

FIFTY AND OUT

THIS IS THE last issue of *Compass*. The final year is the fiftieth year of publication.

Compass was founded by Fr Dennis Murphy MSC and Bishop Jim Cuskelly MSC) at the beginning of 1967, just a little over a year after the closure of Vatican II in December 1965.

They were stirring times, with excitement and turmoil throughout the Catholic world as the Church strove to come to terms with what the word *aggiornamento* might mean.

Compass had plunged with eyes wide open into the immediate post-conciliar commotion with the aim of providing a better point of reference and guidance for Catholics than the regularly sensationalised and confusing coverage of journals such as *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek*.

Compass set out to give depth and background to the debates, providing reliable information about trends in theological thinking, about the results of current research and about possible approaches to controversial questions. It wanted to 'open up the inner dynamism of theology, which is not meant to be a pastime for a clique, but an urgent attempt to bring God's Word in its purity and fulness to the world of our time' (first editorial, 1967).

The journal has been a good, helpful and popular resource for many people's faith lives over the years.

Compass has been a platform for many seeking to have their essays published for the first time. This has launched many into ongoing theological writing careers.

We are grateful for the support of all our readers and contributors over the fifty years.

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Christmas is approaching—a special time for rejoicing: 'Joy to the world!'

But we have reason to rejoice every day of our lives. Our God is a God who loves us. At Christmas we ponder and celebrate the mystery of the fact that God has shown that love by becoming one of us—assumed the lowliness of human flesh and opened to us the way of salvation.

We celebrate the love of God: God loved the world so much that became one of us, that He was born to be amongst us. He became an infant baby, lived in a human family, and grew to maturity as a human being like us.

This God we are talking about is a God of ultimate mystery, the mystery of mysteries—utterly other. We can hardly take it in.

Years ago I had the chance to visit the Holy Land, and it left me with lasting memories. I remember walking around shores of the lake of Galilee and reflecting that God Almighty, the ultimate mystery walked here, on this earth, and looked at these hills and shores! It was a mind-blowing experience.!

This is the way the eternal, utterly other God wants it to be. God almighty humbled himself to walk with us, to be God-with-us, so that we can journey with Him. We pray in the liturgy: 'Grant that as he became a man like us he may share with us his Godhead'

We have many reasons to celebrate at Christmas.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

REPORT TO THE 2016 MSC

CHAPTER

JOHN MULROONEY MSC

In late September and early October 2016 the Australian province of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart held a Chapter meeting. The following is a section of the report to the Chapter by Fr John Mooney MSC, the Provincial Superior.

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When I started to think about this report last month I thought about the reality of the last six years.

It might be good to begin today with the words of Pope Francis from his letter to Religious in the Year of Consecrated Life: *'Live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope, going out to all the world proclaiming the Gospel of Joy.'* And in other homilies, media interviews and visits- he constantly calls on religious to leave their comforts behind and go to the 'periphery'. He is asking us to find our true identity amongst those in the margins.

Again, he asks us to ask ourselves in prayer: 'has my prayer life, my spirituality, my lifestyle, my way of living community, my way of doing my ministry been impacted by my radical, Christ like concern for the poor in my ministry?' Good question!

I wanted to spend the first part of my report in reflection on Religious Life as it has been lived in the past, is lived now and into the future in the western (or 1st) world.....

A Context

As you know, religious life has been very adaptable throughout history, reinventing

itself in response to the challenges in the church and in society.

It began in the *early Christian centuries* with hermits, ascetics living a very radical form of prayer and Gospel living. This was in part a response to the Empire declaring Christianity the official religion of the empire and some Christians wanting to preserve the 'message' in a pure form.

The 5th Century saw the rise of the stable *monastic communities*—groups of men and women living communal life. This was the longest most stable period where little changed and things went on in each new century in much the same way as the last! This period lasted 700 years!

The 12th Century saw the rise of the *mendicants* who sought to live lives of simplicity and poverty and left the monasteries and went on the move to be with the people and the issues. *Eg*, Franciscans and Dominicans.

The 16th Century saw the rise of the *apostolic orders* in response to pressing needs in the church and Society, *eg* the Jesuits

17th to 19th century was the emergence of the men and women's *apostolic orders* (and ourselves)—no longer cloistered.

In the 20th century we see the emergence of the *secular institutes* and *lay movements*, *ie* consecrated laity.

As the world changed, the needs of people changed—and so too did Religious Life and how it responded to those needs. Each of these times saw a gradual change in the image and the basic way of living religious life. And each period of radical change was also met with some official hostility. (We see that even

today, *ie* USA nuns; vocation material in media with no mention of the thousands of women religious out there on the streets with the refugees, with the women victims of domestic violence etc; recent literature on the year of Consecrated life not mentioning the reality today!)

Each of those significant periods of change was very challenging and at times quite painful for everyone involved. As Francis of Assisi said in the 12th Century, 'They will try to drive you back into your monasteries—do not let them'. In the first world *we are right in the middle of one of those periods of change* and it comes with all its uncertainties—I describe it like a 'cloud of unknowing'; there is grieving for the 'way things were' (or at least a perception of the 'way things were'); there are struggles to 'let go'; struggles to change; there can be a sense of 'not much happening' and also things 'as we know them just falling away' and at times there is a frustration in that! I think we all feel bits of each of these things from time to time!

Every religious congregation has a founding story and ours is one that began with Jules Chevalier who had a particular (though not original) insight into living the Gospel in a particular way with its emphasis on the compassionate heart of Christ. We call that particularity 'our charism'—and it determines *why we do what we do and why we do it as we do it*.

And our life is based on three core things that haven't changed through the centuries: (1) Prayer—this is central otherwise there is little time with Christ and nourishment for the spiritual journey (we cannot live as religious unless we live a life of contemplative intimacy with God); (2) Community with all its challenges and (3) Mission—on mission for the Kingdom of God; trying to be prophetic, saying it as it is, speaking on behalf of those who cannot speak (the sick, the poor, the marginalized, the disabled etc); inspiring others to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak; trying to interpret the signs of the times. These have



*Fr John Mulrooney
MSC is the Superior of
the Australian province
of the Missionaries of
the Sacred Heart.*

been the core tenets of religious life through the ages.

Today

As religious today (and particularly here in Australia) we have been 'bashed around a bit' and rightly so by the public response to the story of sins of abuse and denial and indifference to victims *and* we have also been buffeted on every side—there have been the forces in our own western culture, materialism and individualism and a Royal Commission which has brought the church to its knees in the eyes of the general public.

In the midst of all that I have found us collectively as a community and as individuals getting on with things. I have found us to be more grounded in our Charism; clearer about what our core mission is. I have tried to pick up on that and emphasise what I see going on through my newsletters quoting from the founder; from MSC writers and so on. There has been a shift in us from a bit of 'despair' about the future to an acceptance of the 'realities of the present' we live in and some hope about what the future might mean for us.

A past student of Chevalier College (who lately has become involved with Jesuit spirituality and mission) said to me recently: 'what is the special mark of the MSC? What is your 'corporate mission?' I think we have never been clearer: our mission is the same as it was in 1854—through our lives and our communities to make the heart of Christ known and loved! In another phrase—we are called

to be on earth the heart of God. *We were called and are called still to the education and formation of people in a spirituality of the heart of Jesus in whatever ministry and work we do.* That is the core!!! What we do is kind of secondary. Our mission is in the 'how' we do things. For those who always like to think in terms of outcomes: *how we see things, determines how we do things and how we do things determines what we get in the end.* There is almost nothing we do as a 'religious'; that we cannot do as a lay person. So being a religious speaks of a 'way of being' rather than a function or a role. In the pre-chapter meetings we affirmed this again and again and have a strong sense as a group, that this is what we offer to people and the world.

In the midst of any great change there is always a temptation to believe that our choices are limited. That we are constrained by age, by diminishing numbers, by official church expectations that we will carry on as we always have without encountering the depth issues about what is going on in the world; what is going on in the church and what is going on in our own congregation.

I have said it before and others have said it before me - We never had a 'golden age' of our province. There were only men, human as we are here today, all just a bit broken—men, who loved God, grappled and struggled with a sense of being loved by God, men who were sinners, men who cared for persons in need, took on new things, built institutions and dreamt of all sorts of possibilities. Here today in this chapter, we are as human, as broken, sinful and flawed *and* as gifted as they were—and still in touch with the core mission, albeit with a slightly different language, liturgical and cultural expression than the mid-nineteenth century.

In terms of ministry, when I joined in 1972 I was headed (like those around me were) for either missions, schools or parishes—the three core institutional ministries that gave us our identity. I was very much part of a big hard labour force. Now, that is not the case and this

has been one of the biggest shifts in our Province. From large collective institutional ministries we have increasingly moved, by discerning choice as much as by necessity, to much smaller, personalized ministries. The 'exception' that was in 1972 is now becoming more normal. I think we have learned over many years now that we cannot reduce the mission to some traditional institutional ministries (good work though they are) and remain complacent!

The young men who have joined us in recent years are extraordinary men. I say to each of you individually (and I have said this to you before) —You have been formed very beautifully in our spirituality which will be at the heart of whatever ministry you undertake. (Our thanks to your formators and others who have influenced you) I don't think we are asking you to lead the institution that is in existence now! We are not asking you to 'fill gaps'. I think we are asking you to lead the community that is coming into existence—be it here or elsewhere in the world. I know that is putting a huge responsibility on your shoulders but this is all part of our present reality.

Religious life is not dying. Religious life as it has been expressed and lived in the western world is dying. That is a fact! The grieving and dying side of the paschal mystery is amplified in religious life today. The future of religious life is not dependent on the future of this religious congregation—the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. It is the charism and the mission that is not coming to an end.....

Because—It is about the charism, not the congregation! Charisms have a congregation! (Not the other way round)

Charisms endure. Apostolic works fade. In any of our discussions, prayer and sharing - we must not confuse the two. And as Pope Francis says: 'Charisms are not a bottle of distilled water' With all the science and the emerging ecological theology and consciousness we know the universe is not a static place—it is an ongoing, unfolding and emerging event. And we are called to be part

of that and aware of the interconnectedness of all things.

As for the future, the question of the charism is a difficult one. We continually grapple with the questions: To whom do we pass on the responsibility of the charism when the professed members are no longer alive? Can the charism realistically exist outside of us? Must it have a future? Can we trust the church of the future to discover those elements of the Gospel of Jesus that inspired Jules Chevalier?

These questions will remain questions for us in the coming years.

Would this short quotation from Johannes Metz in *Followers of Christ* have anything to say to us today: 'Religious congregations are more apt to appear in times of turmoil and disorientation. These are the historical times when pain is deeper and aspirations more acute, when a settled world's values are up-ended, in short, when an old world is dissolving and a new world is in the making.' Charism is at its most active here.

Future

What future can we look forward to? Well, we do not know what we do not know! (Jules lived with the same reality in his time.)

Our future of course depends as always on the mysterious hand of God's providence and work in the world! If I could borrow the words of Les Murray: (and I love this line) 'We should not, I suggest, be tempted to see ourselves as a team that has to win for God; He is not helpless—and anyway His idea of a win was the cross!!!'

Having said that, the future also depends on how we, collectively and individually, answer the deeper questions. The answers to any questions we have about the future can only come out of and be lived only within the hearts and lives of each of us! Each of us here in this chapter and also in the hearts of those not present with us today!

There are no pat, easy answers. If we did

have the answers we would be greatly loved and in demand by every congregation in the western world asking us to share our game plan!

I don't think we should worry too much about diminishing numbers—every reading of history will discover that almost every change in the world can be traced to a few people or even one individual determined to make a difference.

Paul Stenhouse shared this quote from Ronald Knox in the 1940's at an Graduation Ceremony at ACU: 'Old landmarks seem obliterated, and...the world seems to have exhausted itself and has no vigour left...We are so engrossed in our own plans, five year plans, ten year plans, and the rest of it, that we assume they must be God's plans too...But for all we can tell, God may be working out of five thousand year plans or a ten thousand year plan of his own; we may still be living, for all we know, in the early church.'

I have a gut instinct that we will get to where we are going by remembering who we are and remain true to the mystery of our charism, and we continue to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God! We can only go forward from a place of deep prayer. In situations where we do not know the way ahead—it is only prayer and contemplation that allows what wants to emerge to show itself.

I have no doubt that God is at work in all this uncertainty and 'cloud of unknowing'.

Our Schools

Our schools are still a significant part of our contact with young people. The ministry is vibrant and life giving because it is about young people and forming them.

You may remember Chapters forty years ago when the brothers argued strongly at Chapters that as our professed members diminished we needed to consolidate those we had into the one or two schools and abandon the others. *That is not where the*

spirit was leading us! Instead the spirit led us to see the way forward was formation and education of lay people in our charism and spirituality. This great ministry has continued and the education and formation of lay people has been our main ministry and is now primarily in the hands of other lay people and they are very good at it. You see the gradual shift!

Through their work and the work of the professed members in schools, there has been a real deepening of appreciation, and living of the charism and Spirituality of the Heart. The ministry is consistent with Chevalier's vision of lay people contributing to the mission. (By contrast of 40 years ago—there are now only 4.7 full-time equivalent professed MSC working at the coal face in our schools).

The formation of staff in the charism and spirituality are key priorities, and so not only are young people formed but so too is a large number of adults, who make a difference not only in their schools but also the community and wider church.

It has been said before at Chapters that these schools are more MSC in spirit and character than they ever were. That is still true. As one who went to an MSC school in the sixties and then worked in them in the 80's and beyond I know it first hand. This is not a criticism of those who loved and cared for me as a student in the sixties but a reflection that they did not have the benefit of the 'Cuskelly re-founding' with a new language to express an age-old spirituality. We worked for many years on how that spirituality might impact on the culture, the life and the teaching in a school. And it does impact for good. The quality of relationships at all levels is different than what it was for me in the 60's.

An example of this: I remember after my 40 year re-union at Chevalier College and I was the Headmaster at the time. After our dinner the buses took us to one of the trendy pubs in Bowral and as we walked in I found half of Year 12 students were in there. When they saw who was there a cheer went up, the mike was grabbed from the band and I was

introduced to all the patrons and after that there was lots of hugs and 'highfives' and I didn't have to buy a drink for the rest of the night. All my classmates could say was: 'but they don't seem to fear you.' 'Fear' has been replaced by 'love' as fundamental to the relationships in our school.

We should be very proud of our Colleges!

Our school Principals are a very fine group of men and women and deeply committed to our charism, spirit and values. They value deeply their contact with and experience of the professed MSC as do the members of our College Boards. As one Principal said to me a few years ago: 'I have worked with lots of other congregations and CEO's and I had no idea that there was this MSC way of doing things. This relational style of leadership from the heart really works. Thank you'.

We have chosen to still remain with a slight 'hand on the tiller' in our schools and still have governance contact between the schools and the Provincial Administration. We have not chosen to go the way of PJP's for the foreseeable future.

I think we can be confident that our college communities express beautifully our charism and spirit. Like any community they are not perfect and don't always get it right but they are committed to living and working in the spirit of our charism and constitutions.

Like all our ministry we must always be in continual discernment as we move forward into the future.

I think it is fair to say that we have learnt how to do an 'old thing' in a 'new way'!

Our Parishes

We are still committed to a significant number of parishes—mostly in middle class and upper middle class areas of Australia. The men in our parishes exhaust themselves in their commitment to the people. The level of enthusiasm in ministry is still strong. In recent years the Parish committee has been (among many other things) trying to develop in the

parishes a greater consciousness of MSC spirituality and how that might be embedded in the people and life of the parish. Together with this they have been working on developing lay leadership within parish communities.

The Parish group have some serious hopes and dreams about formation of parishes in our charism and spirituality. A lot of effort still needs to be done to make concrete and focus on what precisely is to be achieved and how that might be achieved. There is a call for more formation in heart spirituality in our parish communities.

One of the tensions in trying to embed the charism within a parish community is: what happens when we leave the parish and, for example, the Franciscans take over....Down comes the picture of Jules and up goes St. Francis. A different charism is introduced and emphasised.

I guess in real terms as MSC we touch the lives of the people in our care in a certain place and time. In the last 140 years we have appointed men to dozens and dozens of parishes throughout Australia and New Zealand and then left those parishes and hopefully the people of that time were touched by the charism and spirit of our men. It was true then and is still true even more so today—that wherever there is an MSC it is an MSC ministry.

In the 20's and 30's and even into the 40's we were much more 'mobile' as a group—men going to different parishes in different parts of the country for periods of time. With the increase in vocations in the 50's and the need to have men gainfully employed we became more settled in some parishes and worked to maintain our presence there year after year. This has made the leaving more difficult during these times.

The simple reality is that the Bishops of Australia require that each parish have a parish priest in residence—someone ordained with sacred oil on their hands. Our parish priests are getting older and many of them unable to

think about taking on a new parish and getting to know everyone at this stage of their lives. To bring in large numbers of men from other Provinces is an open question and would require a five to ten year plan of preparing younger men for the responsibilities of being PP. Province members have different opinions on this and perhaps it is an issue for this Chapter. Whatever happens in this regard we will be leaving some parishes in the not too distant future.

A significant work of the Parish Committee has been the restructuring of: 'An MSC review of parish Life and Ministry.' The quality of our men's personal reflections and the feedback from parishioners beautifully affirms our men who have undergone the review in recent years.

Our thanks to the men who have come from other Provinces to be with us in ministry: Our thanks to them for bringing with them their culture and life and our thanks to those of you who have supported, nurtured and cared for them during their time with us.

There have been a couple of significant gatherings of our parish men and parishioners during the last six years and the focus of their time together has been about the future and about lay leadership in parishes where MSC are in ministry.

The work of on-going appraisals of men and women in these ministries has continued apace and is an important contribution to the professionalism of the ministry.

Last year we celebrated 100 years of parish ministry in the Diocese of Adelaide. We have had men in Brompton, Hindmarsh, Croydon, Henley, Blackwood, Millicent, Snowtown, Albert Park, Flinders Park and others as well as chaplaincies in hospitals and colleges, supply ministry, lectures and retreats, in-services and so on. A very significant contribution during those 100 years.

There is need for some on-going serious thinking about our commitments to parish ministry and what we are wanting to achieve as a community.

Ad Gentes—Our Mission in other Countries

When we look at the men we still have from Australia working in ministry in Papua New Guinea we see them impacting very significantly in the church and society of PNG. Each of these men is inserted into the local church. They do not work together and their paths do not cross all that often; there is always the danger of becoming addicted to work responsibilities because of a lack of communal life. There is some disappointment about the gradual reduction of MSC presence in Eastern Papua.

These men, each in their own way, are truly inspirational. They are well motivated in our MSC Mission.

Japan offers truly enormous challenges particularly for the younger men who are sent to work in very small parish communities throughout central Japan. One needs enormous courage to work in ministry in Japan. It can be a lonely ministry. As with PNG I always come away from a short visit in admiration of how they do what they do. The four Australian men who are working there are getting older and there are no Australians in sight who will follow them. Japan is a multi-cultural MSC community with men from Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, Japan and more recently, India. It requires serious inculturation to each others cultures as well as to the Japanese culture and demands conscious efforts and self-sacrifices. It has been a challenge for some of the Australian men over the years to 'let go' the old ways of doing things and allow new thoughts and ways of being in ministry. There are significant challenges facing the Region: aging churchgoers; fewer young people engaged with church; vocations; the expenses of maintaining plant that exists etc. For example, in the Catholic community of Japan, there are only about 1000 eligible men for religious life who are practicing Catholics and we have 16 Diocese and maybe 100 religious

congregations all fishing!

There has been a growing ministry amongst the migrant workers from other countries. The ministry is often associated with domestic problems, broken marriages, domestic violence, work related troubles, abuses, overstay of visas, etc.

There will be need for ongoing discernment about the future of the Japan Region and how we will be present there and under whose governance?

While we have few bodies to send 'ad gentes' anymore like we did in the past. There are other ways we have been on mission 'ad gentes'. In the APIA region there is close collaboration between Provincials. We have been able to support a great number of men through the province's resources and the Mission office to be trained in formation and spiritual direction. We have also provided opportunities for men from other countries for further study in English language and academic study as well as gain experience in parish ministry.

You may remember that most of the men on mission in other countries gathered for a mission conference in Sydney a couple of years ago. After attending the conference in the city we spent two days in reflection and sharing on our ministry. This was a very positive and affirming experience for the men.

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Each of these three areas of ministry have been very good channels for our mission. However, we must always be in 'continual discernment' about how clearly these ministries express our unique MSC mission? And, do we express our mission in ministries that clearly identify us as MSC?

Vietnam

It is timely to say something about Vietnam. It has now been twelve years since we established a footprint in Vietnam. Our

Superior General said to me once that he thought this is the best foundation undertaken by the Congregation. The growth has been careful, steady and focused on introducing the charism and building deep and strong foundations in the hearts of the men who have joined us rather than the usual great focus on infrastructure first. As I said it has been careful and steady growth. There is still much to be done of course as we move forward through each stage of the foundation of a Province. We have not been rushing things.

The challenges ahead for us are many but the significant ones include: recognition by the Government of Vietnam; building infrastructure; further study and preparation for roles in the province of the future; ministry possibilities; financial support from Australia.....

. Our efforts in Vietnam, while primarily driven by the Australian Province, is a work of the APIA region. It is not possible for us to do what we do without APIA support.

This whole endeavour is a real positive for us and just shows what can happen with a vision and minimal number of human bodies plus other resources such as finances to support the endeavors of the men. At the general Chapter before last we did get a bit of a rebuke from the chair about going into Vietnam from Australia without first securing the support of other APIA provinces. However, I do not think we would have the same result as we have today if we had three different provinces working on the establishment of the mission. Going in first, taking to the deep, trusting in God's providence and our own common sense and Australian way of doing things, making the decisions and then seeking support from other Provinces I think was the best way to go.

Vietnam will remain a most important priority of the Australian Province resources for the next 20 years (and more).

Lay MSC / Lay Professed Council

What remarkable people we have in ministry with us. They are a very diverse group. Actively involving the laity in the heart of the MSC mission is living the dream of the Founder, Jules Chevalier.

Lay MSC refers to those people who have made a public commitment to living a 'Spirituality of the Heart' and sharing in the mission of the Congregation. It also refers to the many people in some of our ministries (and outside any formal ministry) who live this without making any formal commitment.

With a view to entrusting more responsibility to the Lay MSC, a Lay/Professed Council was established some seven years ago. The emphasis of the group (among other emphasis) has been in promoting a ministry to young adults. All MSC schools have appointed someone to foster the spiritual growth of interested past students.

There is an energy and commitment amongst our lay MSC that wants to continue to explore ways forward and continue the journey as we come to understand more deeply the original vision of Jules Chevalier.

So many of our Lay MSC simply call themselves an MSC and feel accepted as such. What a wonderful thing!

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Whatever we decide about ourselves at this Chapter:

—Our life must always be sustained by an experience of God; silent time with God is a non-negotiable;

—Our life is be lived in 'brotherhood';

—Our lives will continue to inspire others by the simple witness of our lives; this is the thing I see everywhere—people touched by our humanity, our ordinariness, our non-clerical mindset and who we are as human beings;

—Our ministry and mission, in whatever

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place and time, will always tend towards the marginalized; and

—Will be open to lay people.

And I would add—silent prayer with others and a sharing of 'what came up in my prayer' must continue in those communities in which it is common practice and encouraged in others; and where possible spiritual direction is essential.

In terms of our commitments in ministry as a Province: during the last six years we have (and in no particular order):

—Strongly affirmed our commitment to young people through our ministry of education and supporting the on-going work of formation through the Chevalier Institute;

—Strongly affirmed the ministry at Douglas Park, Heart of Life, Shoreham and those engaged in adult education/formation

ministry;

—Strongly affirmed our on-going commitment, in conjunction with our APIA brothers, to the eventual establishment of Vietnam as a Province of the Congregation;

—Strongly affirmed our engagement with lay people;

—Strongly affirmed the ministry with Aboriginal people of the north;

—Strongly affirmed and encouraged those working in more personalised ministries and an openness to responding in new ways to the needs of the church and the world.

During our pre-chapter meetings it was quite clear that our overall 'priority' is to live well as MSC and be on earth the compassionate and merciful heart of God. (and we thought that may be enough to say)!

The MSC first came to Sydney from France in 1885, in order to establish a supply base for their new missions in New Guinea that had been founded in 1882 near Rabaul, on the island of New Britain.

The MSC originally settled in the Eastern suburbs of the expanding city of Sydney. Within a few years the congregation began to accept local Australian vocations and a mission seminary was established at the Sacred Heart Monastery, Kensington (opened 1897). The foundation continued to grow and within a few years a separate MSC Australian Province was erected in 1905 with Father Pierre Marie Treand as the first Provincial.

In the following years the Australian MSC accepted a variety of ministries at the service of the Church not only in Australia but also in the islands of Oceania, and in Asia. Today there are about 150 members of the Australian Province.

In Australia we work in Parishes, among youth in Colleges, in Spirituality and Retreat Centres, among urban and traditional aboriginal Australians, in Tertiary Institutions, in Media, in hospital chaplaincies and among people suffering with HIV/AIDS, as well as in Justice and Peace ministries. Overseas, there are Australian MSC working for the development of the local churches of Papua New Guinea and the Islands of the Pacific, in China, Japan, India and Vietnam, as well as in Media and communication.

THE CRUCIFIED PEOPLE

KHOI DOAN NGUYEN MSC

LAST SUNDAY, I went out to meet up with a few young refugees and asylum seekers whom I worked with when volunteering with Catholic Care of the Archdiocese of Melbourne a few years ago. They invited me to stay for lunch at the visit. Sitting at the table and having conversation with them were such delights. These young people (the youngest was only ten years old), regardless of their traumatic experiences on the sea, showed the finest characters that I have ever experienced in people. The ten-year-old boy, as I was told, was separated from his older brother who left the country with him, and was accidentally tossed into the sea when being transferred to another boat. Until now he is still scared of water because of the experience. The others confided to me how difficult and challenging it has been to live in another country, another culture, and to speak another language. Above all, these young boys and girls are living away from their families which they need so much at their young ages. How hard it is to grow up in such circumstances.

I was a migrant myself from Vietnam. Even though arriving in Australia with my parents and one of my brothers and having the rest of the family living here for nearly ten years prior to that, I still found settling in another country and culture quite challenging in many ways.

The day after the Sunday I caught up with my refugee friends, I heard on media that the Turnbull Government was proposing a lifetime ban on asylum seekers and refugees coming by boats from entering Australia, for any purpose (announced on 31st October). Disappointment and anger are short of describing the feeling. So many people expressed their frustration, shock and dismay over the Federal Government's injustice,

indecenty and racist mentality in the name of border protection, national security, and stopping the boats¹. Asylum seekers and refugees, unfortunately, have been the victims of power struggles within Australian politics in which political strategies and policies and their effectiveness have come first ahead of the faces of people fleeing their war-torn countries and life-threatening situations to find some security and a new life.

Looking into the eyes of these people, I feel a deep sorrow for their abandonment, hopelessness and vulnerability which are beyond words and imagination. At the same time, I feel ashamed and appalled at what our political leaders and policy makers are doing to these poor, traumatized and marginalized people. They have been seen not as human beings whom we are supposed to encounter, look them in the eyes, and know their stories. They have been seen as threats, statistics, numbers, burdens, and moreover, scapegoats for the Australian Government to sacrifice and send their 'strong messages' to people smugglers. The scapegoating system which was mainly responsible for Jesus' death two thousand years ago is still pretty much in operation today, in our society. Of course, it is only recognized under the mask of the national security system.

The gospel of John describes the reason for Jesus' death as follows:

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary (Lazarus's sister) and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.'

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death (Jn 11:45-53, NRSV translation).

What is critical in this passage is Caiaphas' advice to the council. It is better for one person to be sacrificed than to have the whole nation destroyed (this is repeated in the passion narrative in the same Gospel, ensuring we would not miss the point - see Jn 18:14). Today, it is better for the boat people to suffer than to have others drown at sea. This used to be the rhetoric of the politicians in stopping the boats in the first place; this seemed to convince a lot of people. However, when we hear nothing of the boats coming, the Government uses another rhetoric, that is of sending 'a strong message' to people smugglers, whoever they are, on the proposal of the new lifetime ban. This seems to affirm the minds of those wanting to exclude rather than include, to preserve the status quo rather than to be open to unknown migrants.

Behind all this, there seems to be a scapegoating mentality which treats vulnerable people as sacrificial victims for the sins they did not commit. No one would flee their own countries, families and cultures for minor reasons, considering the enormous dangers they put themselves in. We need to ask why they would risk their lives to seek another place to live, not what we would have to sacrifice in accepting them in their desperation. The second question shows how eccentric we are as a people and nation in the face of global crises of war (to which we significantly contributed), immigration (which we are handling irresponsibly within our reach) and poverty (which we feel indifferent about).

¹ See *The Age*, 1 November 2016 Issue, 14-15.

² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* 40th



Khoi Nguyen migrated from Vietnam to Australia in 2005 and is a Missionary of the Sacred Heart studying at Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity, Melbourne.

Revisiting the death of Jesus urges Christians to see the face of God in the faces of the scapegoated brothers and sisters, who are in the detention camps, whether offshore and within the country, who are homeless, cultureless and stateless everywhere in the world today. In his most important book, *The Crucified God*, Jürgen Moltmann writes:

Christian identity can be understood only as an act of identification with the crucified Christ, to the extent to which one has accepted the proclamation that in them God has identified [Godself] with the godless and those abandoned by God, to whom one belongs oneself.²

The crucifixion of Jesus is not a mere reality of the past; it is very present in our world today, our country, and our own minds and hearts. The hopes of countless people are crucified. The lives of children, women and men are crucified in detention centers. We are crucifying our conscience voices, whether external or internal.

Thanks be to God that we, Christians, have inherited the image of a crucified God in our traditions, right in the center of our faith. God, through God's beloved Son, identifies God's own self with the scapegoated, the crucified in society, not the powerful and the winners. God is there in the camps and on the boats.

Can we, as Christians, see the face of God in the faces of those desperate for a new life? Can we see the face of a compassionate God in the eyes of those hoping for our mercy when we look closely into their eyes? Can we, as a nation and country, have courage to look these people in the eyes and see them as fellow human beings, not scapegoats to be crucified?

anniversary Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, Kindle Edition, 2015), location 474 (page 20).

DEUS HUMILIS VENIT

Revelation of the love of a humble God

ARMANDO GENOVESE MSC

I HAVE BEEN struck by an idea of St. Augustine's that I find especially rich for our reflection: the humility of God as a quality of God, made visible especially in the Incarnation. This year of mercy that we are living, as well as a reflection on mercy in general, could lead us to consider only a human attitude and to look for its foundation in Sacred Scripture and in Church tradition. Augustine's intuition, however, leads us to look at a quality which is proper to God and which God communicates to us not just in the form of a teaching or as a practice to imitate but as an element that constitutes the divinity and which finds its full realization in the meeting of the human and the divine that happens in the Incarnation. To this movement from above downwards, there is a corresponding movement from below upwards:

Weights are of two types. [...] Brothers, where does fire tend to go and where does water tend to go? Fire rises, seeking its place; as water seeks its place driven by its weight. The rock moves downward and likewise the wood, pillars and the earth with which these houses are built—because they belong to that category of things which by their weight tend to seek a lower level. It is clear, therefore, that they have their foundation below, because by their weight they are driven downwards. If there is nothing to hold them up, everything falls down because everything tends to go towards the ground. The foundation, then, of things they tend to move downwards is below them. But the Church of God, even though it is located below, tends towards heaven. That indeed is where our foundation is located, the Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father.¹

The reflections that we will make here have,

on the one hand, a Christological and soteriological character and, on the other hand, a truly spiritual character. This is the way Augustine's theological reflection is, and in general that of the other Fathers of the Church, for whom theology is always done in an ecclesial context, that is to say in a context of spiritual animation.

I believe it to be quite unnecessary to introduce Augustine to you. His life story is well known, at least in reference to the first part of that life, the part that is told in the *Confessions*. The second part as well, the part that corresponds roughly to his episcopacy, is rather well known, since it includes an important number of works, most of which have survived until today. From all of this we get the idea that we are in the presence of one of the most influential theologians of all of Christian antiquity. Of course, we do not want to do injustice to anyone and we can say that our bishop gives us the synthesis of the Latin tradition that preceded him, takes up a good part of the Greek tradition and, with his particular genius, initiates a new theological reflection that would have a decisive influence on Western theology up to today.

It is also important to note that Augustine's theological work has a very pronounced Christological accent: Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior, the way and our native land, the sole mediator between God and the human race, is present in all his writings, even in his early philosophical writings. This came about not just because of the different controversies he had to deal with but also, and above all, because of his personal and pastoral concerns. As we know, his conversion came about through an important experience with the

Manicheans and his moving encounter with Ambrose at Milan from which he adopted contemplation of Christ as *auctoritas* and *via ad patriam*. By scrutinizing his inner questions and comparing them with his personal experience he developed the idea of an 'invincible' grace which is the definitive step in bringing man to fulfilment.²

Augustine was a man of profound questions and in trying to answer these questions, both for himself and for others of his time, he arrived at a particular understanding of human existence than has indelibly marked theological reflection. In confronting the Donatist movement, which claimed to be the one true Church in the midst of so many African Churches, Augustine made reference to the contemplation and the experience of Christ: if we say that Christ baptizes, it means that the presence of Christ in the Church guarantees the holiness of the sacraments and the communion of saints. The Church, united to Christ, constitutes the *Christus totus*.

After 412, Augustine had to face the problems that originated in Pelagianism and here again he looks to Christ to formulate his argument: Christ is not only an *exemplum*, a model of Christian life but also an *adiutorium*, a help, a source of grace, who heals and makes grow in love and truth. At the same time, because of the political difficulties of the time, Augustine tried to explain what can reasonably be expected of *tempora christiana*: his great apologetic work *De Civitate Dei* is again centered on the face of Christ, the sole mediator, always present in history. During his last years Augustine had to deal with the case of Leporio, who has come to be considered like Nestorius *ante litteram*, and refute at the same time the Arians who had arrived in Africa. Against these new adversaries he underlined the meaning of *unitas personae* in Christ.

The allusions we are making are too brief to illustrate completely Augustine's Christology but they do serve to show how



Fr Armando Genovese MSC has a doctorate in Theology and Patristic Science from the Augustinian Institute, Rome, and is Extraordinary Professor in the Pontifical Urban University.

important it was for him to put Christ and the salvation he won at the center, even with all the difficulties that such a synthesis brings. These difficulties come from the following facts: from the influence of the rhetoric of that time which loved contrasts and metaphorical language; from the complexity of Soteriology itself whose themes like reconciliation, victory, healing, *etc.* had become interlaced with the growing importance of the Bible which had difficulty with philosophical approaches; from the present problems which hindered Augustine from finding a truly personal synthesis.

The difficulties mentioned explain, perhaps, why few scholars have tried to develop an overall presentation of Augustinian soteriology. Many have been content to elaborate one aspect or the other, perhaps considered more important, such as redemption, mediation, the *Totus Christus*, *etc.*

1. The mediation of Christ

The *Enchiridion*, or *The Manuel on faith, hope and charity*, which Augustine wrote to Laurence from 421 on, thus during his last years, is an attempt to make a *resume* of the important points of Christian faith, as they are to be found in the proclamation of that faith.³ At the center of this *compendium* is to be found Jesus Christ, because 'Christ is the indisputable and exclusive foundation of Catholic faith,'⁴ and only through him can one leave sin to be reconciled with God, or rather

to follow the way that leads from being far from God to being near to God.⁵

Augustine is especially effective when he recalls the reasons for the Incarnation: the healing of pride, a call back to God, an example of obedience, a model of grace, proof of the resurrection, victory over the devil;⁶ all of these themes have their focus in the centrality of Christ's mediation.

For we could not be redeemed, even through the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, if He were not also God. Now when Adam was created, he, being a righteous man, had no need of a mediator. But when sin had placed a wide gulf between God and the human race, it was expedient that a Mediator, who alone of the human race was born, lived, and died without sin, should reconcile us to God, and procure even for our bodies a resurrection to eternal life, in order that the pride of man might be exposed and cured through the humility of God; that man might be shown how far he had departed from God, when God became incarnate to bring him back; that an example might be set to disobedient man in the life of obedience of the God-Man; that the fountain of grace might be opened by the Only-begotten taking upon Himself the form of a servant, a form which had no antecedent merit; that an earnest of that resurrection of the body which is promised to the redeemed might be given in the resurrection of the Redeemer; that the devil might be subdued by the same nature which it was his boast to have deceived, and yet man not glorified, lest pride should again spring up; and, in fine, with a view to all the advantages which the thoughtful can perceive and describe, or perceive without being able to describe, as flowing from the transcendent mystery of the person of the Mediator⁷.

The mediation of Christ, and through him the humble coming down of God to the human level are central themes in Augustine's theology and spirituality which are also expressed in another way when Augustine speaks of *auctoritas*, *Christus praesens in Ecclesia*, *adiutorium et exemplum, universalis via salutis*.

The holy bishop's reflection does not only

have its origin in the formation and building up of the ecclesial community but also in the difficulties of a philosophical nature which he finds, for example, in Platonism which has a difficult relationship with the Incarnation,⁸ and because of this, keeping himself firmly bound to the Bible, he understands *mediator* as *redemptor* and *reconciliator*, and gives great importance to the reflection on Christ-according-to-the-flesh.⁹ In other texts, fewer in number, Augustine insists on the fact that Christ is to be found between God the Father and human beings, between the creator and created things, and is, therefore, at the same time God and man.

The Platonic temptation consists in favoring the divine side only, and therefore not only underrating the human component, but also considering the divine part as the only and principal part. It is evident that this is not just a problem of the first centuries but one that touches every epoch, in the temptation to distinguish a good side and a bad side in man, in the Church and in the world.

Augustine had received a great boost in his conversion from Platonism, when, at a certain point in his maturation, he realized that this sort of philosophy could lead him to a dualism which is foreign to Catholic faith. We find a clear indication early on in *contra Academicos*:

I firmly hold that I should not distance myself from the authority of Christ because one cannot find any other authority which is more valid. In relation to what should be argued with philosophical thought, I am confident in finding in the Platonic philosophers themes that are not contrary to Holy Scripture.¹⁰

It is clear from this passage that Augustine was acquainted with Platonism but that he did not depend on it since his relationship is dialectical: the *auctoritas* is Christ and the Platonic philosophers are to be read and their position retained only in as much as they are not in disharmony with the Catholic Church's own faith.

We can try to express his thought in a few words: in paradise, human beings, created in the image of God, enjoyed direct illumination from God and had God as a friend.¹¹ The sin of pride, however, created a distance between God and us: we, separated from the divine Word, went about looking for our own egotistical good instead of the common good (*corruptio naturae*) and exercised 'extraversion' instead of introspection (*corruptio intellectus*), desiring inferior rather than superior things (*corruptio voluntatis*).¹²

We were no longer able to look up: the eye of our heart lowered our gaze towards the ground. A return to paradise, to the intellectual world, was closed to us who were now excluded from illumination. It was necessary that God's authority call us back to intelligence, under an external form, that is to say the grace of the authority of Christ, of Scripture and of the Church.

The incarnate Word, which is the greatest sign of divine things and then the authority of the Bible and of the preaching of the Church, invite us to return to ourselves, to find again, in our own heart, eternal truth. Scripture and preaching give birth to and nurture faith which, from its part, making charity operative, leads the mind to understanding. This ascent, while causing one to advance in a continual purification of the mind, never reaches its goal on this earth. Only in heaven, in union with the angels, will we enjoy the vision of eternal truth. Thus we advance, by means of science, to wisdom,¹³ until we are purified and completely united with Christ-God, towards whom we are oriented, even during this life, through the vehicle of Christ-Man.

The ascent towards God is not made only *per viam fidei*, through faith nourished by the Bible, but also *per viam rationis* by means of the traces of truth that reason discovers in creation. We can say of this vision of salvation that it contains Platonic echoes: it contains both Christian and Platonic

elements or, so to speak, Platonic elements which have been 'baptized.' Among others we would point out: introspection or a turning towards one's self; illumination of the mind and of the heart; purification of the mind and the healing of the eyes; ascent towards the blessed life; the metaphysical dimension (God, evil, good). On the other hand there are elements coming from Christian tradition: Christ who wins our admiration and illumines the mind; Christ the sole teacher, whether internal or external, in the authority of the Church or in the beauty of creation; Christ who helps us with grace and who shows the way through example.¹⁴

2. The revelation of salvation in the incarnation of the Word

In *De Trinitate*, as we have seen above, Augustine presents Christ as *Scientia* and *Sapientia*¹⁵: if we look at the history of salvation, the Incarnation, which is the moment of the union between God and humanity, constitutes the greatest grace; on the level of eternity, the Word of God represents the highest truth. From the moment that Christ is knowledge and wisdom at the same time, the one who reveals God in the flesh to instill in us the faith that purifies, he will also make us see God in eternity.

This way of presenting things seems to be difficult and speculative but in fact our bishop is expressing a line of vision that is very familiar, the idea of the revealing dimension of the incarnate Word. The theme of *Deus qui apparuit in carne*, in fact, was central from the beginning of Augustine's work. In particular it characterizes certain sermons on Christmas and Epiphany in which he repeats the word *manifestatio*¹⁶. This concept is at the foundation of his doctrine on *missio* in the fourth book of *De Trinitate*: after having explained the meaning of incarnation, of the death and resurrection of Christ, Augustine declares:

The Son is not properly said to have been sent

in as much as He is begotten of the Father; but in that the Word made flesh appeared to the world.¹⁷

The *missio* of the Incarnation, then, is distinguished from all the other divine missions: from the theophanies recorded in the Old Testament, from the appearance of the Holy Spirit, and from the spiritual presence of the Spirit or the Word. The very purpose of the Incarnation was double: to reveal what God wants to be for humankind and to reveal what God expects of humans. Here the theme of the humility and of the mercy of God, expressed in the title of this work, finds its motivation and theological explanation. Behind this theme there is a great theological and spiritual richness.

The Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, from conception to glorification, constitutes first of all the supreme revelation of God's love: a *demonstratio* and *commendatio* of love. The Incarnation also shows the humility of God and proves the unconditional love of God for us and the definitive overcoming of all human pride. The revelation of the love of a humble God, on the other hand, demands that we love God and each other without pride. It also leads us to have confidence in divine goodness, and even invites us to be humble ourselves, because only in humility can we recognize that God is love. The Incarnation of the Word was thus a manifestation of the humility of God and at the same time an invitation to love God in humility and, because of God, all people.

The Incarnation shows the incapacity of sinful humans to rediscover with our own freedom, certainly not destroyed but corrupted, divine justice, showing not only the need for grace, but also the nature of grace. The same grace, in fact, through which Jesus became the Son of God, communicates to all who believe and become baptized his divine sonship and sanctification by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Incarnation of the Son of God

is a *demonstratio immortalitatis*: faith finds here the proof that God intends to free us from death and, because of this, becomes a reason to hope. Just as God, who is immortal, became a mortal man out of love, we should no longer fear death, especially because of the fact that the resurrection of Christ has shown how deep are now the roots of our immortality.¹⁸

In the Incarnation of the Word took place the revelation of the love of a just and humble God, of the free grace of divine adoption in Christ and of our eternal destiny. Such a revelation is not only an *admonitio* for a faith that purifies, nor just a reason for hope nor just a heavenly communication of the intention of God to save, but also includes a teaching about the way we must follow to reach salvation. This teaching, which we can classify as moral, appears in both the words and the deeds of Jesus, in his *magisterium*¹⁹ and in his *exemplum*²⁰.

In this regard, the theme of Christ the doctor is particularly revealing: Christ, by means of his doctrine and especially by means of his example, heals the sicknesses of sin, in particular from the contamination of original sin and from the sickness of pride²¹.

It is also to be noted, in relation to the concept of *exemplum*, that this does not mean just a model to be imitated, but a reason for hope: he does not limit himself to being a model to imitate but is also, in a certain sense, a help: he serves as a precedent, a demonstration of what is possible, the guarantee that it can be repeated. We find this meaning in the expression *exemplum resurrectionis*:

The resurrection of the body of the Lord is shown to belong to the mystery of our own inner resurrection, where, after He had risen, He says to the woman, Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father (Jn 20,17); with which mystery the apostle's words agree, where he says, If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God; set your thoughts on

things above (Col 3,1-2). For not to touch Christ, unless when He had ascended to the Father, means not to have thoughts of Christ after a fleshly manner. Again, the death of the flesh of our Lord contains a type of the death of our outer man, since it is by such suffering most of all that He exhorts His servants that they should not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul (Mt 10,28). Wherefore the apostle says, That I may fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh (Col 1,24). And the resurrection of the body of the Lord is found to contain a type of the resurrection of our outward man, because He says to His disciples, Handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me have (Lc 24,39). And one of the disciples also, handling His scars, exclaimed, My Lord and my God! (Gv 20,24.28). And whereas the entire integrity of that flesh was apparent, this was shown in that which He had said when exhorting His disciples: There shall not a hair of your head perish (Lc 21,18). For how comes it that first is said, Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; and how comes it that before He ascends to the Father, He actual-ly is touched by the disciples: unless because in the former the mystery of the inner man was intimated, in the latter a type was given of the outer man?²²

3. Imitation of the humble Christ

The coming down of the divine into human history, the emptying of the Word, to use a well-known Pauline expression, is the paradigmatic model and the source of humility in the Christian disciple. Christian humility is thus much more than a virtue that God invites us to practice; it is the true and proper way that the Word comes close to us and invites us to use as a model in our life. Augustine often presents humility together with the exhortation in the Gospel of Matthew: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11,29).²³ Thus the way of humility is, above all, the way of God and our life is in response to God's initiative. The humility of Christ determines for each person the road to return to God. In a famous letter to Dioscorus,

a young Greek intellectual, Augustine raises humility to the level of a condition and the basis of Christian living:

In that way the first part is humility; the second, humility; the third, humility: and this I would continue to repeat as often as you might ask direction, not that there are no other instructions which may be given, but because, unless humility precede, accompany, and follow every good action which we perform, being at once the object which we keep before our eyes, the support to which we cling, and the monitor by which we are restrained, pride wrests wholly from our hand any good work on which we are congratulating ourselves²⁴.

Humility has many dimensions which move one from a new discovery of one's self to a deeper communion with others. Augustine alludes to the distinction between the grace of the humility proper to a beginner to that of a more advanced or deeper humility. The former implies an understanding of self and an honest confrontation with one's own sinfulness. In this "just means" between "desperation" (low esteem of self) on one hand, and "presumption" (excessive esteem of self) on the other hand, humility implies a turning within so as to recognize the need of constant grace from God²⁵.

The more mature form of humility culminates in a going out of self, towards others, in a way that we would call misericordia. Once we see, in the light of Christ's humility, what we truly are, we are led to practice mercy in relation to our neighbor, according to the example and the strength of Christ²⁶ Augustine holds that the humility of Christ is the model and source of human perfection:

You will be humble only if you listen to the One who became humble for you. Learn from Christ what you do not learn from others: in him is to be found the rule of humility. The one who draws close to him is first formed through humility in order to be honored in praise.²⁷

Augustine is convinced that a knowledge of Jesus Christ includes an understanding of his humility because Jesus Christ, first of all, shows us complete docility to God: he is the

archetype and the master of humility²⁸. While the first kind of humility is centered on a true knowledge of one's self and is appropriate for the created order, since it underlines the ontological situation of limitation and mortality proper to the human being, so too the existential experience of one's sinfulness, the second and more radical type of humility is relational and Christological. This belongs more properly to the order of redemption in which created beings find a new identity established in social terms and rooted in the *kenosis*. The most complete human expression of humility, however, is found in the giving of one's self completely, on the model of the *kenosis* or effusion of divine love in the incarnation and in the passion.

The humble giving of one's self finds its highest model in the washing of the feet: humbling himself before the apostles, Christ proves that his love is concrete, tangible and is not afraid of contact with the filthy parts of humanity:

We have learned, brethren, humility from the Highest; let us, as humble, do to one another what He, the Highest, did in His humility. Great is the commendation we have here of humility: and brethren do this to one another in turn, even in the visible act itself, when they treat one another with hospitality; for the practice of such humility is generally prevalent, and finds expression in the very deed that makes it discernible²⁹.

Augustine holds that Christ, with his actions, establishes a lofty model for the practice of humility. Such a practice does not consist in a simple, formal call to perform the liturgical ritual of the washing of the feet but is, rather, the existential path to accomplish: in the concrete offering of self to others, the Christian becomes the presence of Christ in the world. The humility of Christ is repeated in

the flesh through this concrete giving of self. It is an attitude that demands practice and growth.

Augustine explains that the rejection and persecution of Christ was not an occasional occurrence. The members of his Body share with Him the suffering that redeems. The humble Christ, then, continues to be identified with those who suffer persecution and poverty:

And so, as long as we are here below, we give food to Christ who is hungry, we give drink to him when he is thirsty, we clothe him when he is naked, we shelter him when he is a pilgrim, we visit him when he is sick. These things are part of the roughness of the journey. This is the way we should live in the present pilgrimage in which Christ is needy: he needs his followers even though he is filled with everything in himself. But the one who is needy in his followers, while he is rich in everything, will draw to himself all who are needy.³⁰

The insistence of Augustine in the fact that Christ is to be discovered among the poor is the sign of a development in his thought which takes him from a Neoplatonic search for the Logos within the human heart, to the search for Christ outside, in the world, especially among the most vulnerable.

Augustine describes the humble as empty vessels, in the sense that they are emptied of egoism and an attachment to earthly things and ready to be filled with the Holy Spirit, who is like water in search of a humble heart: 'The Spirit fills the humble because he finds them ready to receive him'³¹. Augustine clarifies that the grace of God, like the rain, batters the mountain of pride and is collected in the humble valley below. Just as the valley is ready to be filled with the rain that falls from the hill, the humble soul receives the effusion of the Holy Spirit: the more it is docile and receptive, the more the Spirit fills it.

NOTES

1. *En. in Ps.* 29,2,10.
2. We make reference to the studies of Lettieri who makes the difficult comparison

in the passage from the first to the second part of *De Doctrina Christiana* the proof of a radical change in doctrine, of a radical yet

not explicit *retractatio* of the initial premise of the first part which were never brought to conclusion and then mysteriously taken up again in the last years of his life, with the hypothesis of 'una vera e propria nuova conversion di Agostino, determinante una crisi decisiva e quindi una radicale rifondazione della sua teologia' (G. Lettieri, *La metamorfosi del De doctrina christiana di Agostino*, in *Cristianesimo nella storia* 21 (2000), pp. 273-274). The proposals of Lettieri (from the article: 'La crisi del De doctrina christiana di Agostino, in *Cristianesimo nella storia*' 18 (1997), pp. 1-60, up to the volume: *L'altro Agostino. Ermeneutica e retorica della grazia dalla crisi alla metamorfosi del De doctrina christiana*, Brescia 2000) have made it possible to open a wide-ranging debate among scholars on the motives behind the taking up again, after a lapse of thirty years, of this important and demanding text.

3. Cfr *Retr.* 2,63.

4. *Ench.* 1,5.

5. Cfr *Ench.* 13,41.

6. Cfr *Ench.* 28, 108.

7. *Ench.* 28, 108

8. Cfr *Trin.* 13,19,24.

9. Cfr *Trin.* 1,7,14 and the texts of an anti-Arian nature: *En. Ps.* 29,2,1; *Conf.* 10,43-68.

10. *C. Acad.* 3,20,43. Precisely when he was rereading *Contra Academicos*, forty years later in *Retractions* (1,1-4), Augustine gave his final and definitive judgement on his previous use of Platonism, unhappy with having praised Plato and his followers too highly, while remaining convinced that many Platonic doctrines were in harmony with Christianity or could easily be harmonized with it.

11. *Gn. c. Man.* 2,4,5: *Ante peccatum... Deus... irrigabat eam fonte interiore loquens in*

intellectu eius, ut non extrinsecus verba exciperet tamquam de supradictis nubibus pluviam, sed fonte suo, hoc est de intimis suis manante veritate satiaretur.

12. Cfr R. Holte, *Béatitude et sagesse. Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne*, Paris-Worcester 1962, 335-343.

13. *Trin.* 13,19,24: *Tendimus per scientiam ad sapientiam.*

14. Cfr R. Holte, *Béatitude et sagesse*, 329-333. Cfr *Trin.* 4,3,6: *Una ergo mors nostri Salvatoris duabus mortibus nostris saluti fuit, et una eius resurrectio duas nobis resurrectiones praestitit cum corpus eius in utraque re, id est et in morte et in resurrectione, et in sacramento interioris hominis nostri et exemplo exterioris medicinali quadam convenientia ministratum est.*

15. *Trin.* 13,16,21-19,24.

16. Cfr *Serm.* 201,1; *Tract.* 11o. 1,1.

17. *Trin.* 4,20,28.

18. Cfr the theme of *exemplum resurrectionis*: *Ver. rel.* 16,23; *Trin.* 4,13,17; *Serm.* 263,1

19. *C. Acad.* 3,19,43; *agon.christ.* 11,12.

20. *Quaest.div.* 83,25.44; *en. Ps.* 90,1,1;

util.cred. 33; *ep.* 137,12, and especially *Ver.rel.* 16,32.

21. Cfr *Serm.* 77,11

22. *Trin.* 4,3,6.

23. Cfr *conf.* 7, 9, 14; *Io. ev. tr.* 25, 18; *civ. Dei* 14, 13.

24. *Ep.* 118, 3, 22

25. *Conf.* 7, 20, 26; *Io. ev. Tr.* 25, 16.

26. *Io. ev. tr.* 58, 4; *serm.* 250, 4-5; 340A, 5

27. *Serm.* 68, 11.

28. *Magister humilitatis: Io. Ev. Tr.* 25, 16.

29. *Io. ev. tr.* 58, 4.

30. *Serm.* 236, 3.

31. *Serm.* 270, 6

ANOTHER WAY TO GOD

REGNAULTY

THE FOUR WAYS to God identified by Hinduism are now fairly well known. They are the way of knowledge, *eg.*, the five ways of Aquinas, the way of devotion or prayer, the way of meditation as practised by yogis, and which finds its way into the Neo-Platonic tradition in the West, and the way of good works.

And there is another, mentioned by two high profile Australians in their autobiographies, the way of art. Thus Robert Hughes

Art was the symbolic discourse that truly reached into me...It wasn't a question of confusing art with religion, or trying to make a religion out of art. As some people are tone deaf, I was religion deaf...But I was beginning, at last, to derive from art, from architecture, and even from the beauty of organised landscape, a sense of transcendence that organized religion had offered me—but that I had never received.¹

The number of religion - deaf people whom we now encounter is immense. It is not easy to know how to help them. For Hughes, however, 'hammered gold and gold enamelling' worked wonders. 'Tears would roll down my face, he writes.

And he wasn't the only one. The late historian, Manning Clark, is another. For him, it was the Madonna in Cologne Cathedral which reached deep within:

The sight of that face worked a great miracle within me. The tempest within subsided, the ghosts from the past stopped tormenting me...I will read of many men and women who have known a moment of grace while contemplating the Madonna in Cologne Cathedral...Many years later when I risked talking about the experience my whole body shook.²

There are the 'transcendentals'—truth, beauty and goodness. Solzhenitsyn

speculated that if truth were too obscure, and goodness too confused by conflicting opinions, then perhaps beauty could do duty for all three. But for Hughes and Clark, what opened the door was more specific than beauty. It was works of art.

Opening the door is not yet stepping into the room. Something more must be done. Hughes was not interested enough to do any more. But Clark was. He was a deeply religious man, a genuine seeker if ever there was one, but he doesn't seem to have got into the room either. What happened? One can make an educated guess. He seemed to have been ... misguided. He never expected to get closer to God. Indeed, his concept of God ruled it out. If God is conceived as infinite in power and goodness, and nothing like the sinful, ignorant beings we are, then getting close to God is not a prospect.

Clark wrote that he never wanted union with God. And that is something not uncommonly said by writers in this field. Antony Flew, the eminent philosopher who wrote a couple of books against God, and who came to accept God in a book at the end of his life, *There Is A God*, says the same thing. H. H. Price, like Flew, a philosophy professor, and a creative and luminous writer, makes it clear, between the lines, in his book *Essays In The Philosophy Of Religion*, that he found the desire for union with God, distinctly odd. There are simply some concepts of God and humanity which preclude it.

What is to be done here? More friendly persuasion? That may help, but the best remedy of all is conspicuous sanctity. Isn't that vanishingly rare? It is not as rare as most people appear to think. Here it is apposite to mention the saintly nun mentioned by the philosopher Raymond Gaita. It is surprising

to find her reported in his writing, since he is an atheist, but his report is sufficiently well known to have made it into the literature.

At some time in his life, Gaita had worked as an assistant in a ward where there were patients with advanced dementia. He noticed that the specialists who treated the patients did so with condescension, as he himself did, but a saintly nun, who worked on a different roster, did not. The nun's sanctity was sufficient to make it noticeable, and that should be enough to make it apparent that closeness between human beings and God happens. Seeing instances of conspicuous sanctity, should, I suggest, have settled the doubts of people like Clark, Flew, and Price.

Of course, such people cannot be

produced on demand, but most religious traditions have them in their records. Thus in the Church, it is written of St. Dominic 'from his brow and eyes there emanated a certain radiant splendour which won the admiration and veneration of all.'³ Perhaps the most famous instance of this is in the Jewish tradition when Moses brought the ten commandments down from Mt. Sinai. In the Russian tradition, there is St. Seraphim of Sarov, and in Protestantism, George Fox. At times like ours, we should look backwards as well as forwards.

We have discussed writers for whom art opened a door on the transcendent. This door is opened to others by literature, and to others by music. They are all potential contributors to a new synthesis.

NOTES

1. Robert Hughes. *Things I Didn't Know. A Memoir*. Random House. Sydney. 2006. isbn 978 1 74166 475 1 [pbk] 513p. p.348.
2. Manning Clark. *The Quest For Grace*. Penguin

Australia.1990. isbn 0 14 014335 1 p.221.P75.

3. Richard Woods OP. *Mysticism And Prophecy. The Dominican Tradition*. Darton Longman and Todd. London. 1998. P. 71.

Richard Holloway. A Little History Of Religion. Yale University Press. New Haven and London. 2016. p.244. \$35.95 isbn 9780300208832.

For a book about religion, this is most unusual. It is very entertaining. It is also instructive. It is a history of religion - they are all sketched one after the other. Some of the sketches are masterful eg., the one on Hinduism, some are questionable, for example, Holloway has Buddha's enlightenment dependent on a realisation, ie., an act of cognition. Given their suspicion of the thinking mind, that would surprise Buddhists. But on the whole, the sketches are of high quality.

Holloway is at his best writing about the social and political dimensions of religion. Less impressive is his psychological insight. He

sees the origins of religion residing in prophecy, which he glosses as a voice heard in the head, and in visions. By the end of the book, one's confidence in these origins has worn very thin. For example, Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church in Korea, at the age of 16, had a vision of Jesus appointing him to complete his mission. When Moon died in 2012, it is said he was worth \$900 million. One can't help wondering about him.

Holloway does not appreciate the quandary that even genuine prophecy puts its possessor in. 'What is happening to me?' one can imagine them asking. 'Am I going out of my mind?' As it happens, that is exactly what Muhammed asked himself after the angel Gabriel commanded him to recite. Muhammed

answered the question in the affirmative, and ran to the nearest cliff in order to commit suicide at once. On his way, he saw a figure astride the horizon which hailed him as a messenger from God. That gave him the assurance he needed.

It not only the prophets who need confirmation. Depending on the circumstances, their followers do too. Thus after Joan of Arc's voices became insistent, she went to visit her local military commander. He only took her seriously because he realised that she knew of a recent French defeat before he did, and he didn't see how she could.

The religion which impresses Holloway most is The Society of Friends[Quakers]. He very nearly gets them right:

'All they had to do was sit in silence with each other and wait for the Holy Spirit to speak in their hearts. God's light already burned in each of them.' [p.187]

He acknowledges that the experience of the shared light can support proposals put before it ie., give guidance. The guidance which interests him most was that slavery is wrong:

'But the Quakers had done more than bring about the end of slavery. They had also ended a childish reading of the Bible. By asserting their conscience against it they made it possible to study it like any other book and not as an untouchable idol.' [p.190]

The Society Of Friends, writes Holloway, remains Christianity's conscience. Nevertheless, there is a fine but important point which he misses, which is that the light which burns within each provides corroboration for the others on the issue about which they are seeking guidance. Prophecy need not be as arbitrary as it seems from his presentation.

Even so, the book is full of things one would like to have known earlier. For example,

Abraham, the beginning of the Jewish story, is dated about 2000 B.C. But the Old Testament in which he features, was not written down until about 550 B.C., which is a long time in the oral form. And the book of Daniel, in which most of the prophecies about the Messiah occur, was written about 150 B.C. The Sadducees who tried Jesus were conservatives who recognised only the first five books of the Old Testament, so they were unlikely to have any sympathy for messianic aspirations.

Most interesting, perhaps, are the pages about religions made in America. The Second Coming of Christ has held a tenacious grip on the American religious mind. William Miller in NY State predicted that Christ would arrive on 21 March 1844. When that didn't happen, he decided that he had made an erroneous calculation, and that Christ would get here on 22 October 1844. When that failed, he withdrew, but others took up his cause, and the Seventh Day Adventists were born.

They weren't the only ones. Charles Taize Russell, a Pittsburgh shopkeeper, put together the books of Daniel and Revelation, and found his ultimate text in the latter 'Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth...' In 1879 he started the Watchtower movement for those on the lookout for the Second Coming. It was the first stirrings of Jehovah's Witnesses. The expectation lives on. Tim La Haye, an Evangelical minister, described as the most influential American of the last forty years, has written a series of novels presenting the case that The End is nigh. The great deceiver, the foretold Anti-Christ, is here right now. He is the Secretary General of the United Nations. La Hayes' novels have sold more than 65 million copies.

This engaging book reminds that the mutually stimulating debate between reason and religion, begun by Socrates so long ago, is still taking place.

—Reg Naulty.

THE IMAGINATION OF FAITH

NEIL BROWN

TODAY in the Western world Christians tend to live bifurcated lives, on the one hand within an enclave of private faith, and on the other in a 'real' world surrounded by the sights, sounds and smells of science, technology and commerce, with very few bridges connecting them. Work, the media, politics and the rest require that faith be left at the gates if you want to travel in their realm.

It is a source of great spiritual dissonance, felt by nearly everyone but especially by the young, who can't find any connecting links between the secular world they have grown up in and what they are taught of faith. Many school age children, we are told, lose their faith because of the disjunction they experience between their secular subjects, especially the sciences, and their religious education. Adults too feel the difficulty of linking their hour or so with God and the rest of their day-to-day living and working—it creates a feeling that faith is somehow 'unreal'.

The impasse is felt on the secular side also—there are enormous barriers to be surmounted just to consider what faith might offer your life—aren't they just fairy stories?

These problems are confounded also by the limitations individualism and consumerism set on our thinking, feeling and acting—in this atmosphere anything outside our own needs, interests and wants feels like foreign territory. Bridges need to be built, therefore, if there is to be any way to cross from one side to the other and, we will find, 'imagination', is an essential source of the resources we need to do so.

Imagination is our power to form, to connect and disconnect, to arrange and rearrange images, ideas and sensations in our minds. By our imagination we can create new worlds, opening up links between our

everyday world, its problems and limitations, with new worlds of possibility and the resolution of difficulties: science needs imagination to devise new hypotheses; technology relies on the inventiveness of imagination to solve problems; and we see imagination at work in every advertisement, novel or movie that seeks to entertain us or lure us into some new buying experience. Our imagination is at work throughout our lives.

Faith too requires imagination if we are to keep open our relationship with God, as Jesus' parables seek to do, and to forge links with the world around us. Faith in God is our trust in, our beliefs about and our commitment to the One who is the Source of all that is. Tradition provides the grammar, concepts and the varied vocabulary that preserve the integrity of faith, but it remains truncated and barely alive if it is disconnected from culture, experience and the public sphere. Shut in on itself, as many feel it to be now, it suffocates for want of the air it needs to breathe in the *real* world of people's lives.

Faith is not meant to be frozen in time, whether in some alleged golden age of practice or even in the age, culture or literal interpretation of the Bible. Throughout the Scriptures we encounter people struggling with faith, facing calamitous events such as slavery in Egypt, exile and persecution, and Jesus himself in the midst of the turmoil of the sick, dispossessed, sinners and outcasts of Galilee ending in his death on the cross.

For his followers we see this struggle of faith carried on in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters and other writings of the New Testament as they face the very different world of the Roman Empire outside Israel.

Our faith always remembers and treasures this past, but lives out the struggle in the 'real'

present while it looks to the possibilities God offers for the future—links which can only be made when imagination brings all these together in our vision of what is being asked of us in the actual circumstances of our time and place.

Richard Dawkins provides a good example of how lack of imagination creates difficulties for faith in our present scientific culture:

A God capable of continuously monitoring and controlling the individual status of every particle in the universe cannot be simple. His existence is going to need a mammoth explanation in its own right. Worse (from the point of view of simplicity), other corners of God's great consciousness are simultaneously preoccupied with the doings and emotions and prayers of every single human being—and whatever intelligent aliens there might be on other planets in this and 100 billion other galaxies.¹

A few pages later, he states that believing in such a God is tantamount to dealing yourself 'a perfect hand in bridge', 'a total abdication of the responsibility to find an explanation', 'a dreadful exhibition of self-indulgent, thought-denying skyhookery'.²

But, leaving aside the diatribe which sounds like a highly excited electioneering speech, in the manner of Donald Trump, that is precisely what we believe about God—God would not be God if that were not true. It is not, however, a campaign for votes—God is not some pseudo solution to a scientific equation. God as Creator is the One on whom everything that exists depends.

Modern science presents us with vast eons of time, some fourteen and a half billion years of our universe's existence, with the possibility of an indefinite number of bangs and bounces preceding that beginning; with a billion billion stars; with the intricate and complex settings for the forces that allow the Goldilocks' zone for life to emerge on earth; with fermions and bosons, the building blocks of matter and force; with the double helix of life replicating and life evolving DNA and RNA; with the indeterminacy of quantum



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

theory, the unpredictability of chaos theory, and the multi-dimensions of string theory, and the conundrums they create; and with a list of wonders that will continue to grow, all creating a very different mindset from the past. The question then is how is faith to erect the bridges needed to allow people to cross from one to the other and back again.³

Perhaps we can begin with St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), an unlikely ally in the present contest. Even theists today have given up on Anselm's famous argument for the existence of God—if it is possible to conceive, he argued, of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, then, if that being does not exist, it would be less than perfect, so therefore that being must exist in order to be the being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

As every modern atheist who has kicked Anselm's dialectical football around the playing field of logic enjoys pointing out—because something can be thought to exist, *eg* a unicorn, it does not mean that it does exist.⁴ A fair ruling! But even if Anselm's argument does not kick a goal, it may keep the ball in play.

Anselm's reflection was originally in the context of a prayer, so, rather than being a 'proof', it may be better seen as a corrective to our inadequate powers of imagining. When we think of the billions of galaxies, of the infinitesimally small particles of matter and energy, of the eons of the evolution of life, and the complex equations we need to explore the universe, perhaps again Anselm's thought

COMPASS

experiment can propel our imagination to the Being than which nothing greater can be thought - for this is precisely what the Scriptures attempt to do for our faith in the God who is revealed in the events and lives the authors portray.

The stars in the night sky of Israel some two and a half thousand years ago would have shone brighter than we can now see them and certainly excited the psalmist's imagination:

He who lives forever created
the whole universe;
the Lord alone is just.
To none has he given power to
proclaim his works;
and who can search out his
mighty deeds?

Who can measure his majestic
power?...

It is not possible to diminish or
increase them,
nor is it possible to fathom the
wonders of the Lord. (Sir 18:1-6)

Beauty and wonder are for the Scriptures
the imagination's way into the
transcendent:

If through delight in the beauty of
these things people assumed
them to be gods,
let them know how much better
than these is their Lord,
for the author of beauty created
them. (Wis 13:3)

The Scriptures invite us to use our imagination if we are to come into the Presence of God. What the Scriptural authors knew excited wonder and awe. What we know through science, the numbers, equations and eons of time, excites wonder and awe also—this amazement must be allowed to enter into our own faith as well.

In the Scriptures faith has a cosmic dimension which has tended to be eclipsed by our narrow focus on the private and the personal: 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now...' (Rm 8:22)—a 'groaning' we are very acutely

conscious of as habitat is destroyed and the world faces ecological disaster.

'Creation' is very much to the forefront in the prayer of the Scriptures—a dimension that tends to escape us:

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the
heavens. (Ps 148:3-4)

The word 'God' in the Scriptures is an infinite universe of meaning, value and expression, unlimited even in imagination, a reality that cannot be named, a universe that can never be captured, and is always expanding, and only ever glimpsed momentarily in awe and wonder as we struggle into the future:

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephes 3:18-9).

The openness of the word 'God' to encompass the whole universe and all that is in it, is also a holding open of the 'human' so that it doesn't close in on itself and implode, losing its sense of worth and destiny. The Scriptural prohibition of idolatry was just as much about humanity as it was about God:

They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false... (2Kg 17:15).

Idolatry is the belief that there is something within the universe that defines us, whether it be literally an idol or is some principle, fact or theory that seeks to tell us once and for all what we are. Idolatry is a foreclosure of meaning and value which seeks to reduce us to some pre-established formula and to pretend to answer the perennial existential question of human beings: Who am I?

Faith in God is the refusal of all forms of idolatry, ancient and modern. Revelation, however, is not the disclosure of everything,

but the coming into the presence of the ungraspable Mystery of all things that is to be understood as personal, loving, just and compassionate. Just as God is always a Question for us, so are we always a question to ourselves. As the Scriptures tell us, 'the dawn from on high' is always breaking upon us to enlarge our vision of who we are:

By the tender mercy of our God,
 the dawn from on high will
 break upon us,
 to give light to those who sit in
 darkness and in the shadow
 of death
 to guide our feet into the way
 of peace. (Lk 1:78-9)

The imagination of faith keeps alive our sense of our own worth and of the things that truly matter to us as we are confronted by the trinity of our modern world's gods—Profit, Pleasure and material Progress. Walled off within our private and personal enclaves, our faith will feel 'unreal' if it does not march out to combat 'the cosmic powers of the present darkness' as the Epistle to the Ephesians calls the struggle of faith (Eph 6:12).

The Galilee of Jesus' day was a human wilderness of suffering, oppression, alienation, poverty and conflict, as we saw earlier. It was also the world of possibility, with a potential for change, grace and conversion. At the end of his Gospel, Mark tells us that it is there in Galilee that we will encounter the risen Christ:

But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you (Mk 16:7).

In every age, people have indulged their tendency to fashion gods for themselves, gods which they serve and worship. In modern times the Scriptures will allow us to come into the presence of a God not made into our own individual and consumer image and likeness: but rather, into the presence of the *God of Creation*—'the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the waters' (Gen 1:2); the *God of history*—'I am the God of your

father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Ex 3:6); the *God of contradiction and surprise*—'But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23-4); the *God of the poor and oppressed*—Jesus reechoing the words of Isaiah 'he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor' (Lk 4:18); and the *God whose purposes bring all things together*—'See, I am making all things new... I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end' (Rev 21:5-6).

Such a God is able to upset the applecarts and shopping trolleys in which we place all our privileged wants and desires, as Jesus did with the money changers' tables in the temple. The God of the Scriptures is infinitely larger in life than our own domesticated imitations, well able to encompass both the discoveries of science and the struggle for justice in an afflicted world.

In place of a catechism mentality that seems to have all the answers, we need to be more aware of the questions we face that don't have ready answers and on which so much depends. Science, literature, the Arts and the human sciences are all engaged in exploring the human. Technology confronts us with issues that affect both our planet and our social health. Commerce raises our standards of living, but more and more people fall through the cracks. Often we seem to use our certainties as a shield against the questions and issues that our life and times throw up to us.

Imagination is not comfortable—but neither is love—in the real world. As the English poet, W.H. Auden reminds us:

What figures of destruction unawares
 Jump out at love's imagination,
 And chase away the castles and the bears;
 How warped the mirrors where our worlds
 are made;

While we are attempting to protect the 'castles' and the 'bears' of our faith within the

enclaves of our Western Churches, we never seem to notice how 'warped' is our own view of the world. If nothing else, however, the death of Jesus at the hands of unjust and vicious political and religious authorities should convince us that our place is not within protective walls, but facing the 'figures of destruction' in the real world.

We do a great disservice to everyone and to young people especially when we present faith as an interminable list of answers to questions people have long since ceased to ask. Our faith is a commitment to the questioning and wonder both at the God revealed in the Scriptures, especially in the death of Jesus, and at ourselves with our mystery and unlimited potential.

The philosopher, John Armstrong, in his book, *In Search of Civilization*, poses a problem that he perceives in secular terms, but which is just as relevant for Christian faith:

how to meet the almost opposed demands of redemptive meaning (a story that is good enough, hopeful enough, to be worth believing) and plausibility (a story that is true enough, close enough to reality to be a genuine source of strength).⁶

There may be many ways to 'redemption' and 'plausibility', but for Christian faith one way stands out, that of squarely facing the reality of the world we live in - it is what the cross of Jesus confronts us with as do the Scriptures as a whole.

The Book of Job, in particular, takes us to the depths of human suffering: the vulnerability, injustice, wickedness and calamities that humankind can face:

The wicked remove landmarks;

they seize flocks and pasture them.

They drive away the donkey of the orphan; they take the widow's ox for a pledge.

They thrust the needy off the road;

the poor of the earth all hide themselves (24:2-4).

And Job puzzles over the silence of God:

The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;

he covers the eyes of its judges—

if not he, who then is it? (9:24)

This seeming silence of God is broken in the person of Jesus, especially on the cross, when God identifies with the suffering and victimhood of the poor and oppressed in face of injustice—Job's faith is vindicated:

For I know that my Redeemer lives,

and at the last he will

stand upon the earth... (19:25).

Death is not the end of the story. Resurrection in this life is the power of God *within* the struggle for a better world evoking, inspiring and sustaining hope for integrity, justice and peace. In this way the Christian story is 'redemptive' and 'plausible'. When it remains solely a story of ritual and private devotion it appears 'unreal' and 'lifeless', a far cry from the cry of Jesus' anguish on the cross as he entered into the depths of human suffering: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mt 27:46)

NOTES

1. *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006) 149.

2. *ibid*, 155

3. See for a fuller treatment, John Polkonghorne, *Exploring Reality*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005; and *Quantum Physics and Theology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

4. For example, Kerry Walters, *Atheism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2010) 68-72.

5. 'In Sickness and in Health', *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979) 112.

6. *In Search of Civilization* (London: Allen Lane, 2009) 114.

AMORIS LAETITIA & SENSUS FIDELIUM

NIHALABEYASINGHA

TWO SYNODS were convoked specifically to discuss the issue of marriage and family. The end result was that the prevailing doctrine, usage and understanding of these realities were repeated. The bishops gathered together could get no further.

As Pope Francis said in *Amoris Laetitia* (=AL)2:

The Synod process allowed for an examination of the situation of families in today's world, and thus for a broader vision and a renewed awareness of the importance of marriage and the family. The complexity of the issues that arose revealed the need for continued open discussion of a number of doctrinal, moral, spiritual, and pastoral questions. The thinking of pastors and theologians, if faithful to the Church, honest, realistic and creative, will help us to achieve greater clarity. The debates carried on in the media, in certain publications and even among the Church's ministers, range from an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding, to an attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations.

At that point, one option would have been that of Paul VI, and *Humanae Vitae* (1968)¹. But, now almost fifty years later, we are aware of the consequences of that action. Yet there are some who uphold that approach. The option that Pope Francis has opted for, as stated in AL3 is

Since 'time is greater than space', I would make it clear that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the *magisterium*. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in

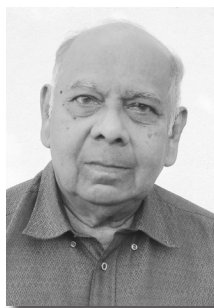
the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (cf. Jn 16:13), until he leads us fully into the mystery of Christ and enables us to see all things as he does. Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For 'cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied'

The statement of the Pope that 'time is greater than space' is a reference to *Evangelii Gaudium* #222-225. It is basically a call to give time for growth, development, to allow God's grace to work within individuals and communities. 'Space' is an area where we want to dominate, live by ideologies and insist on falling in line with a rigid application of teaching and doctrine. In doing so, he is well aware of LG #12 and the International Commission of Theologians' *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*² (2014) # 74-80. When Newman wrote *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (1859)³, it was to demonstrate that the faithful (as distinct from their pastors) have their own, active role to play in conserving and transmitting the faith. It is significant that Pope Francis says explicitly that 'not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the *magisterium*.' This is tantamount to stating that the bishops have seen a disparity between the ideals urged upon us and our Christian faith and the difficult challenges in which the faithful are called upon to live, but that they have been unable to find

a bridge over the divide.

In this process, the Pope acknowledges like Newman, that Christians have their own active role to play in conserving, transmitting and living the faith. In this process, 'the thinking of pastors and theologians, if faithful to the Church, honest, realistic and creative, will help us to achieve greater clarity.' (AL 2). The Pope is not speaking of abstract realities. He is not advocating a re-assertion of the past or a free fall unto cultural relativism. There is the need to rediscover what is essential to the Christian way of life, rediscover ways to ritualize that and reformulate what those rituals mean in terms that are faithful both to the teachings of Jesus and the experience of living according to them. This process will take a very long time as we learn from history. What he says is that 'the Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired by love, then the Lord reigns there, with his joy and his peace.' (AL 315). From there the living out of the realities connected with sexual life will emerge—slowly, but surely.

The Pope advocates gradualness in pastoral care (AL 293-295), discernment (AL 293-306) and explains the logic of pastoral mercy (AL 307-312), within the context of his key principle 'time is greater than space'. Pope Francis is definitely not confining himself to abstract concepts. He uses the word 'concrete' often (at least 20 times in AL) and touches on issues that are more appropriate to pastoral and homiletic discourse than to academic and scientific writing. Most important of all, he notes the importance of conscience. 'We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.' (AL 37). What he envisages is a possible



Fr. Nihal Abeyasingha has degrees in civil law, philosophy, Buddhism and theology both catholic and evangelical. He was a professor at the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka, and has also been in pastoral ministry. Now he is in retirement.

development of lived doctrine and morality in the Christian community. Such developments do take place, often by a long and circuitous process. Humphrey O'Leary notes five stages, where a movement takes place in stages. Stage One, where the subject is not mentioned; Stage Two, where the practice is outright rejected; Stage Three, where some practice is allowed as exception; Stage Four, where the exception is encouraged and Stage Five, where the exception becomes the norm. Think of the Chinese and Malabar liturgical controversies of the 17th century; forbidding form criticism in the interpretation of the scriptures in the early 20th century; *Mortalium Animos* (1928) of Pius XI rejecting the ecumenical movement; Pius XII ruling out the celebration of the liturgy in the vernacular at the 1956 International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy and many other instances.

Development of Doctrine and Usage:

Two such cases I would briefly outline are the development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the church's attitude to usury. In regard to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception for a long time, there was legitimate disagreement based on sound argumentation that all human beings (including Mary) needed Christ to be saved. Based on this premise, Mary could not have been conceived immaculate. But John Duns Scotus (1265/6-1308) offered a different perspective on Christ and why God would preserve Mary from all taint of sin at her conception. In *Lectura in*

Librum Tertium Sententiarum d.3 q, 1, he wrote³:

Christ was the most perfect mediator. Therefore, he exercised the highest degree of mediation in favour of another person. Now he could not be a most perfect mediator and could not repair the effects of sin to the highest degree, if he did not preserve his mother from Original Sin (as we shall prove). Therefore, since he was the most perfect mediator regarding the person of his mother, from this it follows that he preserved her from Original sin.'

It was several years later that in 1483, Pope Sixtus IV addressed the controversy over the Immaculate Conception, and gave Duns Scotus' conclusion in favor of the doctrine papal approval. This approval, it should be noted, did not mean 'Everybody but Scotus is wrong.' It simply meant that, in addition to the other theories of how Mary was preserved from sin floating around in the Catholic world, Scotus' view was admitted to the discussion as a legitimate contender. After this, there wasn't much of a quarrel in the Church. Most people happily celebrated the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. It was celebrated in the East (in the 5th century in Syria); then found its way in the 8th century to the Byzantine area of southern Italy and went from there to Normandy and eventually celebrated in Rome in 1568 (a very slow process).

The controversy died down (although there were holdouts among some Dominicans, who stuck with Thomas' theology on Mary's holiness right up until 1854 when the doctrine was defined). When it was defined in 1854, the distinction of Scotus was used: 'in the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.' It is the same sentiment that is used in the Opening Prayer of the Mass. But for the average Catholic it was a settled matter that the Church had arrived at a clearer understanding of Scripture by seeing just how full of *charis* (grace) Mary really was, when the angelic greeting '*Kaire, Kecharitomene*'

(Hail, full of grace!) gave her a title as pregnant with meaning as her womb (Lk 1:28). Indeed, even early Reformers like Martin Luther had no problem with the doctrine.

In regard to usury, the general view prohibited usury. 'Usury is where anything more is required in return than was given. For example, if you lend 10 solidi and you seek anything more in return (*et amplius quesieris*), or if you lend one measure of wheat and you demand more in return' as Gratian stated (*circa* 1145)⁶. But Peter of John Olivi (1248-1298), *Tractatus de emptioibus et venditionibus, de usuris, de restitutionibus* (written *circa* 1295) granted that 'It is not possible to demand anything more in return (than the sum lent) without violating both equity and equality (*absque aperta lesura equitatis et equalitatis*).' Then he went on to explain 'The reason why [money of a certain kind] can be bought or exchanged for a price [more than itself] is because . . . money which in the firm intent of its owner is directed toward the production of probable profit (*ad aliquod probabile lucrum*) possesses not only the qualities of money in its simple sense but beyond this a kind of seminal cause of profit within itself, which we commonly call 'capital' (*communiter capitale vocamus*). And therefore it possesses not only its simple numerical value as money/measure but it possesses in addition a superadded value (*valor superadiunctus*).' From that point on, it was a long journey before the idea of interest on money given on loan was understood. Claudius Salmasius (1588-1653) pointed out the productive function of usury. Robert Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) was the first to identify the connection between usury and property rights. He saw the difference between the present and the future value of money. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) wrote *A Defense of Usury* (1787).

Vix pervenit (On Usury and Other Dishonest Profit) was an encyclical, promulgated by Pope Benedict XIV on 1 November 1745, which condemned the practice

of charging interest on loans as usury⁸. The encyclical was addressed to the Bishops of Italy. The Holy Office applied the encyclical to the whole of the Roman Catholic Church on 29 July 1836, during the reign of Pope Gregory XVI. By degrees a certain number of Catholic writers relaxed their severity. Economists generally uphold the theoretical lawfulness of interest on loans. For a long time civil law was in agreement with canon law; but as early as the 16th century, Germany allowed interest at 5 percent; in France, on the contrary, interest on loans was forbidden until the Decree of October 1789. Contemporary laws always consider the loan for consumption as gratuitous in principle, but allow a stipulation for the payment of interest to be added. The Holy See admits practically the lawfulness of interest on loans, even for ecclesiastical property, though it has not promulgated any doctrinal decree on the subject. The Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1917, allowed those responsible for the church's financial affairs at the parochial and diocesan levels to invest in interest-bearing securities 'for the legal rate of interest (unless it is evident that the legal rate is exorbitant), or even for a higher rate, provided that there be a just and proportionate reason.' Thus, it took a long time from Peter of John Olivi for distinctions to be made and interest to be considered lawful, while usury (exorbitant interest is always unlawful). But the basis for the change was a different view of money—as Peter of John Olivi stated, money could be directed toward the production of probable profit. Thus, interest is permissible, but exorbitant interest is never permissible⁹.

The Scriptures

To return to a possible functioning of the *sensus fidelium* in regard to the problem issues in AL, the Pope says that rules set forth a good which can never be disregarded¹⁰ (AL304). But rules in the particular situation are not helpful or desirable (AL 35 cf. 2, 49, 201, 300). The

Pope acknowledges that there are pressures on people from various directions—a culture, which pressures young people not to start a family (AL 40); forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that often puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families.(AL 46). In addition, there are situations where people are unable to live the Christian life in its fullness. What about them?

Following this divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner: she seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good, to take loving care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work... When a couple in an irregular union attains a noteworthy stability through a public bond—and is characterized by deep affection, responsibility towards the children and the ability to overcome trials—this can be seen as an opportunity, where possible, to lead them to celebrate the sacrament of Matrimony'. (AL 78)

When faced with difficult situations and wounded families, it is always necessary to recall this general principle: 'Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations' (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84). The degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision. Therefore, while clearly stating the Church's teaching, pastors are to avoid judgments that do not take into account the complexity of various situations, and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition. (AL79)

The instruction is addressed to pastors. They are to offer a service to help assist wounded families to live their calling in their particular situation as best they can.

Reviewing the Scriptural Tradition

The idea of harmonious lifelong relationships in marriage appears in imperial literature. Christians by and large inherited the marital

practices and ideology of their predecessors, but differed especially in two points. They condemned divorce and re-marriage after divorce and secondly, esteemed the refusal to marry and commitment to lifelong virginity more highly than marriage¹¹. Not until *De Bono Coniugali* of Augustine was marriage given a full theoretical treatment. Augustine countered extreme views against marriage e.g. those of Jerome in *Adversus Jovinianum*, that privileged virginity over the sanctioned pleasures of marriage¹².

Scripture texts on marriage do not give absolute rules, but offer formation and reasoning about matters of belief and practice. It is very intriguing that the Canticle of Canticles is part of the canonical scriptures. In its text, there is no mention of God. At no point is a marriage celebrated or even suggested. The sexual union between the partners is evoked throughout (may be even considered provocative at times. Cf the description of parts of her body Cant. 7:1-5). There is no mention of the procreation of children.

The first biblical commentary ever written was on *The Song of Songs* by Origen (3rd century), whose allegorical approach lies at the root of later Christian interpretation of the Song. For ancient interpreters the *Song of Songs* was reckoned among the deepest and most difficult texts in the Bible. The short eight chapters of the *Song of Songs* have generated more commentary than almost any other book of the Bible.¹³

In medieval Christian hermeneutics, different layers of Scripture were distinguished. First of all, the literal sense of the text, also called the historical meaning or narrative, was opposed to the non-literal spiritual or mystical sense. The non-literal sense, in turn, could be differentiated into an allegorical, an anagogical and a tropological or moral sense. Allegorically, the Old Testament, and thus the Song, was interpreted as a typology of Christ and the Christian Church. In the anagogical reading, events were

interpreted in relation to their ultimate fulfilment in the kingdom of heaven. The tropological interpretation placed the allegorical and anagogical meaning of the text in the light of the life and behaviour of the individual Christian. For medieval monastic authors, the literal sense of the Song was problematic; it is a love song in the form of a dialogue, possibly between Solomon and his Egyptian bride, in which God does not occur. Therefore, emphasis was laid on the spiritual meanings that can be found in the Song: the bridegroom and bride were either interpreted allegorically, as God and the Church, or tropologically, as the Word and the human soul. This made the text a story about the longing of the Church for God or the striving of the soul for union with Christ. However, in the twelfth century the focus shifted to the moral meaning of the Song as the soul's mystical union with God as the primary mode of interpretation¹⁴. In more recent times, 'double meaning' is used as a hermeneutical principle and leads to discover allusions to a messianic meaning developed within the poem that celebrated the love of Solomon and the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh¹⁵. Thus, the Biblical perspective offers many possibilities of reflection and attempts to live covenanted love today.

Marriage as it is understood today has come a long way since Biblical times. Each generation has moulded the marriage concept to make sense to them within their own cultural context. Is it fair to say that the Bible does not provide enough guidelines on the subjects of marriage and sex; therefore each generation revised the few rules there are to suit themselves? The fact that morality has changed and is changing is undeniable. We will have to make a responsible distinction between cultural customs and religious values. Our culture will be ever changing and customs that were once acceptable are no longer acceptable today¹⁶. What is the Christian call today?

The Road Ahead

In today's world as AL 41 states:

'The Synod Fathers noted that 'cultural tendencies in today's world seem to set no limits on a person's affectivity'; indeed, 'a narcissistic, unstable or changeable affectivity does not always allow a person to grow to maturity'. They also expressed concern about the current 'spread of pornography and the commercialization of the body, fostered also by a misuse of the internet, and about those 'reprehensible situations where people are forced into prostitution'. In this context, 'couples are often uncertain, hesitant and struggling to find ways to grow. Many tend to remain in the early stages of their affective and sexual life.'

And yet the challenge is to grow beyond the early stages of affective and sexual life into the maturity of love. As AL 135 states:

It is not helpful to dream of an idyllic and perfect love needing no stimulus to grow. A celestial notion of earthly love forgets that the best is yet to come, that fine wine matures with age. As the Bishops of Chile have pointed out, 'the perfect families proposed by deceptive consumerist propaganda do not exist. In those families, no one grows old, there is no sickness, sorrow or death... Consumerist propaganda presents a fantasy that has nothing to do with the reality which must daily be faced by the heads of families. It is much healthier to be realistic about our limits, defects and imperfections, and to respond to the call to grow together, to bring love to maturity and to strengthen the union, come what may.'

That is the struggle that people are going through and it is the situation, where pastoral care and concern is called for. As Pope Francis admits, we are at a stage when 'At times we find it hard to make room for God's unconditional love in our pastoral activity' (AL 311) with its footnote 364: 'Perhaps out of a certain scrupulosity, concealed beneath a zeal for fidelity to the truth, some priests demand of penitents a purpose of amendment so lacking in nuance that it causes mercy to be obscured by the pursuit of a supposedly pure

justice. For this reason, it is helpful to recall the teaching of Saint John Paul II, who stated that the possibility of a new fall 'should not prejudice the authenticity of the resolution' (*Letter to Cardinal William W. Baum on the occasion of the Course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary* [22 March 1996], 5: *Insegnamenti* XIX/1 [1996], 589).

On the other hand 'Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin - which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such - a person can be living in God's grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church's help to this end' (AL 305) with its footnote 351: 'In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments. Hence, 'I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber, but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy' (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* [24 November 2013], 44: AAS 105 [2013], 1038). I would also point out that the Eucharist 'is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak' (*ibid.*, 47: 1039).'

Thus, the way forward is that the situation will develop as it may be handled (or mishandled?) by pastoral ministers and lay persons in situations that are outside the norm trying to discover the demands of the gospel in their situation. The life of the believing community goes on in a world that is facing rapid change at all levels in which people live —people who are rational, and are selfish in their choices. Salvation history works itself out not in a sterile situation free from sin, but in the midst of human fragility¹⁷. Just as the distinctions of Scotus led to the clarification of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the contribution of Peter of John Olivi began the process of reflection that has led to the lawfulness of taking interest, so also in the case of sexual morality, there are several negative factors and myths¹⁸ operating to prevent the development and maturing of the

initial attractions that brings people together.

Some Insights of Recent Times:

As pastors and people try to live the demands of the gospel, there are several contributions of recent thinking that may or may not influence the direction of 'discernment' and the search for discovering the demands of the gospel. This would perhaps include the entire range of positions in regard to sexual morality. Some of these areas that may need to be reviewed and either incorporated into Christian life or rejected as unsuitable for integration in the context of following Christ could be briefly named. Which of them, if any, would have an impact on Christian life, it is difficult to predict.

1. The notion of complementarity of sexes: Over the course of the last half-century, the Vatican embraced sexual complementarity as the foundation of its theological anthropology. Sister Prudence Allen¹⁹, recently named by Pope Francis to the International Theological Commission stated that the word 'complementarity' appears in none of the cited sources from 750 BC to AD 1500. Previously, those who asserted essential differences between the sexes also asserted the superiority of men. The closest Allen comes to early traces of what later became complementarity is in the work of the twelfth-century abbess Hildegard von Bingen. Perhaps this concept needs to be rethought. Linked with this would be trying to understand a whole range of literature that currently circulates together with the contribution of Pope John Paul II and his series of 129 discourses (Sep 1979 to Nov 1984) on the Theology of the Body²¹ and Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas est* (2005) with its discussion of *eros* and *agape*.

2. New Questions as regards what sexuality is: One of the more interesting critiques of views on current sexuality is the work of Michel Foucault. In the first volume of the history, Foucault famously states that while 'as defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden

acts,' 'the nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage'. In *The Use of Pleasure*, in contrast to either of these definitions, the Greeks of the classical period, rather than categorizing sexual activity in terms of the sex of the desired object, thus dividing among homosexual and heterosexual, categorized in terms of the dominance or passivity of the desired role, thus classing boys and women—as passive—together as objects of desire for men.

3. Homosexuality: There were same sex friendships called 'sworn friendships'²³ They were not only recognized; at least in practice at a point in the history of the Church, they were even ritually sanctioned. Recently, Bishop Johan Bonny²⁴ of Antwerp has suggested that homosexual couples, divorced and remarried Catholics, and cohabiting pairs should be given some sort of Church blessing as part of a 'diversity of rituals' that would recognize the 'exclusiveness and stability' of their unions.

4. The nature of the biological act: The official papal teaching banning the use of 'artificial' contraceptives for family planning is based on the belief that the biological 'laws of conception' show that each and every act of sexual intercourse has procreation as their natural 'finality' and 'significance.' From such a belief, the moral requirement is inferred that couples engaging in sexual intercourse must always be open to procreation. However, the vast majority of acts of sexual intercourse do not have the biological 'capacity' for procreation, and therefore they cannot have procreation as their 'finality' or 'significance.'

As for the intention of the agents, the Bible identifies a variety of morally worthy non-conceptive motives for engaging in sexual intercourse. This is confirmed by the evolutionary biology of human reproduction, and sociology, among other disciplines. The use of modern contraceptives can facilitate one or more of sexual intercourse's non-conceptive meanings, as well as have additional morally worthy purposes—e.g.

family planning, following the requirements of responsible parenthood (*Humanae Vitae* 10). Theologians are requesting a consideration of change²⁵.

The Progress of Discernment

There are some significant approaches to the situation of persons in irregular situations. Christoph Cardinal Schoenburg of Vienna, has proposed a method for his Archdiocese²⁶. Based around five questions, his proposal aims to help such faithful on a path of discernment, assist them in an examination of conscience and facilitate their integration into the Church's life. The five questions focus on i. What is the situation regarding your children? ii. What is the situation regarding your separated wife or husband? iii. Have you overcome guilt and feelings of guilt? iv. To faithfully married couples: How can you deepen your relationship and make it even happier? v. What does my conscience tell me? What is God asking of me?

Quite different are the *Pastoral Guidelines for Implementing Amoris Laetitia* of Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia (July 1, 2016): With divorced and civilly-remarried persons, Church teaching requires them to refrain from sexual intimacy. This applies even if they must (for the care of their children) continue to live under one roof. Undertaking to live as brother and sister is necessary for the divorced and civilly-remarried to receive reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance, which could then open the way to the Eucharist. Such individuals are encouraged to approach the Sacrament of Penance regularly, having recourse to God's great mercy in that sacrament if they fail in chastity.

Very fascinating is the proposal of the bishops (of the Buenos Aires Pastoral Region), which they drafted to implement Chapter 8 of AL. They sent these to Pope Francis and he warmly approved the guidelines²⁸. This is certainly a beginning and needs to be

integrated in the pastoral praxis of the church on a wider scale.

They suggested:

1) Firstly, we should remember that it is not advisable to speak of 'permissions' to have access to sacraments, but of a discernment process in the company of a pastor. It is a 'personal and pastoral discernment' (AL #300).

2) In this path, the pastor should emphasize the fundamental proclamation, the kerygma, so as to foster or renew a personal encounter with the living Christ (cf. AL#58).

3) Pastoral accompaniment is an exercise of the 'via caritatis'. It is an invitation to follow 'the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement' (AL#296). This itinerary requires the pastoral charity of the priest who receives the penitent, listens to him/her attentively and shows him/her the maternal face of the Church, while also accepting his/her righteous intention and good purpose to devote his/her whole life to the light of the Gospel and to practise charity (cf. AL# 306).

4) This path does not necessarily finish in the sacraments; it may also lead to other ways of achieving further integration into the life of the Church: greater presence in the community, participation in prayer or reflection groups, engagement in ecclesial services, etc. (cf. AL# 299)

5) Whenever feasible depending on the specific circumstances of a couple, especially when both partners are Christians walking the path of faith, a proposal may be made to resolve to live in continence. AL does not ignore the difficulties arising from this option (cf. footnote 329) and offers the possibility of having access to the sacrament of Reconciliation if the partners fail in this purpose (cf. footnote 364, recalling the teaching that Saint John Paul II sent to Cardinal W. Baum, dated 22 March, 1996).

6) In more complex cases, and when a declaration of nullity has not been

obtained, the above mentioned option may not, in fact, be feasible. Nonetheless, a path of discernment is still possible. If it is acknowledged that, in a concrete case, there are limitations that mitigate responsibility and culpability (cf. 301-302), especially when a person believes he/she would incur a subsequent fault by harming the children of the new union, AL offers the possibility of having access to the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist (cf. footnotes 336 and 351). These sacraments, in turn, prepare the person to continue maturing and growing with the power of grace.

7) However, it should not be understood that this possibility implies unlimited access to sacraments, or that all situations warrant such unlimited access. The proposal is to properly discern each case. For example, special care should be taken of 'a new union arising from a recent divorce' or 'the case of someone who has consistently failed in his obligations to the family' (AL#298). Also, when there is a sort of apology or ostentation of the person's situation 'as if it were part of the Christian ideal' (AL#297). In these difficult cases, we should be patient companions, and seek a path of reinstatement (cf. AL#297, 299).

8) It is always important to guide people to stand before God with their conscience. A useful tool to do this is the 'examination of conscience' proposed by AL# 300, specifically in relation to 'how did they act towards their children' or the abandoned partner. Where there have been unresolved injustices, providing access to sacraments is particularly outrageous.

9) It may be convenient for an eventual access to sacraments to take place in a discreet manner, especially if troublesome situations can be anticipated. At the same time, however, the community should be accompanied so that it may grow in its spirit of understanding and acceptance, without letting this situation create confusion

about the teaching of the Church on the indissoluble marriage. The community is an instrument of mercy, which is 'unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous' (AL#297).

10) Discernment is not closed, because it 'is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized' (AL#303), according to the 'law of gradualness' (AL#295) and with confidence in the help of grace.

This is why we would like to welcome the following words of the Pope: 'I also encourage the Church's pastors to listen [to the faithful] with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church' (AL#312).

Dated 5 September 2016, Pope Francis replied To the Bishops of the Buenos Aires Pastoral Region, addressing himself to Mons. Sergio Alfredo Fenoy, Delegate of the Region.

Dear brother,

I received the document of the Buenos Aires Pastoral Region entitled 'Basic criteria for the implementation of chapter VIII of *Amoris laetitia*'. Thank you very much for sending it, and let me congratulate you on the work that you have undertaken: a true example of accompaniment of priests...and we all know how necessary it is for a bishop to stay close to his priests and for priests to stay close to their bishop. The bishop's 'neighboring' neighbor is the priest, and the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself begins, for us bishops, precisely with our priests.

The document is very good and thoroughly specifies the meaning of chapter VIII of *Amoris laetitia*. **There are no further interpretations.** And I am confident that it will do much good.

May the Lord reward this effort of pastoral charity. And it is precisely pastoral charity that drives us to go out to meet the strayed, and, once they are found, to initiate a path of acceptance, discernment and reinstatement in

the ecclesial community. We know this is tiring, it is 'hand-to-hand' pastoral care which cannot be fully addressed with programmatic, organizational or legal measures, even if these are also necessary. It simply entails accepting, accompanying, discerning, reinstating.

Out of these four pastoral attitudes the least refined and practised is discernment; and I deem it urgent to include training in personal and community discernment in our Seminaries and Presbyteries. Finally, I would like to recall that *Amoris laetitia* resulted from the work and prayers of the whole Church, with the mediation of two Synods and the Pope. For this reason, I recommend a full catechesis of the Exhortation, which will, most certainly, contribute towards the growth, consolidation and holiness of the family. Once again, thank you for your work and let me encourage you to carry on studying and teaching *Amoris laetitia* in the different communities of the dioceses. Please, do not forget to pray and to remind others to pray for me.

May Jesus bless you and may the Holy Virgin take care of you.

Fraternally,
FRANCIS

Conclusion:

Basic to any conclusion is: 'Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin—which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such—a person can be living in God's

NOTES

1. R. McClory, *Turning point: the inside story of the Papal Birth Control Commission, and how Humanae Vitae changed the life of Patty Crowley and the future of the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1995); Charles E. Curran, *Loyal Dissent: Memoir of a Catholic Theologian* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006); Charles E. Curran, 'After *Humanae Vitae*: A Decade of 'lively Debate' in: *Hospital Progress* 59/7 (July 1978) 84-89; Janet E. Smith, *Humanae Vitae: A*

grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church's help to this end' (AL 305). The pastoral role respects the law (there is no gradualness in the law), but is not legalistic (time is greater than space). The call to follow Christ remains, even though one finds oneself in an 'objectively' irregular situation. One embraces that call with one's whole being in the context of doing one's best in that situation.

There have already been in the church two disciplines that have been practiced during various periods of its history to achieve specific goals. First, there was the catechumenate (seeking to incorporate into the church, persons who were not yet baptized. Here the doctrinal element was foremost)²⁹. Secondly, there was the penitential discipline (seeking to re-incorporate those who had deviated from what was required of them by the enlightenment of baptism—to offer them a second plank of salvation, stressing repentance)³⁰. Perhaps the present would be an opportune moment to consider the institution of a discipline of discernment that provides a programme for those wishing to search in honesty for what they can do in their particular situations, combining reason, virtue in the context of gradualness in pastoral care (AL#293-295), discernment (AL# 293-306) and the logic of pastoral mercy (#AL 307-312) aware that 'time is greater than space', in the spirit in which Pope Francis has heartily endorsed the initiatives of the Bishops of the Pastoral Region of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It could even be the inauguration of a new mission in itself.

Generation Later (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1991); William H. Shannon, *The Lively Debate: Response to Humanae Vitae* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1970); Paul F. de Ladurantaye, 'From *Humanae Vitae* to *Donum Vitae*: Symmetry and Consistency in Catholic Biomedical Teaching' in: *Linacre Quarterly* 66/1 (1999) 7-20

2. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/

[rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html](#)

3. Cf. <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/rambler/consulting.html>

4. 'Reversal of Position by the Church', in *The Month* (Feb 2000) 68-70

5. Cf. C. Balic, 'Joannes Duns Scotus et Historia Immaculatae Conceptionis', *Antonianum* 30(1955) 36-58, 108-118. On the opposite side stood such outstanding scholars as Thomas Aquinas, who in *Commentary on Sentences*, Book 3, d1, q 1 a 1: Christ did not need to be redeemed, since he is the head of the human race, but all other persons had to be redeemed through him. Therefore, neither the Blessed Virgin nor any other person before Christ could have been given this privilege. Again in *STh* 3, 27,2: ... if the Blessed Virgin Mary did not contract Original Sin, she would not have needed redemption through Christ, Now this would have been out of place, since Christ had to be saviour. Cf. also Thomas M. Izbicki, 'The Immaculate Conception and ecclesiastical politics from the Council of Basel to the Council of Trent: The Dominicans and their foes', in *Archiv fuer Reformationsgeschichte* 96/1 (2014) 145-170; Sarah J. Boss (ed.), *Mary: The Complete Resource* (London: Burns and Oates, 2007) esp. 207-235 for development of doctrine of Immaculate Conception.

6. Gratian, *Decretum* II. 14. 3. c. 4

7. J.B.C. Murray, *The History of Usury* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lipicot & Co, 1866); Glyn Davies, *A History of Money* (Cardiff: Un. Of Wales, 1994); Benjamin N. Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1949).

8. The pope stated: 'The nature of the sin called usury has its proper place and origin in a loan contract . . . [which] demands, by its very nature, that one return to another only as much as he has received. The sin rests on the fact that sometimes the creditor desires more than he has given . . . , but any gain which exceeds the amount he gave is illicit and usurious. . . . One cannot condone the sin of usury by arguing that the gain is not great or excessive, but rather moderate or small; neither can it be condoned by arguing that the borrower is rich; nor even by arguing that the money borrowed is not left idle, but is spent usefullyCf. Tomas Storck, 'Is Usury Still a Sin?', in *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 36/3 (Fall 2009), 447-474.

9. In *Quando nel principio* (1923), Pius XI cites social justice as a governing principle of the peoples of this earth that precedes and transcends the state. In the matter of war reparations the pope reminds the conquering forces that both social justice and social love, as well as the self-interest of the creditor states and of all nations, does not allow the restitution from the debtor of that which can be paid back only with the complete exhaustion of its powers and reserves.

10. In line with the development of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, no salvation without Christ; in regard to usury, no exorbitant interest.

11. Judith Evan Grubbs, *Law and family in late antiquity: the Emperor Constantine's marriage legislation* (New York: Oxford University Press 1999); Edward Westermarck, *The history of human marriage* (London: Macmillan 1921); Frances Gies—Joseph Gies, *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages* (London: Harpercollins 1987).

12. Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali, De Sancta Virginitate* (P.G. Walsh ed. & tr., Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001); Jane Barr, 'The Vulgate Genesis and Jerome's Attitude towards Women.' in *Studia Patristica*, 18 (1982) 268-273; Jane Barr, 'The Influence of Saint Jerome on Medieval Attitudes to Women', Janet A. Soskice (ed.), *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition* (New York: 1990) 89-102. Cf. Savitri Ashok, 'By God, If Wommen Hadde Written Stories': A Feminist Glance at the Wife of Bath's Love Versions and Subversions' [An interesting analysis of Chaucer's character] at: <http://pintersociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Savitri-Ashok-10.pdf>

13. Judy Elise Lam, *The Canticle of Spiritual Direction: A Transformative Approach to the Song of Songs* (MA Dissertation, University of South Africa 2012), 1 at: uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/8103

14. Lieke Smits, 'A Union Not Only Of Bodies But Of Spirits': *The Image Of The Kiss In The Commentaries On The Song Of Songs Of Bernard Of Clairvaux And William Of St. Thierry* (MA Dissertation, Utrecht University, 2014) at: <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/298188>. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press 1961) 84 notes that the Canticle of Canticles especially for Cistercians is equivalent to a treatise on the love of God. Its aim is to touch the heart rather than the mind. Cf. Hilary Elizabeth Elder, *The*

- Song of Songs in late Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline poetry* (PhD Dissertation, Durham University, 2009) 107-116 at: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2165/>
15. Theodore of Mopsuetia (died 428) saw in the Canticle a poem celebrating marriage. Cf. Raymond Jacques Tournay, *Word of God, Song of Love: A Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Tr. J. Edward Crowley, Mahwah, NY 1988).
16. Maria Elizabeth Tukker, *Sexuality and marriage: Guidelines for the twenty-first century* ((MA Dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2011) at: <http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/25754/dissertation.pdf?sequence=1>; Peter Vardy, *The puzzle of sex* (London: HarperCollins 1997); Ralph Barnard, *Dis tyd dat Christene anders dink en praat oor seks* (Wellington: Hugenote Uitgewers 2000).
17. Moshe Weinfield, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972); Raymond F. Person Jr., *The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (Studies in Biblical Literature 2. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002)
18. William N. Eskridge Jr., 'Six Myths that Confuse the Marriage Equality Debate', *Valparaiso University Law Review* 46/1(2011)103-116.
19. *The Concept of Woman* I-III (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997, 2002, 2016).
20. Cf. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love and The History of the Christian Idea of Love* (Tr. Philip S. Watson)(Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1953; first pub. 1930)
21. Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: MA: Pauline Books and Media 2006); Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners* (Milwaukee, WI: Ascension 2004); Kenneth Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtya, Pope John Paul II* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press 1993); Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul's 'Man and Woman He Created Them'* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media 2007)
22. *The History of Sexuality. Introduction, II. The Uses of Pleasure, and III. Care of the Self* (Tr. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books, 1988-90; Original in French: Paris: Gallimard, 1976).
- Cf. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, & Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge 1995).
23. Cf. Allen J. Frantzen, *Same Sex Love from 'Beowulf' to 'Angels in America'* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); John Boswell, *Same Sex Unions in pre-modern Europe* (Visalia, CA: Vintage, 1991); Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia University 1966); Alan Bray, *The Friend*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006); Alan Bray, 'Friendship, the Family and Liturgy in Traditional Christianity', *Theology and Sexuality* 12(2000) 15-33; Lawa Gowing-Michael Hunter-Miri Rubin (eds.), *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe: 1300-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), esp. 88-109; Gabriel Herman, *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). From legal perspective in USA: William N. Eskridge, *The case for same-sex marriage: From sexual liberty to civilized commitment* (New York: Free Press 1996).
24. Johan Bonny (with: Roger Burggraave—Ilse Van Halst), *Mag ik? Dank je. Sorry. Vrijmoedige dialoog over Relaties, huwelijk en gezin* (Tiel: Lannoo 2016).
25. Cf. *The Tablet* (24 Sep 2016) 29. See Catholic Scholars' Statement on the Ethics of Using Contraceptives at <http://www.wijngaardsinstitute.com/statement-ethics-using-contraceptives/>
26. Aufmerksamkeiten: Seelsorgliche Handreichung für den Umgang mit Geschiedenen und mit Menschen, die an eine neue Partnerschaft denken at: http://media.wige.kategoriale-seelsorge.at.s3.amazonaws.com/Dateien/73749_aufmerksamkeiten.pdf,
27. http://archphila.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/AOP_AL-guidelines.pdf
28. <http://www.periodistadigital.com/religion/diocese/2016/09/18/religion-iglesia-amoris-laetitia-el-arzobispo-de-granada-asume-los-criterios-de-los-obispos-de-baires-sobre-los-divorciados.shtml> Cf. also <http://www.cyberteologia.it/2016/09/basic-criteria-for-the-implementation-of-chapter-viii-of-amoris-laetitia/>
29. Michel Dujarier, *A history of the catechumenate: The first six centuries* (New York: William H. Sadlier 1979); Thomas M. Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1992); Thomas

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30. Marie-Francois. Berrouard, 'La pénitence publique durant les six premiers siècles: Histoire et sociologie', *La Maison-Dieu* 118 (1974) 92-130; G. Oggioni, 'Storia e teologia della Penitenza. Bibliografia', *Problemi e orientamenti di Teologia Dogmatica*, (Marzorati, Milano: Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Milano 1957), 901-923; Bernhard Poschmann, *Paenitentia secunda : die kirchliche Busse im ältesten Christentum bis Cyprian und Origenes ; eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Bonn: P. Hanstein 1940); Nathaniel Marshall (a priest of the Church of England), *The Penitential Discipline of the Primitive Church for the First Four Hundred Years After Christ: Together with Its Declension from the Fifth Century Downwards to its present state impartially represented* (Oxford: John Henry Parker 1844) Available at: <http://archive.org/stream/>

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31. Thomas Michelet OP, 'Synode sur la famille: la voie de l'ordo paenitentium', in *Nova et Vetera*, 90, 1/2015, p. 55-80. Cf. Pope Francis asked Jesuits in Poland to teach discernment in seminaries as an aid to the ministry, 30 July 2016. 'Oggi la Chiesa ha bisogno di crescere nel discernimento, nella capacità di discernere. E soprattutto i sacerdoti ne hanno davvero bisogno per il loro ministero. Per questo occorre insegnare ai seminaristi e ai sacerdoti in formazione: loro abitualmente riceveranno le confidenze della coscienza dei fedeli. La direzione spirituale non è un carisma solamente sacerdotale, ma anche laicale, è vero. Ma, ripeto, bisogna insegnare questo soprattutto ai sacerdoti, aiutarli alla luce degli Esercizi nella dinamica del discernimento pastorale, che rispetta il diritto, ma sa andare oltre. Questo è un compito importante per la Compagnia.... Bisogna davvero capire questo: nella vita non è tutto nero su bianco o bianco su nero. No! Nella vita prevalgono le sfumature di grigio. Occorre allora insegnare a discernere in questo grigio.' Cf. <http://ilsismografo.blogspot.com/2016/08/vaticano-dialogo-del-papa-con-alcuni.html#more>

The Synod process allowed for an examination of the situation of families in today's world, and thus for a broader vision and a renewed awareness of the importance of marriage and the family. The complexity of the issues that arose revealed the need for continued open discussion of a number of doctrinal, moral, spiritual, and pastoral questions. The thinking of pastors and theologians, if faithful to the Church, honest, realistic and creative, will help us to achieve greater clarity. The debates carried on in the media, in certain publications and even among the Church's ministers, range from an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding, to an attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations.

(Amoris Laetitia par.2.)

LARGER FEARS FUEL CARDINALS' DIVORCE BEEF

ANDREW HAMILTON S.J.

IN THE YEARS after the Second Vatican Council many theologians gave public lectures to Melbourne audiences on renewal. Jesuit moral theologian Arnie Hogan encouraged the move from a command and control approach to Christian living, to an approach based on personal responsibility.

Many of his hearers thought he was not renewing but selling out faith. They flocked to his lectures to grill him. One evening someone asked him whether it was a mortal sin to miss Mass on Sundays. (Mortal sins were a ticket to hell, and in church teaching to miss Mass on Sunday was a mortal sin.)

In response he began to explain the importance of free consent, grave matter and mature decision etc. His questioner interrupted him, demanding a yes or no answer. Arnie again took the conversation to a broader level, only to be told, 'You are evading the question, Father. Is it, or is it not, a mortal sin to miss Mass on Sunday?'

Arnie paused for a moment and said, 'Well, for you, it would be!'

I was reminded of this story when reading that four cardinals had sent a letter to the Pope demanding yes or no answers as to whether his reflection *Amoris Laetitia* was faithful to Catholic tradition in its treatment of the reception by divorced Catholics of communion. On not receiving a reply they published their letter, and one cardinal followed it up with murmurs about impeachment.

The incident prompts reflection on the propriety of cardinals questioning a pope in this way and on the reasons why discussion of communion for the divorced should raise such passion.

I am in two minds about the cardinals' action. Those who consider it inappropriate argue that cardinals are chosen to act as a pope's consultants. They cannot exercise this role effectively if they are involved in public disagreement with him.

They also argue that it is vital for any community organisation to focus on what matters: the cause it represents and the people it serves. The cardinals' action switches the focus to politics as politics—the disagreements and power relationships between its leaders—to the detriment of the Catholic Church.

The four cardinals argued that they were merely accepting the Pope's invitation to open discussion of the issues raised in *Amoris Laetitia*. Certainly, an open exchange of views can allow the truth to appear. It also allows people to assess which of the participants in the debate are trustworthy in their pursuit of truth. Demanding yes or no answers to complex questions may put lead in your saddlebags in that respect.

The second question raised by the cardinals' letter is why making space for some married and divorced couples to receive communion should arouse such anxiety. The fact that space already exists in much catholic pastoral practice may suggest that the concern is symbolic of a more general anxiety.

I find illuminating a 17th century precedent for this kind of passionate debate. It concerned the conditions under which it might be lawful to act contrary to a law. Some argued that any judgment that the law does not apply may be based on probable evidence, even if it is less probable than the opposing evidence. Others claimed that the evidence must be more

probable than that for observing the law. Others insisted you must follow the safest course of action and so obey the law regardless of probability.

This fairly abstract debate, which however had large consequences, raged strongly, with all sides demanding that the Pope adjudicate in their favour. Perhaps the most revealing contribution was that of the French polymath Blaise Pascal in his satirical *Lettres Provinciales*. He portrayed the Jesuit backed probabilist case as lax and worldly—a rent-an-opinion-and-you-can-justify-anything job.

Pascal was a recent convert to a rigorist Catholic group, influenced by a reading of St Augustine, which opposed frequent communion. This suggests that underneath the debate about moral decision making was the anxiety that if personal responsibility were not put under strong restraint it would lead to licence and to the dilution of Catholic faith.

Pascal's rigorism reflects two aspects of the inheritance that St Augustine left to the church. First, Augustine emphasised the extent of the corruption of human minds and hearts as a result of the sin of Adam. This generated fear that left to themselves, people will not make trustworthy judgments about right and wrong.

The second aspect of Augustine's



Andrew Hamilton S.J. taught theology at the United Faculty of Theology for many years. He is currently editorial consultant of *Eureka Street* and a policy officer with Jesuit Social Services

inheritance derives from his portrayal of the church as a school within which people can learn to live just and ethical lives. This image can lead people to make paramount obedience to church teaching, and so can engender in them fear of moral collapse if it is disregarded.

Large fears of this kind fuelled the passion evident in the 17th century debates. They may also underlie the peremptory demands made of Pope Francis by the four cardinals.

Ironically the Pope also draws on Augustine's heritage. When he speaks of the great joy and energy that comes from knowing yourself to be a sinner who is loved by God and chosen to share that joy with others, he echoes Augustine's experience. In moral decision making, too, he may resonate with Augustine's aphorism: 'love, and do what you will'.

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AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS DIARY 2017, David Lovell Publishing, RRP \$32.00.

This is surely the best religious diary on the market. It covers the full liturgical year and the full calendar year. It begins with the First Sunday of Advent and runs through to the beginning of January 2018.

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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

January to April 2017

From the Feast of Mary the Mother of God to the third Sunday of Easter

(Year A).

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed while this final issue of *Compass* is current. It focuses on the readings for Sundays between January to April 2017, from the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God (New Year's Day) to the Third Sunday of Easter (Year A). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The New Year: As we move into the New Year, 2017, our first Sunday celebration is the Feast of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She accompanies us in the year ahead. We come to this new year with our desires for happiness, yet aware that there will be events and circumstances that will also have its challenges, if not tragedies. Mary's companionship with us through all these is guaranteed. She will 'mother' us, as she did Jesus.

The following Sunday (Jan 8) is the *Epiphany of Jesus*. This feast celebrates the 'manifestation' (*epiphania* in Greek) of Jesus to the world. Rather than focussing on the literal event of a star and its guidance of foreign magi to Jesus, it would be helpful to

remember the origins of the Feast. In the early centuries Epiphany was so important that it surpassed even Christmas. The Epiphany is the celebration of the universality of Jesus for a world in need of direction and spiritual nourishment. Epiphany is eternally relevant.

After Epiphany, we move to celebrate the first eight Sundays of Ordinary Time (OT). In these Sundays of Ordinary Time (OT 3-8) that lead us to Lent we follow the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel: Jesus calls his disciples (OT 3) and teaches them (OT 4-8). The themes of the gospel over these Sundays echo and continue in their unique way the call to discipleship celebrated through baptism. The Sunday second readings are from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. His struggle with the divided Corinthian followers of Jesus reveals his passion to have them come to unity, guided by the spirit and wisdom of Jesus. Similar tensions exist in our churches today. Paul's teachings from 2 Corinthians are still pertinent.

Lent

1. The First readings over the Sundays of Lent are important opportunities to celebrate the sacred story of Israel's

PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

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

2. The Second Reading during Lent comes from writings associated with Paul. These readings allow us to celebrate essential truths about our relationship with Jesus (Lent 1 and 2), God (Lent 3 and 4), and the Spirit (Lent 5). Lent 1, 3 and 5 focus on Paul's important letter to the Romans. The other Lent Sundays are letters written by Paul's disciples (2 Tim, Eph). Each of the selections is relevant for the respective Lenten theme celebrated.

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

- Lent 1 and 2 conventionally look at the stories of Jesus' temptation and transfiguration. In both stories in Mt, Jesus is portrayed as a faithful Jew,

committed to God in the midst of temptation and struggle. The highlight of Mt's gospel proclamation comes on Passion Sunday and Easter, with the narrative of Jesus passion, death and resurrection. He dies as king, and God raises him to life.

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

A final word about the Easter Gospel (April 15 and 16) might be helpful. This is the most important gospel proclamation of the whole liturgical year. Matthew portrays the resurrection of Jesus as an event of victory in the face of evil and human machinations. Political power and military might, symbolised by the presence of the guards posted at the entrance of the tomb, are unable to prevent God's action. This is an important and necessary truth we need to hear today, in a world and church entrapped by political power and might. God is the heart of everything and Matthew's risen Jesus is testament to this fundamental truth.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

January 1, 2017—Mary, Mother of God. New Year's Day: Num 6.22-27. Through Moses, the great leader, God offers a blessing to Aaron and all the people. It is a blessing of God's loving openness to the people. Gal 4.4-7. Paul reminds his listeners

that Jesus was born as a human being, subject to the teachings of the Torah. We are possessors of his spirit that has made us God's daughters and sons. Lk 2.16-21. Mary ponders what she hears about Jesus and then she and Joseph have him circumcised,

ensuring his covenantal fidelity to God. *Theme-God's Blessing*. The 'Aaronic blessing' from Numbers is God's blessing on all of us as this New Year begins. God's face is turned lovingly towards us, our families, those we care about and all who struggle.

January 8—Epiphany of Jesus: *Is 60:1-6*. God's light shines on creation and humanity. This makes a difference to how our world is perceived. *Eph 3:2-3.5-6*. The mystery of God's universal and hospitable love means that we share in God's life. *Mt 2:1-12*. The wise follow the stars; their eyes are on the heavens, their ear to the Scriptures and their desire on Jesus. *Theme-Being Enlightened*: At the core of every being is the inner light of God. We affirm our search for God and the way we draw close to God through Jesus. Epiphany is a continuous feast (however unrecognised) in the heart of every human being. Can we identify its manifestation today in the hearts of those we know?.

January 15—Ordinary Time 2: *Is 49:3, 5-6*. God's Servant is chosen from before time, with a mission of restoration to a broken and dispersed people. *1 Cor 1:1-3*. This is the beginning of a famous letter, in which the Corinthian Jesus followers are reminded of their call to sainthood, and their relationship to God and Jesus. *Jn 1:29-34*. John the Baptist recognises Jesus as the chosen one and possessor of God's Spirit. *Theme—Spirit Possessed*: Our communion with Jesus through baptism and Eucharist reminds us that we, like Jesus, possess the Spirit of God. We are called, like the Servant, to proclaim restoration and hope to people

January 23—Ordinary Time 3: *Is 9:1-4*. This is a beautiful poem of God's overwhelming vision for humanity: light, peace and freedom in the midst of oppression. *1 Cor 1:10-13.17-18*. Paul addresses a divided group of Corinthian Jesus followers. The true source of unity is Jesus, the Good News. *Mt 4:12-23*. Jesus' presence and ministry echoes the Is

reading of liberation. Jesus calls his first community of disciples. *Theme-Liberation and Hope*: The hope expressed in the first reading's vision from Isaiah touches our deepest desires. Mt's Jesus expresses this as he calls his first disciples. How is our local faith community an expression of that hope and liberty, of Isaiah's vision?

January 29—Ordinary Time 4: *Zeph 2.3; 3.12-13*. The prophet speaks of the anawim (Hebrew), the 'poor' and 'humble' open to God. *1 Cor 1.26-31*. Paul reminds his audience that they are 'weak' and yet God's chosen ones. *Mt 5.1-12a*. Jesus proclaims the key characteristics of authentic discipleship. *Theme-Openness*: The readings invite us to reflect on who we are, limited, flawed, yet open to the action of God in our lives and world.

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

February 12—Ordinary Time 6: *Sir 15:15-20*. In this First Testament wisdom book the writer reveals God's wisdom that enables faithful people to live with freedom. *1 Cor 2:6-10*. Paul celebrates the wisdom of God, once hidden, now revealed in Jesus. *Mt 5:17-37*. Jesus affirms the teachings and wisdom of the OT and deepens their meaning for Matthew's Jewish audience. Rather than showing Jesus' teaching as antithetic to the OT, Mt emphasises Jesus in harmony with the OT and Torah teaching. The 'but' in the translation is neither accurate nor helpful. *Theme—Wisdom*:

PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

We all desire wisdom to live rightly, happily, in harmony with others and our world. All today's readings celebrate this search and locate true wisdom in God (Sirach) and Jesus. (1 Cor, Mt). What are signs of wisdom acting in our world? Who can we celebrate today who reveals true wisdom to us?

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

February 26-Ordinary Time 8: Is 49:14-15. God seeks to remember, console and celebrate. 1 Cor 4:1-5. Paul's relationship with God lies at the heart of everything he does. He will be judged simply by his fidelity to this relationship. Mt 6:24-34. Jesus teaches his disciples to trust in God and let go of unnecessary worries. Theme-Trust in God. Emphasis on material wealth and status can distract from true wealth and riches: one's relationship and intimacy with Isaiah's God, who wants to console and celebrate us. God is in love with us.

March 5-Lent 1: Gen 2:7f. This ancient story seeks to explain the reason for the presence of evil and human's cooperation with it. Everyone gets blamed! Rom 5:12-19. Jesus is God's obedient and righteous one in the plan of salvation. Mt 4:1-11 Jesus is tempted by the devil and remains faithful to God. Theme-Evil and Fidelity. The great human experiences that

cause suffering and misery are the focus for this first Sunday of Lent. The call to repentance and fidelity to God might typify the message to the local community.

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

March 19—Lent 3: *Ex 17:3-7.* The people complain about their thirst in the desert. *Rom 5:1-2,5-8.* Paul affirms God's love for us. This is our cause for hope. *Jn 4:5-42.* This is the great story of the woman at the well who meets the source of living water, Jesus. *Theme—Thirst Quenching:* For what do we thirst? What is our deepest desire? Today's gospel invites us to renew our relationship with the source of Living Water, who satisfies us deeply.

March 26—Lent 4: *1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13.* The anointing of David, the unexpected and unrecognised one, as king. *Eph 5:8-14.* We live in the light of God. *Jn 9.* Another great story: the gradual insight into Jesus of the man born blind. *Theme—Light and Seeing:* This Sunday can help us name the ways that we deeply see, interpret and know our lives and world. Today's gospel invites us to come to the source of light, Jesus.

April 2—Lent 5: *Ez 37:12-14.* God promises to open the graves of the dead, 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 and resurrection:* This Sunday climaxes great themes of Lent in preparation for Easter - our resurrection and life. What brings us to life? Are there any local and relevant examples

where life is happening?

April 9—Passion: *Mt 21:1-11* Jesus enters Jerusalem as its legitimate and recognised leader. *Is 50:4-7*. The song of the humble and attentive servant of God, ever alert and schooled in God's ways. *Phil 2:6-11*. The famous hymn celebrates Jesus' embraced service that leads to his exaltation. *Mt 26:14-27:66*. The passion and death of Jesus, Israel's exalted and humbled Leader. *Theme—The Suffering One*. Jesus reveals God's solidarity with the suffering, struggling and rejected.

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

April 14—Good Friday. *Is 52:13-53:12*. Here is another 'servant song' reflecting in length on the servant's innocent suffering for others. *Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9*. Jesus is compassionate with us who suffered. *Jn 18:1-19:42* Jesus, the exalted one, suffers, and dies as innocent lamb and acclaimed as king. The moment of death is also exaltation and victory. *Theme—Victory*. God's solidarity revealed through Jesus with the cries of suffering emitted by creation and human beings. God is victorious over death.

April 15 & 16—Easter: *Mt 28:1-10*. The Risen Jesus brings joy to the women who come to the tomb. Violence is overturned. *Theme—Joy*. In a world and among people who seem so sad and preoccupied with survival, this Easter message is central, offering a renewed vision: He is Risen!

April 23—Easter 2: *Acts 2:42-47*. The Jerusalem followers of Jesus are portrayed as sharing a common life. This is the fruit of Jesus' spirit active amongst them. *1 Pet 1:3-9*. The writer expresses the fruit of baptismal life. *Jn 20:19-31*. The Risen Jesus offers peace to the assembled disciples: 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.' *Theme—Being Blessed*. The Easter presence of Jesus brings God's blessedness to human beings feeling terrorised by life and its demands, and in a church that struggles.

April 30—Easter 3: *Acts 2. 14, 22-33*. Peter witnesses to the Risen Jesus on the day of Pentecost. *1 Pet 1.17-21*. Jesus, God's promised one, brings us to God, whom we call as 'Father'. *Lk 24.13-35*. Two disciples discover the Risen Jesus in their midst as they journey dispirited and disillusioned. Jesus gives them hope and courage. *Theme—The Journey*. We think of our journey; we remember what life is like for ourselves, those close to us, and parts of our world which seem to be in turmoil. On this Easter day we remember that the Risen Jesus is present to all this. He journeys with us and our world into the future.

Fr Michael Trainor is senior lecturer in biblical studies with Adelaide's Australian Catholic University, and adjunct lecturer with Flinders University.