. However, it is the pre-pubescent Neil who is speaking in this way. And this is already shocking in its way. However, Araki is suggesting that for some youngsters, their sexual focus emerges at a young age. This does not necessarily lead to abuse but that in this period, where so much attention has to be on victims, there may be some deep level response to the sexuality but not to elicit abuse. This is an area that has not received a great deal of attention. In this screenplay, it emerges that Neil has been complicit in the sexual behaviour. He has also been seduced into being an ally of the abuser in his activities with other boys. This compounds the evil compulsions of the perpetrator, the abuse of a child and the contamination of another child into being an abuser.

Neil talks about his orientation. He
indicates what happened during his visits to the coach's house. Much of this is visualised in the early part of the film—the more seductive aspects rather than sexual activity. While the audience tries to grapple with understanding the mentality of the young boy, the screenplay portrays the coach as a complex naïve but knowing seducer, who uses the language of games and seeming innocence, who is really an emotionally and morally immature boy. It is on this basis that the abusive sexual compulsions build up. Alarm and disgust at the paedophiles has obscured the need for trying to understand the mentality of the emotionally stunted abusers, their attractions and their exploitations.

Other films from this period which are also helpful in dramatising abuse, some within the family, include The Butterfly Effect, Chromophobia, and the documentary Capturing the Friedmans where, in a family who make it a practice of filming everything, two brothers are accused of abuse.

2006-2010

Background

With 2001-2005, as the main period when clerical sexual abuse issues were in the public media, and surfacing in many countries, especially the United States in 2002, this is a time when it was generally taken for granted that there had been many abusers and that they would have to be more investigations in dioceses and religious orders. There were crises moments, for example, prior to World Youth Day in Sydney in 2008, Cardinal Pell had to face some very public complaints, not very compassionately as reports later revealed. By contrast, Pope Benedict XVI in the United States and in Sydney, had meetings with the victims of abuse to listen to them and offer some church attentiveness to their experiences.

It is also at this time that the website, Broken Rights, already established in Australia, began to include very detailed histories of particular cases and of particular perpetrators.

The films

In 2006, a major documentary about abuse in the United States was nominated for an Academy Award. It was called Deliver us from Evil. This is a meticulously made documentary by a director, Amy Berg, who is not a Christian and is looking at the issues from outside the Church. She sought advice and legal counsel about the truth of the claims made in the film.

The focus of the film is Fr Oliver O'Grady, an Irishman who worked in Northern California, from the 1960s to the 1980s. The film has significant ramifications for the Church today as, prior to his appointment to be archbishop of Los Angeles in 1985, Cardinal Roger Mahoney was auxiliary bishop in Fresno (1975-1980), bishop of Stockton (1980-1985).

Oliver O'Grady emerges from the film as, at least, self-delusional. On the one hand, he admits what he has done. On the other, he cheerfully excuses himself and compartmentalises his behaviour. As a portrait of a priest offending over decades, the film offers an alarming portrait. In September 2005, the BBC's Panorama program featured Oliver O'Grady. The film-maker, himself a victim of abuse in Ferns, Ireland, asked O’Grady to indicate how he ‘groomed’ a young girl for abuse. He cheerfully did so, straight to camera, an astonishing performance (and the BBC, to its discredit, featured this sequence in the promotion of the broadcast as well as including it at the head of the program as well as during it). Fr O'Grady’s behaviour and comments as late as 2006 were bizarre and reprehensible.

Deliver us from Evil works dramatically and powerfully. The range of interviews with victims and their parents are placed throughout the film. They have been judiciously selected so that the audience
shares the experience of the families, the initial welcome to Fr O'Grady as he took a pastoral interest in them and became firm friends, being invited to meals and becoming part of the family. Families did not realise what was happening to their children. Such behaviour on the part of a priest was unthinkable to most.

As the truth emerged and Fr O'Grady went to different parishes in Northern California, the families were surprised, dismayed and shocked. Along with the chronicle of the history of Fr O'Grady's activities are the testimonies of Cardinal Mahoney and different church officials from Stockton diocese. Since the United States uses videocameras for depositions, the film incorporates footage of the actual questions and answers.

This is where there can be some controversy. The director has selected particular sections—and they sound to the detriment of the churchmen. The cross-examination reminds the audience that bishops were not so well informed about the nature of abuse, especially its criminality, and made decisions to move priests around—which resulted in further abuse. On the one hand, one can argue that in retrospect, bishops made poor decisions which resulted in some disastrous behaviour. On the other, we have more clarity now than then and it is easy to be judgmental in looking back. However, what is important is what has to be done now in terms of truth, justice and reparation.

One more alarming aspect of the film is the featuring of Fr Tom Doyle who, since the 1980s and his working in Washington DC and becoming involved in Bishops Conference decisions, has been something of a whistleblower and a friend of victims. He makes some very strong and critical statements during the film which also need examination and attention.

There were far fewer fictional films during this time. 

*The Least of These*, 2008, seems to be set in a Catholic school and viewers have interpreted it that way. However, the school and the chapel do not have any Catholic pictures, statues or iconic props and the final credits indicate that there was some strong Lutheran input into the making of the film. Be that as it may, it is still a relevant story, with violent implications which makes one realise that such vengeance against a priest abuser has not been the order of the day.

A young priest, Fr Andre (Isaiah Washington) who had been a student at the school, comes back to join the staff after being absent from the diocese (Colorado) for two years. His predecessor has disappeared. Andre is welcomed by the priest rector of the school, is treated warily by the disciplinarian and in a friendly way by the other priest on the staff. The boys are another matter, typical of boarders at any school, nominally religious but mainly not, while conforming to the rules of the school. Andre manages to settle in, dealing with the priests, trying to assess and relate to the boys, puzzling about the disappearance of Fr Collins. A rich boy, a sports champion is quite hostile, especially when Fr Andre, who teaches religion and has a great belief in prayer, asks the boys to compose their own and he parodies the Lord's Prayer. There is another reclusive boy who spends a lot of time in the chapel and is wary of talking.

We soon realise that he is one student who has been abused. Some of the boys search sealed off basement offices and it soon emerges that Fr Collins has been killed and the quiet boy is under suspicion. The media, needless to say, make a great deal out of the case, filming Fr Andre trying to put them off, then raising accusing suspicions about his behaviour. The audience shares in a number of discussions amongst the priests and how the situation should be handled.

The plot here has a few unexpected twists which makes the abuse by Fr Collins more harrowing, his murder comprehensible and the cover-up alarming. Fr Andre's life is also more complicated - he had been a whistleblower on a former case, with a close friend suspended.
and hounded, only to discover that the whole affair had been fabricated by a child and parents. This sub-plot offers a sobering reminder of different scenarios in different cases.

*Doubt*, 2008, is a film of strong Catholic interest.

It can be viewed in the light of the Church experience of sexual abuse by clergy. However, this is not exactly the central issue of the film. Doubt is a film about Church structures, hierarchy, the exercise of power and the primacy of discipline and order.

Set in the autumn of 1964 in the Bronx, New York, the film focuses on the suspicions of the primary school principal, Sister Aloysius (Meryl Streep), that the local priest and chaplain to the school, Fr Flynn (Philip Seymour Hoffman), is taking an unhealthy interest in one of the students, aged twelve. There are some suggestions, several ambiguous clues, about what might have happened but the actual events remain unclear as the priest defends himself against the nun's strong intuition against him. She discusses the problem with the boy's mother. As the title of the film indicates, the drama leaves the truth unclear because it is the stances of the two characters in conflict, especially the determined nun and the truth struggle, the power struggle, the conscience struggle, that is the point of the film.

John Patrick Shanley has adapted and opened out his Pulitzer-prize winning play for the screen and directed it himself. Shanley has indicated that he is not so much concerned with the issue of clerical abuse of children as of pitting two characters against each other to highlight the uncertainties of certainty and the nature of doubt. The drama is all the more powerful because of its naturalistic atmosphere, recreating the period and the life of the school, the convent and the rectory.

As with most organisations by the beginning of the 1960s, secular or religious, the Catholic Church was hierarchically structured. Everyone knew their place, whether they liked it or not. A pervading Gospel spirit of charity and service pervaded the Church but it was often exercised in a way that seemed harsh and demanding, especially by those who saw their authority being backed by a 'grace of state'. Many of those who left the Church in this era have offered many anecdotes of the treatment they received from priests and nuns as reasons for their departure, even of their loss of faith.

Sister Aloysius is a strong-minded superior of the strict, intervening school of religious life. She sees herself as an authority figure and what she says goes. This was the spirituality of God's will spoken through the Superior—though, in retrospect, this often seems more the whim of the superior. She believes in discipline and she does not expect to be liked. She trusts her intuitions and assumes that they are correct. But, the kind of Church and religious life she has inherited mean that she is constantly on the alert, wants proper order everywhere and sees herself in the chain of hierarchical authority that goes. To this extent, the portrait of Sister Aloysius helps us understand authoritarian stances taken by many bishops in the abuse cases.

At the opening of the film, Fr Flynn gives a sermon on experiencing doubts. This cuts no ice with Sister Aloysius. Fr Flynn is already on her hit list because of his friendliness towards the children in the school. He coaches basketball. He talks with the children and affirms them. This kind of pastoral outreach was about to be encouraged by the Vatican Council's document on priesthood.

The confrontations between Sister Aloysius and Fr Flynn becomes quite desperate for Fr Flynn when he realises that the nun is so certain and dominating and has taken investigations into her own hands rather than respecting him as a person let alone a priest. We see the conflict between the old authoritarian style and the new, more personable style of interactions. While Shanley himself states that he has some sympathy for the old ways, rituals, silence and
devotion, his drama clearly shows the inadequacy of the authoritarian hierarchical model of Church in dealing with human relationships.

*Doubt* offers an opportunity to look at the two models of Church and to assess their strengths and weaknesses, especially in the light of subsequent events and the nature and life of the Church at the present day.

Shanley’s images of Sister Aloysius at the end indicates that he believes we should all have doubts and not take the moral high ground of untested certainties.

A film well worth seeing, secular and concerning families and a teenage daughter, is *Trust*, 2010, to be seen especially by adults, and parents with their teenage children. It is a strongly cautionary story about the Internet, Internet communication and lies. In this case, the 15 year old daughter of a couple makes contact with someone who says that he is a student, gradually reveals that he is older, and makes an appointment to meet her which she eagerly goes to. He flatters her, buys her special underwear, and then takes her to a room and assaults her. Eventually, the criminal is unmasked, a quiet man who lives with his family but who has preyed on other girls.

The value of seeing the film in this context is that it dramatises how grooming works, especially online, in chatrooms.

2011-2015

**Background**

The number of films dealing with clerical sexual abuse was comparatively small during this period, although it was at this time that some governments became involved, a nine-year enquiry and report into the church in Ireland, state commissions of investigation in Australia, leading to the establishment of a Rule Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse in non-governmental institutions, and the many hearings, some in private, some public, where victims of abuse were able to tell their stories and some perpetrators and some authorities cross-examined in great detail.

**The Films**

Once again, this is a period of documentaries, one in particular, really being required viewing: *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God*, (2012).

It needs to be said that this is a very well-made film. Audiences will not agree with all the speakers or the expert ‘talking heads’. After all, the film marshals facts but, as is any film, it is an interpretation. The writer-director, Alex Gibney, has very good credentials, winning an Oscar for Best documentary for another investigation, this time torture in Afghanistan and Iraq, *Taxi to the Darkside*. Expose is his forte.

As with any successful film, the maker wants to draw the audience in. And that is what happens here. We are informed briefly about the woeful abuse career of Milwaukee priest, Lawrence Murphy. He is the offender for the first third of the film. But, the film is victim-focused, all the more emotionally telling here because we see men in their fifties and watch them tell their stories—’watch’ advisedly because the men are deaf and sign their stories, vividly and powerfully, while some articulate Hollywood actors speak their signed words.

Fr Lawrence Murphy, ordained in 1950, was a popular figure, fund raiser for the school for the deaf which he eventually ran for many years.

The stories of the men are told plainly, factually, especially of their childhood and family backgrounds. Some parents could not sign which put the boys at a great disadvantage in letting their parents know about the molestation. The stories are also told visually with many excerpts from home movies of the period, of the boys and their life at the school and of Fr Murphy himself. Which means greater repugnance from the audience.
The complaints and testimony are clear, detailed and, though some at the time could not believe the boys or such stories about a priest, undeniable. We hear their response to persistent abuse, some feelings of being singled out and special, their shock at experiences in confession and in Fr Murphy's room and holiday house. And their resigning themselves to this fate. Evidence is shown that official complaints about Fr Murphy were made to the Apostolic Delegate in 1974.

That first section of the film was called 'Lambs of God'. The next section introduces the veteran of studies of clerical celibacy, with interviews of priests over the decades, Richard Sipe. A former Benedictine, Sipe has written extensively. His introduction at this stage of the film enables him to offer something of the history of celibacy, deficiencies in formation of priests, the consequences of this as well as the loneliness in the celibate vocation. The selection of sequences with Sipe are judiciously chosen and make a great deal of sense (while not saying everything, as many would point out). Other experts seen in the film include another former Benedictine, Patrick, who had a mission of moving around examining cases but who ultimately found it, and his perceptions of covering priests, too much and so left the priesthood.

The passionate Fr Doyle, the American priest who has been constant in his work (and now, perhaps, feeling justified in his perseverance of cases and issues, especially in the context of law and Canon Law) has a great deal to say about cases, about the loyal impulses of priests, bishops and devout laity who have felt that they must protect the church at all costs.

There are some interesting sub-plots, so to speak, which enhance the quality of the film and its research. The story of Fr Gerald Fitzgerald and his founding of the Servants of the Paracletes in the 1940s, an order to work with priest sexual offenders as well as priest alcoholics. He advocated spiritual reform rather than psychology, but he and his order are praised for recognizing and acknowledging the problems and wanting the priests out of and away from ministry.

The other sub-plot concerns the career of money-raiser, founder of the Legionaries of Christ, confidante of Cardinals and Popes, who was a Jeckyll and Hyde perpetrator of sex crimes and injustices, Fr Maciel. His story, well-illustrated in terms of clerical patronage, is told in the context of John Paul II (who favoured him) and Benedict XVI (who ultimately dismissed him to a life of prayer and penance, though beachfront footage of Jacksonville, Florida, is shown as his final home).

From Wisconsin, the second third of the film moves to Boston and the 2002 uncovering of scandals, the arrests and gaoling of Frs Geoghan and Shanley, the resignation of Cardinal Law (with adverse comments on his leadership on the issue in Boston) and his comfortable career and life in Rome.

We all need to be media savvy, knowing what we want to say and saying it, without ambiguity or leaving ourselves open to misinterpretation or ridicule. There is a terrible moment in an interview with Cardinal Desmond Connell of Dublin (who is later shown as having made some effort, though belatedly, in contacting Rome about cases). He is asked if it would have been good to have visited victims. He does admit it would, but, unfortunately, for himself and his reputation, he adds, even with traces of a smile, that he does have many things to do.

At different stages during the film, opinions are given as well as questions raised as to how anyone could commit such crimes. Some technical language is used, quite enlightening and suggesting further reflection. 'Noble cause corruption' is one contribution, the perpetrator's belief in his own good. There are later quotations from Fr Murphy stating that he was trying to help the boys, some with sexual orientation difficulties, that he behaved as he did to help some boys through sexual confusion, that he recognised their needs, even taking their sins on himself—and that he
prayed and confessed afterwards. There was also mention of 'cognitive distortion' in the way that the abuser interpreted his behaviour.

The only other member of the clergy to be interviewed for the film besides Fr Doyle is Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee, who talks frankly and with sorrow and shame about events in his own life (nothing to do with abuse of minors) who, when asked had he met Fr Murphy, replied that the main impression he made was that he was childlike in his self-delusions.

But, in the latter third of the film, the focus is well and truly on Rome. One of the difficulties is the constant referring to 'The Vatican'. While the references to the Pope and the Curia are accurate in their way, it is particular people in the Vatican and its bureaucracy who are responsible. The whole section will be fascinating to many Catholics but may be too general or taking audiences into unfamiliar realms which may make it rather difficult for some non-Catholic audiences. Here is where the investigative journalism can be hard work. The film tries to give some dates for letters coming to the Office of Doctrine of the Faith, of Cardinal Ratzinger's decisions that all cases come to him which, as the narrator suggests, makes him the most informed person in the world on this abuse. Dates are given as are examples of letters sent and not answered, or material back to sender as unwanted.

At the end we go back to Milwaukee. We see the men signing again, 'Deaf Power'! We see their desperation, their being acknowledged (after some scenes with Archbishop Cousins of Milwaukee in the 1970s whose response was erratic, inclined not to believe such stories about a priest, meeting with Fr Murphy rather than asking any of the other students and sending a nun (name and photo supplied in the film) to get one of the men to recant his statement and make an apology to the archdiocese). One writes a letter to Cardinal Sodano, telling the story, asking for Fr Murphy to be stood down, noting that he is still allowed to receive communion when others who are far less guilty are forbidden. Two of them went to see Fr Murphy before he died in 1998, with a camera, but he told them to go away, that he was an old man and wanted to live in dignity. He seems to have gone out, nevertheless, to play poker machines and collapsed, and was buried in vestments as a priest. But, the men are alive, relieved and, still in the spirit of activism, American style, protesting.

So, in 2012-2013, a film that summarises much of the history of abuse and how it was handled and mishandled or not handled.

More documentaries on abuse in secular institutions are emerging from the United States, one, _The Overnighters_ (2014), showing workers being brought in to a plant and local subjecting that some of them have accusations of abuse against them. Another focuses on a community where it seems that some Lutheran pastors had been abusers. _Happy Valley_ (2014) is a documentary about a sports coach arrested for abuse. And Kirby Dick who made the 2004 documentary on the Catholic Church and abuse, _Twist of Faith_, has made two more documentaries, _The Invisible War_ (2012) where he turns his attention to abuse in the military and _The Hunting Ground_ (2015) on abuse, cover-ups on American college campuses.

In terms of fiction, for this period, the outstanding drama is an Australian six-part television mini-series, _Devils Playground_. It takes a character from the 1976 film, _The Devils Playground_, a student in the Marist Bros Juniorate, in 1953, and asks what his character might be doing in 1988. He is a psychologist becomes involved at the invitation of an auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, in taking on a priest accused of abusing boys as a client.

This miniseries shows a wide range of clerical characters and how they were handling abuse accusations in 1988, in the archdiocese: the role of the Cardinal, the stances of his two auxiliary bishops, a head of an Institute where abusive priests went for therapy, a range of parish priests as well as teaching brothers, and the accused priest himself, formerly a parish
priest and now a school chaplain. The series opens with the suicide of a young boy, the investigations, the effect on a family when the truth is revealed, a focus on another little boy who is being groomed, picked out as someone special, taken on camps, taken hunting with a gun, but who is confused when the priest he admires keeps turning up at his home.

With six hours running time, the series has the opportunity to go to some length and depth in exploring characters. The abusing priest himself has charming moments, seems to be a very concerned priest, but is in denial about what he has been doing, even while discussing with the psychologist, and the situation is generally treated as hush-hush. In a twist of plot, it is the seemingly liberal auxiliary Bishop who finishes with covering up, even protecting himself from exposure in his handling the situation. It is the seemingly conservative bishop whose conscience is struck, who is asked to be secretive by the Papal Nuncio even as he asks his own secretary to find out the facts, but agrees to meet the families to discuss the matter, even when he finds it repugnant and is awkward in his manner.

The brother principal of the school which the victims attend is initially wary but ultimately does confront the priest and another brother, and the audience initially suspect him of being an abuser, is in fact by no means an abuser but the support of the abused boys.

It is interesting that a country of small population, like Australia, which has had to face so many cases, is able to produce a miniseries which is technically and dramatically excellent and probing.

This survey will end for a film which has received acclaim and has been widely seen: Calvary (2014).

As can be seen from the title, this is a film rooted in the gospel story and in Catholic faith. It is one of the best films on priests in recent years. It was written and directed by John Michael McDonagh, whose screenplay reveals quite detailed knowledge of the church in Ireland and which brings the plot to contemporary life - even though, one hopes, that the principal events of the film would not happen in real life. Brendan Gleeson gives a totally persuasive performance as a parish priest in Ireland, 38 km from Sligo.

With the focus of the title, it is clear that this will be a film about suffering, or that the priest will be a significant Christ-figure, a victim of his own Calvary, an innocent victim, atoning for the sins of others.

This is made very clear from the opening sequence, the priest sitting in the confessional, a man coming into the box and declaring that he has been a victim of a priest's sexual abuse, that it happened over many years, that it has ruined his life. And then he makes a threat that he will kill this priest on the following Sunday, not because he is a guilty man, but because he is innocent and that will make his death more significant.

Since the initial theme is that of clerical sexual abuse, Calvary has to be seen in the context of the Church in Ireland, of the government enquiry, of sentences for guilty clergy, and the criticism of church officials for not understanding the crisis and for not acting on it well. This gives a powerful framework for this week in the life of the parish priest, considering what he has been told, preparing for his possible death. The accuser could be anyone in the village, although the priest has recognised his voice. He is a late vocation, a widower who decided on priesthood after his wife’s death. We are introduced to his daughter, who has attempted suicide, but has come to visit her father and talk things over with him. Which means he is a priest of some life experience, of family life, even though he reflects that he was something of a failure - and a drinker.

The action of the film is basically the priest visiting different people in the parish, a woman who does his washing, is separated from her husband, the local butcher, and is having an affair with the local garage man. She is not averse to other relationships, especially to the
atheist and mocking doctor in the local hospital. But, as with the other characters, she is able to speak frankly to the priest and he is able to speak frankly with her. It is the same with her husband, the butcher. There is a young man in the village, rather prim and proper, awkward in his manner, who comes to the priest to discuss his ambitions, his personality, his sexual problems, his future. Other people he visits include the man from the garage, the local policeman and his rather exhibitionist son, a local landowner who is alienated from his family, drinks a great deal, and confesses that he cares for nothing and no one. On the lighter side, there is an old American author who welcomes the priest, getting food from him, but wanting a gun just in case he gets ill and needs to leave this world.

It is the priest's preparation and readiness which is more important than what might happen, his death or not. However, one significant question for the priest is whether he wept at the killing of his pet dog—and whether he wept at the plight of the victims of sex abuse. A key question for the church, hierarchy and laity.

John Michael McDonagh does have a key idea, revealed early in the film, when his daughter asks the priest about virtues. He replies that forgiveness has been underrated—something which pervades the ending of the film.

NOTE: An overview of this topic appeared in Compass, 2005. For readers wanting more detail about particular films, the information readily available on The Internet Movie Database is recommended. For discussion material on these films, Google Peter Malone's website. Often, there is detailed information about particular films and their history found by Googling Wikipedia.

Sexual abuse of minors is not the province of the Catholic Church alone. About 4 percent of priests committed an act of sexual abuse on a minor between 1950 and 2002, according to a study being conducted by John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. That is roughly consistent with data on many similar professions....

"We don't see the Catholic Church as a hotbed of this or a place that has a bigger problem than anyone else," Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, told Newsweek. "I can tell you without hesitation that we have seen cases in many religious settings, from traveling evangelists to mainstream ministers to rabbis and others."

Part of the issue is that the Catholic Church is so tightly organized and keeps such meticulous records -- many of which have come to light voluntarily or through court orders -- that it can yield a fairly reliable portrait of its personnel and abuse over the decades. Other institutions, and most other religions, are more decentralized and harder to analyze or prosecute. Still, it is hardly good news that the church appears to be no different from most other institutions in its incidence of abuse. Shouldn't the Catholic Church and other religious institutions hold to a higher standard?

—‘Five myths about the Catholic sexual abuse scandal’ by David Gibson, Washington Post, Sunday, April 18, 2010
TO BEGIN, let's mull over four Scripture quotes:

'Taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8).
- 'Your promise is sweet to my taste, Lord. It is sweeter than honey in the mouth.' (Ps. 119:103).
- 'The words of the Lord are 'sweeter than honey, even than honey that drips from the comb' (Ps. 19:10).
- 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Deut. 8: 3 and Matt. 4:4).

Psalm 34 is one of the Wisdom psalms. The basic theme of Wisdom literature is to recognize that God is supreme over one's life which manifests itself in worshipping God and obeying his commandments. Verse 8 cited above encapsulates all this—'taste and see that the Lord is good.' From there, the Psalm proceeds to how tasting the gift of God's goodness brings an imperative to embrace forms of behavior for that gift to be embodied in society and in our world.

The language of taste, therefore, is deeply Biblical, as the Psalms above have indicated. These texts remind us that to know God is to share in God's life. We are 'fed' when God speaks to us so that we are drawn closer to Him. Such 'food' can shape us spiritually, mentally, psychologically, socially, emotionally, even physically. Through the eyes of 'faith', we can 'find God in all things.' The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that people of faith have 'tasted the gifts from heaven, and received a share of the Holy Spirit, and appreciated the good message of God and the powers of the world to come' (6:4-6).

Three further thoughts, then, emerge from these texts.

First, God's 'word' suggests the Word—Jesus as God incarnate, present in his Church and the mysteries of faith. Special here are the Scriptures. St. Jerome reminds us, to be ignorant of the Scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ. In one opening text above, appeal is made to the sense of taste in that the words of the Lord are 'sweeter than honey.' In another text, God's word is needed to nourish us and help us respond to our deepest yearnings.

But we must also keep in mind, as Karl Barth insisted, that Scripture as God's word is identified with the person of the eternal Word. Brevard S. Childs notes that, for one who is open to the witness of the Scriptures, 'the very divine reality which the interpreter strives to grasp, is the very One who grasps the interpreter.' To hear or read the Scriptures is not simply listening to a communication or to taste a 'word.' We not only learn 'about' God. We engage with the person of the Word, discover further depths in Jesus and also in ourselves through the action of the Holy Spirit. We are called to 'taste and see that the Lord is good.' It is to deepen and strengthen a personal relationship of faith in Jesus: 'I believe you because I believe in you.'

Second, God's self-revelation has a second volume—creation. This includes not only the cosmos and the environment but other people, events in our lives, suffering, family life and all our relationships. In these, we know God through the mediation of what God has created.

Spiritual writers, e.g., John of the Cross, remind us there is a third way in which we can know God and be nourished: by immediate union with God. On reflection, this is an extraordinary claim. How can there be that 'nothing between us' contact of the omnipotent God and his limited, even fallen, creature? The language of 'touch' and 'taste'
are used to express this mystery. It is particularly associated with the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let's pursue this further.

**Faith and the Gifts of the Spirit**

Jesus promised the gift of the Spirit who 'will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13). Paul speaks of the body of Christ as animated and directed by 'different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:4). One aspect of this mentioned by Paul and other authors is 'charisms', namely, concrete expressions of the Spirit's action enabling specific functions for building up the Church. Paul also speaks of the Spirit's presence and activity in all the baptised. As Anthony Kelly points out, the Spirit's activities (named as guiding, speaking, hearing and declaring), are explicitly related to Jesus: 'He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (John: 16:14). This is again seen in Paul for whom to be 'in Christ' and to live 'in the Spirit' are closely linked. Kelly explains that:

From a Pauline point of view, it is clear that the gift of the Spirit permeates Christian consciousness, for the Spirit of the risen One saturates all dimensions of Christian experience: "... no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts that are bestowed on us by God" (1 Cor. 2:9-10). A new field of communication results: "And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual" (1 Cor 2:9-13). ²

Approaching this from another angle, Bernard Lonergan speaks of faith as the 'eye of religious love', a knowing that stems from love, especially love that is given and directed by God. It is from 'God's love flooding our hearts' that comes 'another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love.' ³

In his discussion of faith, Anthony Kelly reminds us that this love not only unites believers to God but situates them in the community of faith. The social bond associated with faith brings 'shared scriptural, doctrinal, institutional and moral beliefs' that are enacted and transform believers in the Church's sacramental and liturgical life. ⁴

The gift of the Spirit takes more specific form in the 'seven gifts' of the Holy Spirit (as named in the Christian tradition) which are present and active within the corporate consciousness and experience of the Church which, in turn, mediates the Spirit's guiding presence in the lives of individual believers. Such a presence is transformative at the cognitive, affective and behavioural levels. As Kelly notes:

By locating the cognitive aspect of faith and shared beliefs in the affectivity of consciousness transformed by the gift of love and shared within the corporate experience of the Church, Lonergan is invoking a long tradition represented in the Thomist understanding of the connaturalising power of charity, and the operation of the "gifts of the Spirit." ⁵

The seven gifts reflect the transformation of consciousness that is 'connaturalising', namely, of bringing about a 'new identity, spiritual activity and modes of experience' attuned to the divine domain as if this is 'second nature' and instinctive. In the cognitive realm there are wisdom, understanding, knowledge and counsel shaping and directing our perception and appreciation of the 'divine economy revealed in Christ.' Our affective receptivity and responsiveness is informed and guided by
piety, fear of the Lord and fortitude that shape the discernment of true values and inform a resolute will to pursue their call to self-transcendence. In a timely reminder, Kelly notes that 'far from destroying or compromising human intelligence and liberty, the Spirit given "instinct" manifest in the gifts enlarges and completes the Christian's affective, intellectual and moral capacities.'

Let's put the spotlight on what Aquinas regarded as the greatest of the gifts, namely, wisdom.

Wisdom as Taste

Building on the texts at the start of this article highlights something central in the spiritual journey: to develop a taste for God is to learn to taste with God and to grow in wisdom. Its origins are in our share in the divine life through grace. As a form of learning it is 'experiential.' What does that mean?

An earlier article suggested that touch is common to all our senses in that they all involve the body in some way. In his commentary on Ps. 34 (33) and verse 8 'taste and see that the Lord is good', Aquinas gives us a helpful insight.

We can be aware of something distant or absent by sight, smell and hearing—I can see the horizon, smell the car fumes, hear the thunder. But we can only touch or taste something that is present, within immediate range, to my hand or in my mouth.

Aquinas notes that, with touch, we make contact in an extrinsic way, namely from the outside, through the outer layer of the object. We can't touch the inner aspect of the piece of wood although when I feel the beautiful oak cabinet I can sense an underlying depth. Or touch can open up what is unseen yet profound—a hand held can trigger a moment of shared pain.

But taste is different. It enables us to experience something 'from inside what we are tasting', says Aquinas. I can fondle the apple. When I bite into it, I have another level of sensation, a sort of 'inside knowledge' that touch can never give me. Since God is neither distant nor outside but within us, then, suggests Aquinas, it is appropriate that the experience of God and divine goodness is called tasting. The closer we are to God, the more we grow in tasting God and a taste for God. We know God 'from the inside.'

God's Taste and Good Taste

Let's pursue this further, especially in terms of 'taste and see that the Lord is good.' To savour God is intrinsically linked with developing good taste, or perhaps, more accurately, God's taste. We not only come to relish God. We participate in the divine taste and so are increasingly sensitized to appreciate what is truly good.

The knowing from faith that is shaped and directed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit accompanies the transforming gift of grace whereby a person participates more and more in the knowing, loving, and responding of the persons of the Trinity. Because God is the object (a new horizon), grace entails a 'gifted excess' whereby there is a shift to a higher level of spiritual activity of the intellect, will, and the virtues so that, through the gifts, their mode of operation exceeds their natural boundaries, the limits of reason. The emphasis now is not so much on our own human activity but of a receptive stance to being moved by, and responding to, the action of God.

Kelly explains this as involving 'a certain affective and cognitive 'feel', 'instinct' or 'sympathy' implied in the effusive character of the gift. It gives rise to the tradition of "spiritual senses", as found with different emphases in the writings of Origen, Augustine, Bonaventure, Ignatius of Loyola.' The graced person is enabled to operate in a supra-rational mode, governed by divine instinct rather than by the calculative mode of reason. The person is moved to another level under the influence of grace. It is described as an instinct, a 'taste' for the things of God that draws one to
perceive, choose, and respond in a manner that is 'second nature,' namely, as if it is natural and normal for us to know, feel, love, and act as God does. For Aquinas, this is appropriately described as wisdom, an immediate knowing that comes from loving.9

We share, then, in God's way of discerning, of knowing instinctively what is truly valuable in God's eyes and with God's eyes. We slowly come to know, judge, respond and love as the persons of the Trinity do. It is very much a collaborative process. Through the gift of wisdom, we share in God's wisdom. We see, attend to and evaluate life and our actions through God's eyes and with God's mind and heart.

Let's take this a bit further in more specific terms. Take your Bible and read through 1 Corinthians 2: 6-13. What stands out for you in the passage?

Probably the verse we first recognize is verse 9: 'the things no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.' Perhaps we interpret those words as referring to what awaits us with God in heaven. While it does include that, the primary context of Paul's words is captured later when he says 'These are the very things that God has revealed to us through his Spirit.' In other words, it is the wisdom that comes from God now through accepting in faith the 'plan' of God revealed to use in Christ. It is the Spirit who helps us 'to understand the gifts that he has given us.'

What sort of understanding? Paul is referring to the wisdom that does not 'know' by logic or analysis. It is a knowing that comes from love. It resembles the intuitive knowledge a mother has of her child. It can't be proved or argued. Its certainty is embedded in the bonds of love. To an outsider it may defy logic or 'reason'. But it can often be more rational and truth-bearing than the perspective of a detached observer. It is a deeply personal and 'experiential' understanding.

So it is with the 'taste' or wisdom from the Holy Spirit. It is a sixth sense about what is right and truly good. One is convinced because it 'rings true', a kind of sympathy or co-feeling with God arising from union with God through love.

It brings a certainty that is often difficult to explain. It seems just beyond words. This occurs through the action of the Gifts of the Spirit, helping us to understand 'the depths of God.' As Anthony Kelly says, these Gifts 'attune us to the milieu in which we are called to live.' St. Ignatius of Loyola used the word 'sentir' for the relish, the direct savouring of spiritual realities. It is based on the analogy of a wine taster, or in an earlier age, of a sauce taster (in French a saucier).

Since we image God uniquely in our knowing, loving and freedom, these capacities are taken to a higher level—to be more lively, supple, receptively attuned to the action of the Spirit. This sharing in divine wisdom and all Seven Gifts shapes our affectivity—our will and our emotional life. We are called to follow love's instinct as it reverberates in every level of our being.

Under the transforming action of the Spirit, then, we become God-tasters and Godlike tasters with good taste.

**Tasting, Eucharist and Hope**

Finally, the Eucharist is often seen as 'tasting the heavenly gift.' When we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ, our spiritual taste-buds are made sharper and more sensitive. Again, Aquinas is helpful here in highlighting the aspect of affective response in a personal encounter with Christ in reception of his body and blood.

The effect of this sacrament is considered from the way in which this sacrament is given; for it is given by way of food and drink. And therefore this sacrament does for the spiritual life all that material food does for the bodily life, namely, by sustaining, giving increase, restoring, and giving delight. Accordingly, Ambrose says (*De Sacram. v*): ‘This is the bread of everlasting life, which supports the substance of our soul.'

10
Aquinas goes on to consider the relationship between Christ and the believer from the slightly different perspective. Richard Cross points out that when Aquinas speaks of Christ as head of the Church the emphasis is less on the Christian life as some form of personal encounter with Jesus. Rather, it is rather 'the means whereby the believer is enabled to take on the Christ's way of "looking" at things: Christ gives the believer a 'spiritual sense'—a Christ-like capacity to make proper judgments about the values of things.'

Again, in the Eucharist we share in the work of Christ's transformation: of bread and wine into his body and blood but also in the movement towards the fulfillment of the divine plan for the created universe. Christian hope is both nourished and broadened by sharing in the mind of Christ.

Finally, let's return to one of our original texts: 'Your promise is sweet to my taste, Lord. It is sweeter than honey in the mouth.'

What we have said is summed up in the Church's liturgy. Let's pause for a moment and savour this prayer from the Mass of Corpus Christi.

Lord Jesus Christ,
You give us your body and blood in the Eucharist
As a sign that even now we share your life.
May we come to possess it completely
In the Kingdom where you live
For ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES


4. Kelly, 'Faith as Sight?', 188.

5. Kelly, 'Faith as Sight?', 188.

6. Kelly, 'Faith as Sight?', 89 and 90.


10. *Summa Theologicae* 3.79.1c.

THE OPENING part of John’s Gospel, a poem, speaks of the eternal ‘Word’ of God. God spoke this word of his to us, in time, to heal what had become wounded and unwell. He named him ‘Jesus’, which means, in Hebrew language: God-does-the-saving-(if-we-allow-him).

‘In him was LIFE’, we are told.

Though he was in the form of God, adds St Paul—poetically again—‘he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant’.

Being himself Life, he therefore had life to give us.

The same Life was Light for us, John continues, helping us to understand, and see our way forward.

Three Australian Catholic Indigenous Statements

Of course, there have been more than three. I’m choosing these three because, together, they express with particular force the view that, for each, one stage has ended, another begun.

1. Pat Dodson’s departure from the ordained ministry. Like young David in King Saul’s heavy armour, Pat felt he needed more freedom of action as he explored his own origins.

The break, when it came, was painful, but friendly, and has remained so. Pat is now Adjunct Professor at Notre Dame University Broome Campus, as well as leader of his own Yawuru people, and a national political eminence. This he could never have become as a Catholic priest in the 70s.

2. Jimmy Chi’s melodrama, Bran Nue Dae, a nostalgic gem I had the joy of seeing in Perth. What a mixture, of so many things! But its title defined it.

Between dae and dae, there comes a nite, however. Maybe out of that we are dawning steadily now, feel Jimmy and the Kuckles.

I still remember the old mission yards, the old days, the old ways, the times that were hard, the friends of my childhood, when I was young, the fathers, the brothers, the old Irish nuns, —sings Theresa.

3. On 14 August 2006, a meeting was held at Nungalinya College, Darwin, to commemorate 100 years since Bishop F.X. Gsell’s arrival in Darwin as a missionary priest.

Fr Martin Wilson MSC delivered the ‘Occasional Address’, and was followed by four speakers, (two indigenous, two white), each of whom was tasked to comment on his Address.

One of the four was Lorraine Erlandson, an indigenous Catholic theologian and staff member of Nungalinya College.

It seems to me that her response to Martin Wilson’s talk on this occasion has not received the attention it deserves. It is a thoughtful paper, firmly focussing on the person of Jesus. Indeed—in the circumstances—a bold testimony, well on target still.

A few passages

‘One of the things that has completely confused me with the Church has been the connection of Christianity to Dreamtime. So, your comment, Fr Martin, that nowadays we profit from the perceptive investigations of anthropologists and that we are bewitched by the Dreaming is what grabbed mt attention in your paper.

It would appear from Pope John Paul II’s address to the indigenous Australians in Alice Springs in 1986 that this was an affirmation of
the Dreaming. Have the anthropologists led the Church into a set of beliefs quite different from Christianity and to uniting the two as one? Does this help us come to know the truth about Jesus?

I believe the Church in doing this has undone some of the work of the early missionaries in bringing people into a relationship with Jesus by practically saying you can belong to the Church and retain your traditional Aboriginal beliefs and this in effect has almost made Jesus irrelevant.

Both Aboriginal Religion and Christianity contain a set of beliefs which govern the way of life of the believers. As these beliefs have been united and worked out in the Christian faith and worship there appears to me to be a need for guidance and direction from the Church’s Religious leaders to the indigenous people.

Some of my perceptions are that some people have almost excluded Jesus in the connecting of the beliefs and overlook the fact that as Christians the relationship is with Jesus and that he is the one we are following.

After Vatican II in trying to rectify mistakes of the past in relation to culture we appear to want to leave people in the comfort of their culture and the gospel is not challenging things in the culture because as Church we seem to have an attitude that all is good in the culture. The pendulum has swung so far in the opposite direction from where it was with the early missionaries that it needs to find a point of balance....’

If indigenous Catholics, such as Pat Dodson, Jimmy Chi and the Kukkles—a whole indescribable range of Indigenous Christians Australiawide, in fact—are now, after the dark night, in search of a Bran Nue Dae, they will be on sure ground heeding Lorraine’s observations.

‘In him (Jesus) says St John the Beloved, was LIFE.

The place of meeting him, as Life, is first and always our own inner soul, (or, heart: liyarn, in Nyul-Nyul language over here) once it has been purified of rubbish.

In there, we seek and find him, in the Spirit, then we begin to find him everywhere, as Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr has so beautifully explained from her own experience.

As Creator, God fills the whole universe, and we are in union with God, through Jesus in our soul. As that old Christian mystic, St Simeon, called the New Theologian, has put it.

Blessed are you, Lord
Who have placed in my heart
The light of your commandments,
And planted within me the Tree of Life
Making me another, spiritual Paradise.
For, you have brought into my soul
another Spirit,
Your own divine Spirit,
to abide with me in love.

What matters is to evangelize man’s culture and cultures, not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in Gaudium et Spes, always taking the person as one’s starting point and always coming back to the relationship of people among themselves and with God.

—Pope Paul VI, ‘Evangelization in the Modern World’, ch.2 par.20
The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the Feast of the Epiphany to the Fifth Sunday of Easter in Year C. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgment of source.

Concluding the Christmas Season

This selection of liturgical readings for this edition of Compass begins with the Feast of the Epiphany. This was one of the earliest feasts of the Church's calendar that preceded even the celebration of Christmas. Epiphany is about celebrating the importance of Jesus for the world. This is a cosmic celebration—the whole of creation celebrates Jesus, revealed as light for creation and identified by the cosmic 'star'.

Ordinary Time 2-6 (before Lent)

- The celebration of the Baptism of Jesus (Jan 10) propels us into Ordinary Time. The first readings during Ordinary Time in the New Year are drawn from the prophetic tradition (Isaiah, Nehemiah and Jeremiah). As usual, all the readings are chosen thematically with a view to complement the gospel. Though this may be seen to limit their impact, it is important to reflect upon and proclaim the First Testament readings as readings addressing the Israelite people. Their theological insights are trans-temporal and trans-cultural. They still speak to us today as we seek to draw closer to God and experience the kinds of struggles similar to the original audience addressed by these readings.
- The second reading continues the semi-continuous selection from 1 Corinthians, Paul's letter addresses a divided, struggling and charismatic group of Jesus followers. The issues that Paul addresses in these readings resonate still with us today. These concern celebration of the presence of God's spirit (OT 2, 4), how to respond to those excluded from the faith life of the Christian community (OT 3), and the implications of Jesus' resurrection (OT 5).
- Gospel selections over these Sundays continue to be from Luke (except for OT 2, which is from Jn 2:1-12, the wedding feast at Cana). As mentioned in the last Compass edition, Luke's gospel is written for a missionary-challenged faith community in a multicultural and diverse Greco-Roman world. The chapters of the gospel over these Sundays (Lk 4-5) present the early days of Jesus' public ministry and teaching. This teaching seeks to encourage Jesus followers overwhelmed by a political and imperial power structure controlled by the Emperor through his armies, governors and puppet kings. As we become addressed by Jesus through these Sunday gospels, we also find ourselves encouraged in our engagement with our world, social concerns and various political and economic factions. We are invited into an alternative community that considers and respond to the poor and disenfranchised.
During Lent

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

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

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

Year A Readings for Lent

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

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

Easter Readings

The Easter gospel (Lk 24:1-12) allows us to accompany the women to the tomb and to hear the truth of Jesus’ resurrection. The women are told to ‘remember’ what they had experienced about Jesus in his ministry. This memory opens them up to the conviction of Jesus’ resurrection and the impulse to proclaim this to other disciples. When the male disciples hear the women’s message they think they are literally mad, and one of them (Peter) goes off to check out their story. Luke’s deliberate retention of this embarrassing aspect of the Easter story is instructive, especially as we seek ways to honour women’s leadership, ministry and proclamatory gifts in today’s faith community.

Lk’s gospel also permits us to lament the ways the Christian community has sometimes stifled the ministry of all, especially women.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

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

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

Jan 17—Ordinary Time 2: Is 62:1-5. In a time of exile and apparent abandonment, God reveals to Israel that they will be God's delight. 1 Cor 12:4-11. God's spirit permeates the household of Jesus followers, releasing spiritual gifts upon them. Jn 2:1-12. Jesus' first sign symbolically underscores God's joy with humanity symbolised in a wedding feast with an extraordinary quantity of exquisite wine. Theme—Be Delighted. The first reading and the gospel invite us to celebrate how God delights in and cherishes us. Sometimes this theological conviction is hard to come by, especially when things seem pretty tough. Today's word offers another perspective.

Jan 24—Ordinary Time 3: Neh 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10. After exile, the temple is rebuilt, the Torah is found, and the first liturgy of the word celebrated. This is a fine picture of how the Liturgy of the Word should be celebrated in every generation. 1 Cor 12:30. Everyone is important in the household of Jesus followers. Those most honoured are those considered socially dishonourable. Now that's a challenge! Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21. We hear the first verses of Lk and then (skipping over the story of Jesus' birth) Jesus' proclamation of his ministry. His ministry is essentially about liberating human beings. Theme—Proclaiming Freedom. Neh and Lk present scenes of biblical preaching, one in the story of the renewed people of Israel, another at the commencement of Jesus' public ministry. The scriptures are intended to nurture, liberate and bring their hearers a sense of happiness. This offers an opportunity to name and celebrate ways this Christian community honours this today.

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

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

Feb 14—Lent 1: Dt 26:4-10. This is a summary of Israel's story concerning Abraham's wanderings and Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Rom 10:8-13. Communion with God ("being justified") is God's gift that comes through faith in Jesus. Lk 4:1-13. Jesus' is tempted to break fidelity with God and rely solely on his own power, but he refuses. Theme—Our Story & Commitment: Dt reflects on the story of Israel. This is picked up in the gospel (Lk), where Jesus' story echoes that of Israel, in its temptations to live without God. The journey of Lent begins with a celebration of the way God has called each of us to live guided by God.

Feb 21—Lent 2: Gen 15:5-12, 17-18. God encounters Abram and makes a covenant of loving commitment to him and his descendants. Phil 3:17-4:1. Paul envisions our true 'commonwealth' (v 20) realised in God's transforming presence. Lk 9:28b-36. Jesus is transfigured through his prayerful communion with God; the disciples are caught up in Jesus' transfiguration. Theme—Encountering
God. The second week of Lent invites us to reflect on our encounters with God (as in Abram) and God’s encounter with us (through Jesus). Whether we are like Abram, and find ourselves often wandering, or like Jesus, who finds God in prayer and becomes transformed, we seek to draw closer to God.

Feb 28—Lent 3 for Year C: Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15. God commissions Moses to lead the people from slavery. This is a wonderful story of divine encounter. 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12. Paul urges his audience to listen and learn from the story of Israel. Lk 13:1-9. Time is God’s gift for healing, reconciliation and forgiveness. Theme—Repentance. 1 Cor and Lk provide invitations to allow this week of Lent to be one of sincere repentance and seeking forgiveness. Rather than a focus on private morality (what I have done wrong privately), forgiveness might be expressed in more global or ecological ways (steps I can take to heal the ecological damage done to my world)

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

Mar 6—Lent 4 for Year C: Josh 5:9a, 10-12. God’s people enter into the land given to them. The land is God’s gift and they celebrate it in their Passover meal. 2 Cor 5:17-21. Our union with Jesus enables us to experience a new way of life (‘the new creation’), and how to be ministers of reconciliation, Lk 15:1-3, 11-32. Here is one of the gospel’s great and rich parables about the embracing and forgiving father, the ability to change, and the stubbornness to resist welcoming the stranger. Theme—Coming Home. Israel (Josh) and the young son (Lk) experience what it is like to finally come home. How can this happen and be celebrated in our faith communities?

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

Mar 13—Lent 5 for Year C: Is 43:16-21. The prophet’s vision about God’s new action on behalf of the people. Phil 3:8-14. Paul is totally taken up by his commitment to Jesus and desire to be with him. Jn 8:1-11. Jesus forgives and challenges those who judge and condemn to a change of heart. Theme—Doing something new. The possibility of a new life, new future and a new way forge the link between the first reading and gospel. What is it that we would like God to do for us, that would renew or refresh us? How will this be seen? What signs are there already in our faith community that that is taking place?

Lent 5 for Third Scrutiny of the Elect: Ez 37:12-14. God promises to open the graves of the dead and lead Israel back from exile with a new spirit. Rom 8:8-11. God’s spirit possesses us. Jn 11. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Theme—Life & resurrection: Our readings climax the great themes of Lent in preparation for Easter - our resurrection and life. What brings us to life? What tangible signs are there that this is already happening around us?


symbol of service and solidarity Theme—
Leadership: Jesus is the one who leads us to God. Authentic leadership is the cry of our Church, world, community. How can tonight’s celebration identify and celebrate this kind of leadership already occurring within our local, national and international communities?

Mar 25—Good Friday: Is 52:13-53:12. This is a final song of God’s servant reflecting on his innocent suffering for others. Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Jesus feels for us because he can ‘sympathise with our weakness’ (v15). Jn 18:1-19:42. Jesus, the exalted one, suffers, and dies as innocent lamb and acclaimed king. The hour of death is the moment of exaltation, victory and community empowerment. Theme—Victory. God’s solidarity with suffering creation and humanity is revealed in Jn’s passion story of Jesus. God is victorious over death and everything that seeks to frustrate God’s design.

Mar 27—Easter: Acts 10:34a, 36-43. Peter sums up Jesus’ ministry and the meaning of ‘Holy Week’ for a Gentile centurion. 1 Cor 5:6b-8. Paul wants us to celebrate the risen Jesus with the ’unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (v 8). Lk 24:1-12. The women come to anoint Jesus’ body, but discover the tomb empty and the two men proclaiming the Easter message: They learn that Jesus is risen and are entrusted with this message. Theme—Easter Struggle. This is one of the most difficult times of the year for families. Joy which pervades the gospel is also tinged with the pain and difficulty of living out the Easter proclamation: the women’s message of the risen Jesus is not believed!

April 3—Easter 2: Acts 5:12-16. The healing power of the risen Jesus continues to pervade the life of the first Jerusalem followers of Jesus. Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19. John’s apocalyptic image of the risen Jesus: ‘the first and last...the living one’ (v17). Jn 20:19-31. Jesus breathes his spirit of courage and forgiveness on to the assembled disciples. Theme—Healing. Signs of healing pervade the world: acts of kindness, the patching up of broken relationships, steps towards reconciliation. All these (and others) are signs of the presence of the risen Jesus. What signs of his presence are tangible in my community and can be celebrated this Easter day?

April 10—Easter 3: Acts 5:27-32, 40-41. Peter and John are arrested for preaching about the risen Jesus—an act which they must continue to do no matter the consequences. Rev 5:11-14. John’s apocalyptic vision of Jesus: exalted, honoured, worshipped and sharing in God’s wisdom and power. Jn 21:1-19. The concluding chapter of the gospel pulls together two key themes: discipleship love, and the importance of alertness to the risen Jesus who offers direction for the future Church Theme—Alertness. John’s final chapter prepares the gospel audience for a new moment in its history. Alertness and attention to the risen Jesus are essential. What practical ways is that happening in our midst now? Who are those in our local communities that show this kind of attentiveness?

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

April 24—Easter 5: Acts 14:21-27. Paul and Barnabas continue their preaching mission of encouragement and forming leaders among the Gentiles. Rev 21:1-5a. This is a delightful vision of God’s presence within the human community that establishes joy and renews creation. Jn 13:31-35. Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure, leaving them with his injunction about love. Theme—Easter Renewal. God’s life continues to renew us, as it did the early Christians (Acts), and creation (Revelation). Many local examples abound of people and situations that renewal and encourage. These can be celebrated as signs of Jesus’ ongoing Easter presence.

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