MAKE DISCIPLES

This issue of Compass is mainly about the challenge of communicating the Good News, the opportunities that we have and the means that we devise for doing it. We open on a high note with Gerald O’Collins’ reflection on Pope Benedict’s Easter proclamation in St Peter’s Square to the faithful there assembled and to the many millions throughout the world who see it on television. Tony Doherty writes of the task of proclaiming the Good News in everyday contexts and reminds us that there are many ways of telling the story of Jesus. Geoffrey Plant explores the possibility of effective story-telling using contemporary means of communication, including evangelization in cyberspace. Leslee Sniatynskyj clarifies the theme of discipleship-as-a-journey in Luke’s Gospel and Acts of the Apostles. Chris Fleming and John O’Carroll provide a context for all the preceding with their essay on meaning: in the modern desacralised, ‘disenchanted’ world we risk living with a sense of meaninglessness…the antithesis of the pope’s ecstatic Easter proclamation in the first article.

It is significant that Jesus did not tell us to go out and make instant converts…rather, he told us to ‘make disciples of all the nations’. Discipleship is a process, a journey, a very subtle journey with many twists and turns, a journey that is very personal and particular to each individual. Making disciples, likewise, is a very subtle and relational task, more like education as contrasted with teaching pure and simple.

On the twenty-first of January last Pope Benedict addressed a letter to the faithful of the diocese of Rome concerning the urgent task of educating young people. The letter is a gem, and I recommend that readers download it for themselves from the Vatican website. To do this, go to http://www.vatican.va then click on The Holy See English, then click on Benedict XVI, then click on Letters, then click on 2008, then click on Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese of the City of Rome…January 21, 2008.

Benedict writes in this letter of ‘the problem of education’. We have at heart, he notes, the good of the people we love, especially our children, adolescents and young people. We are concerned about their formation, ‘about their ability to give their lives a direction and to discern good from evil’. We are concerned about their health, not only physical health but also moral health.

The task of education, Benedict writes, seems to be becoming more difficult. Some speak of an ‘educational emergency’. He cautions against laying blame on any group, not on the young, nor on the adults—though adults are strongly tempted to give up. Adults and young people have responsibilities that need to be recognized.

The pope rather lays the blame on a prevailing atmosphere in the culture, a ‘mind-set’ which is potentially corrosive of faith in the value of the human person and the meaning of truth and goodness. This ‘atmosphere’ makes it difficult to pass on ‘something that is valid and certain, rules of conduct, credible objectives around which to build life itself’.

Benedict invites his brothers and sisters of Rome not to be afraid—none of these difficulties, he assures them, is insurmountable. The difficulties, actually, are the other side of the coin of the gift of freedom. With freedom comes responsibilities. Every person is free, every person must make their own options:

Not even the greatest values of the past can be simply inherited; they must be claimed by us and renewed through an often anguishing personal option.

Today, Benedict goes on, ‘the foundations are shaken’, and as the challenges from the
surrounding culture make themselves felt, the call for a good education is coming from parents, teachers and society as a whole, while children and young people are ‘asking for it in their inmost being’.

We are blessed because we have our faith in God and Christ to support us and reassure us—‘his love reaches us wherever we are and just as we are, in our wretchedness and weakness, in order to offer us a new possibility of good’.

The pope then goes on to list several requirements for an authentic education:

• closeness and trust born of love, first of parents, then of teachers;
• truth that can be a guide in life;
• experience of suffering;
• and, most delicate of all, finding the right balance between freedom and discipline.

In striving for this balance teachers must not abdicate their authority in educating the young to accept the risk of freedom, while being constantly attentive in order to help them correct wrong ideas and choices.

Possibly the one requirement in the list that might surprise us is ‘the experience of suffering’. Do educators need to burden the young with awareness of suffering in our world?

Benedict explains himself:

Suffering is also part of the truth of our life. So, by seeking to shield the youngest from every difficulty and experience of suffering, we risk raising brittle and ungenerous people, despite our good intentions: indeed, the capacity for loving corresponds to the capacity for suffering and for suffering together.

Pope Benedict returns to make further reflections on how a sense of responsibility is crucial in education—responsibility of educators and of those being educated. It is a personal and shared responsibility. Society is not an abstraction, he writes, we are all in it and must contribute.

The pope concludes his letter with a paragraph from his recent encyclical Spe Salvi, on Christian hope:

The soul of education, as of the whole of life, can only be a dependable hope. Today, our hope is threatened on many sides and we even risk becoming, like the ancient pagans, people ‘having no hope and without God in the world’, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Ephesus (Eph. 2:12). What may be the deepest difficulty for a true educational endeavour consists precisely in this: the fact that at the root of the crisis of education lies a crisis of trust in life.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

My dear young friends!
I always remember with great joy the various occasions we spent together in Cologne in August 2005. At the end of that unforgettable manifestation of faith and enthusiasm that remains engraved on my spirit and on my heart, I made an appointment with you for the next gathering that will be held in Sydney in 2008. This will be the XXIII World Youth Day and the theme will be: ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:8).

The underlying theme of the spiritual preparation for our meeting in Sydney is the Holy Spirit and mission. In 2006 we focussed our attention on the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth. Now in 2007 we are seeking a deeper understanding of the Spirit of Love. We will continue our journey towards World Youth Day 2008 by reflecting on the Spirit of Fortitude and Witness that gives us the courage to live according to the Gospel and to proclaim it boldly.

—Message of Benedict XVI to the young people of the world on the occasion of the XXIII World Youth Day, 2008.
ON EASTER SUNDAY millions of people see on television or hear on the radio Pope Benedict XVI’s broadcast and blessing. In many languages he announces to the city of Rome and to the world the glorious news that lies at the heart of Christianity: ‘Jesus is risen from the dead. Alleluia.’

We should recognize, of course, the great differences between our cultural and historical setting and that in which, nearly 2,000 years ago, Peter, the first of the apostles, carried out his ministry. Yet in what the pope does on Easter Sunday there are profound echoes of what happened at the first Pentecost, when Peter announced in Jerusalem the resurrection of Jesus to ‘Parthians, Medes, Elamites; inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; Cretans and Arabs’ (Acts 2:9-11).

On Easter Sunday the television cameras catch the faces of those who have come to Rome from all over the world to stand in St. Peter’s Square and hear from Peter’s successor the good news that has changed the world: ‘God has raised up Jesus and of that all of us are witnesses’ (Acts 2:32). St. Peter’s witness to the resurrection lives on in a striking way in the Easter proclamation of Pope Benedict XVI.

To be sure, the church was founded on all the apostles. Together they formed the primary witnesses to Jesus Christ. They proclaimed the resurrection of the crucified Savior, admitted members of all nations into the new community and guided the early church with apostolic authority. But within this college of original witnesses, Peter had a special role as witness and foundation. To Peter alone were addressed the words ‘On this rock I will build my church’ (Mt 16:18).

Peter would suffer martyrdom in Rome in fidelity to his crucified and risen master. The church of Rome in time came to be recognized as the seat of distinctive authority and responsibility among all the Christian churches. The bishop of Rome was acknowledged to be called in a special way to do two things: to proclaim the saving truth revealed by Christ, and to maintain the communion of all the local churches in their common faith.

The distinctive role of leadership assigned to Peter did not isolate him from the other apostles. Paul, James, John, Barnabas and the rest also witnessed authoritatively to the good news and maintained unity among the churches. In the centuries that followed, the special responsibility of the bishop of Rome to uphold the truth about Christ and lovingly preserve Christian unity has always been exercised in collaboration with the college of bishops.

Other Witnesses

We should also remember the contributions of all the ‘founding fathers’ and ‘founding mothers’ at the origins of Christianity. Mary Magdalene and her companions were key witnesses to the resurrection. The appearance of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11-18) led early Christian writers to call her ‘the Apostle to the Apostles’ and ‘another Eve who announced not death but life to the men.’

All four Gospels report how on that first Easter Sunday faithful women followers of Jesus discovered the tomb of Jesus to be open and empty. In three of the Gospels, one angel
(Matthew and Mark) or two (Luke) explain to them why the body of Jesus is missing: ‘He has been raised’ (Matthew and Mark); ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead?’ (Luke). We must never lose sight of the defining role played by all those individuals recalled by name in the Gospels. They were witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (Mary Magdalene, Susanna, Joanna and other women) or at least to part of that story (Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus, Simon of Cyrene and other men).

Similarly, today all the baptized bear the responsibility of sharing with others the good news about their crucified and risen Lord and keeping Christians united in their common faith. Luke’s Gospel expresses this mission given to all the faithful by recounting not only the sending of the Twelve (Lk 9:1-6) but also the sending of a much larger group of 70 disciples (Lk 10:1-12). A wider mission for all disciples surrounds a core mission of Christian leaders.

Peter’s Position and Ministry

As for Peter and his role at the birth of Christianity, the Acts of the Apostles portrays his distinctive ministry as the official witness to Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Beyond question, he had other responsibilities. He played a decisive role in admitting Gentiles into the Christian community (Acts 10:1-11:18). Later Paul, Barnabas and James joined him at the Council of Jerusalem to decide authoritatively against imposing on Gentile converts the obligation to observe the whole of the Jewish law (Acts 15:1-29). Peter and John laid hands on believers to bring them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). Peter worked miracles by healing the sick (Acts 3:1-11; 5:15-16) and even bringing a dead woman back to life (Acts 9:32-43). The first half of Acts presents various dimensions of the leadership role that Peter exercised in the life of the early church. Central was his pre-eminence among all the official witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

Of course, the position and ministry of Simon Peter in the emerging church did not rest only on the risen Lord’s appearance to him. As normally happens in God’s dealings with human beings, other factors were involved. We should not isolate the encounter with the risen Jesus from earlier aspects of Peter’s history and vocation. Even before Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter was already being prepared for his mission.

Peter is always mentioned first among the Twelve (e.g., Mk 3:16) and among the smaller circle of three (Peter, James and John). Jesus takes those three with him on such special occasions as the transfiguration and the agony in the garden. The Gospels also tell us that Jesus gave Simon the new name Cephas or Peter (‘rock’). Matthew associates this naming with an episode at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter spoke for the others in confessing Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah, or deliverer of his people. Jesus reacted by promising to make Simon Peter the foundation on which the new community of God would be built (Mt 16:13-19). The promise Jesus made in Caesarea Philippi was matched by the risen Christ’s commission to Peter: ‘Feed my lambs and sheep’ (Jn 21:15-17). That charge to shepherd the Lord’s flock fulfilled the promise of an authoritative leadership role made during his ministry.

Undoubtedly, there is much relevant data to recall about Peter, his training and his ministry. But the heart of the matter is the tradition about his having seen the Lord after the
resurrection and his major role in announcing to the world the good news of Easter.

Among the various roles exercised by the bishop of Rome, the most fundamental is to proclaim the Lord’s resurrection. This proclamation shapes and flows into the pope’s whole commission to teach the church and the world. This mission involves applying the Easter message to issues of current life. Seen in these terms, the pope’s central vocation is to proclaim the risen Lord and to explain the implications of the resurrection not only for the church but for all human beings. That vocation is beautifully expressed, year by year, in the Easter broadcast from St. Peter’s Square.

**The Faith of Christians**

In recent years ecumenical contacts between Catholics and other Christians have underscored the realization that authentic unity can be realized only in confessing the truth of faith. How best can we express that unity and truth? The essential truth of Christian faith could be formulated by saying, ‘The crucified Son of God is risen from the dead to give us his Holy Spirit.’ The paschal mystery says it all. It is the basic truth to be maintained and passed on by all Christians. They have been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-4) to live together through the power of the Holy Spirit as the new Easter people of God.

What more could we expect from the bishop of Rome than that, like Peter, he strengthen the whole church’s faith in Christ’s resurrection? How could he better serve the unity of an Easter people than by proclaiming insistently the event that brought the church into being: the resurrection of the crucified Jesus? The pope must also lead the church with the loving authority of a chief pastor and be a model for all worshipers in celebrating the sacraments. But his great task for all the world is to announce that Christ is risen. Nothing can or should ever count against the power and joyfulness of that unique message.

One picture of St. Peter has fixed itself forever in my mind: a huge 17th-century painting of Peter’s martyrdom. The painting had been taken down from a church and brought for restoration to the studio of an Italian friend of mine. It shows two soldiers using ropes to pull Peter upside down onto a cross. The saint looks stiff and old, but his face is calm and peaceful. Two cheerful little angels watch the scene as Peter faces death and prepares to meet his master in glory.

Classical painters aimed to express the final character and significance of those they portrayed. They wanted to lead us to the reality and identity of the persons they had chosen to represent. That old painting of Peter in my friend’s studio in Rome catches the apostle’s courage in the face of death. Originally martyr (a Greek word) meant ‘witness.’ Peter the great witness became Peter the martyr. He could face martyrdom with such serenity because he had faithfully witnessed to his master’s victory over death. He knew that Jesus had died but was now alive forever. In that resurrection Peter found his destiny and final identity.

When he was elected pope, Benedict XVI found his own final destiny and identity. A serene figure in white, he faithfully preaches the Easter faith that holds us all together. When I see him proclaiming the resurrection, he reminds me of another figure also dressed in a white robe: the angelic messenger sitting in the empty tomb of Jesus and announcing to Mary Magdalene and her companions: ‘He has been raised’ (Mk 16:5-6).

In a few weeks Pope Benedict XVI will arrive in Australia. May he continue to fulfill fruitfully his vocation as Peter’s successor by announcing to the whole world the unique good news that is Christ’s resurrection from the dead. We could desire nothing greater for Benedict XVI than that he continue to show himself to be an Easter pope for an Easter people.

Adapted with permission from the article originally published in America 2008, 198, 10, 11-14.
ENGLISH WRITER and social commentator Clifford Longley claims that in the United Kingdom today it can no longer be assumed that the average person under thirty-five can put three facts together about the Christian story. If young Australian adults were questioned would the same statement be true? Probably not. But it would make an interesting study for some budding social scientist.

Perhaps it is an age thing. When figures of the world’s present population who call themselves Christian are totalled, the number would approach two billion. The question ‘Who is Jesus?’ is alive and well. Simply ask Mel Gibson or Dan Brown. They have the figures to prove it.

Whatever about the present, it is beyond argument that many millions throughout the centuries have venerated the name of Jesus. ‘But few have understood him and fewer still have tried to put into practice what he wanted to see done,’ Albert Nolan asserts in his famous book Jesus Before Christianity. Nolan adds by way of further explanation:

His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing. His name has been used and abused to justify crimes, to frighten children and to inspire men and women to heroic foolishness.

The story of Jesus has been told and retold over a vast number of generations. And there are as many ways to tell the story as there are people and cultures. Does it matter how it is told? Many believe that it does. The manner of the telling is crucial.

For a start, the particular significance of Jesus is expressed in many ways in the gospels themselves. Just think of some of the titles popularly given him in the early church: the Son of God, Messiah and Lord, the Word made flesh, the Light of the World, the Lamb of God, the Bread of Life, and other rich terms of great consequence. Each of the gospel writers themselves displays interesting variations on the answer to this intriguing question.

And then there are the creeds. In the Apostles Creed the believing community expresses faith in ‘Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary’ and goes on to describe Jesus as the decisive revelation of God. Marcus Borg, a contemporary scripture scholar, expresses it in these terms:

Jesus reveals, discloses, what can be seen of God in human life and what a life filled with God looks like.

How we see God, in other words, is determined in great part by how we see Jesus. And how we see Jesus is more often than not shaped by the manner in which we tell his story. It might be a useful exercise for the reader to reflect upon (as far as this is possible) those first memories of being introduced to this fundamental story of Christian faith.

It is not an easy exercise. Fleeting wisps of memory of childhood prayers, perhaps coloured prints in books or framed pictures, early experience of entering places of worship. For those in the Roman Catholic tradition, the memory of rote learning of questions and answers, may still linger in the subconscious. But these were different days. It is not going too far to say it was an entirely different culture only a few short generations ago—a very different population from that to which Clifford Longley referred.

Today, those who take on the responsibil-
ity of bringing the gospel to others—parents, teachers, ministers of the gospel—face an entirely different challenge.

To state the blindingly obvious, the quiet message of the gospel makes a claim on our attention in an entirely different context today. The context of the information explosion is so pervasive that we can scarcely understand its impact upon us. Unlimited information is called up at the stroke of a computer key—whether the person lives in outback Australia or works in a glass pyramid in down-town Manhattan. Advertising budgets that would do justice as the GNP of a small country compete for our attention just to have us buy their particular brand of soft drink. Satellite television flashes through space in order to place us comfortably in the grandstands of sporting events featuring our favourite team competing on the opposite side of the globe. Global entertainment events command audiences of countless millions for glitzy, Rock concerts. Somehow in this frantic stream of flashy messages, the gentle words ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ may require some different treatment.

And yet there are those who risk swimming in these turbulent waters. Actor and filmmaker Mel Gibson provides a dramatic example of re-telling the story today. Gibson’s film *The Passion of the Christ* presented a vivid and violent account of Jesus’ death on the cross. Interestingly it opens with a verse from the Jewish prophet Isaiah: ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities: by his wounds we are healed.’ (Is 53.5)

These words set the scene for the movie. Gibson’s intention is to tell the story of the dying saviour who died for our sins—employing all the immensely powerful tools of the modern filmmaker.

There are those who applaud the efforts of telling the story of the passion. What better way is there to reach a world-wide audience than using all of the power and drama of contemporary cinema. The gloomy figures cited by Clifford Longley provide sufficient reason.

Other critics are not so sure. They express serious disquiet about a presentation marked by the naked violence and seemingly endless scourging which marked its telling. Next to the blatant gore and scenes of torture of the film, the gospel accounts appear almost modest. If we believe that the way we see God is determined in great part by how we see Jesus, such critics argue, then by implication the mercilessly violent depiction of the death of Jesus implies a God who is demanding some form of retribution ‘for our sins’. Yes, it might leave us sinners more contrite, but at the risk of distorting a more fundamental and crucial image of a God who has gifted us all with life and into whose embrace we will one day return.

Recall the myriad of other rich biblical images such as the tender story of the Prodigal Son, or a mother hen guarding her chicks. Are these revelations of a gentle God consistent with one who would demand this form of bloody justice?

Another contemporary example of telling the story of Jesus was attempted by best-selling author Dan Brown in the *Da Vinci Code*. Drawing upon a wide range of comparatively recent and fascinating research into accounts of Jesus’ life uncovered in documents called ‘pseudo gospels’ (those outside the canon of sacred scripture), Brown stumbled upon a story which touched the imagination of readers of every age and seems to have broken every publishing record for fiction in the modern age.

Brown suggests a Jesus whose humanity has been concealed by Catholic Church authorities who for their own devious reasons of power...
wanted to emphasise his divinity. The immense popularity of the tale caught everyone by surprise, not excluding the author himself.

If Gibson placed his story-telling emphasis on Jesus dying for our sins, Brown puts his weight on the humanity of Jesus—in a reaction to the Catholic Church’s intent on guarding his divinity. Brown, perhaps unwittingly, becomes caught up in the debates of the first three centuries of church history—a debate that came to some sort of resolution in the Council of Nicea. Bishops and theologians had been searching for the acceptable balance between the divinity and the humanity of Christ in the midst of opinions held with passion and often violence.

This tradition of the great Christian creeds reduces this mystery of mysteries, at least in the popular mind, to a simple equation—true God and true man. Or to use the exact language of the 5th century Council of Chalcedon, ‘perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity’. But perhaps the human imagination, grappling with faith, requires more. Such mystery calls for all the skills of the poet, the storyteller, the evangelist ‘if language is not to be denied its indissoluble link with apprehension’.

‘The words are easy to say’, remarks Cistercian writer Michael Casey, ‘yet they contain great mystery. The humanity and divinity do not subsist side by side and independent like chalk and cheese’. This fundamental principle he refers to as ‘an inconceivable conjunction’ which in turn baffles and enchants those who search to humbly depth its mystery.

This belief of ours is a belief about divine and human love. The mystery behind the question ‘Who is Jesus’ explores how these two are interwoven, how the human mediates the divine and how the divine suffuses the human. Each is not what it at first seems—each is more than it seems.

This article is about the importance of stories. Not simply the one single story that can lure us into a sense of false certainty and close off the search. Our tradition is an endless resource of many stories which are designed to feed our imagination and nourish our faith. Remember there are four gospels, not simply one—each containing many images of God for those who wish to contemplate them. The Jewish scriptures which fed the imagination and the faith of Jesus are the wellspring of many more.

This article wishes to make the point that contemporary life stories interact with inherited stories; and that the hearing of inherited stories uncovers the depth of present experience of the gracious mystery we call our God. Most of all it is about the story of Jesus and the many ways the ancient tradition of our faith has found of telling it.

Fr Tony Doherty has recently published a series of books entitled Friendly guides to the Catholic Tradition designed for three groups of readers:

• So, You’re Working for the Catholic Church—for staff in Catholic institutions such as Hospitals, Schools and Social Welfare organisations;
• So, You’re Sending your Child to a Catholic School—for parents of school children; (to be published in August 2008), and
• So, You’re Searching to Refresh Your Faith—as a parish resource for pre-marriage couples, candidates in RCIA programmes and general adult faith education.

The Publisher is John Garratt Publications, Melbourne 32 Glenvale Crescent, Mulgrave 3170
The following letter was written in 1970 to the editor of The Times by Mrs. Valerie Eliot on the occasion of the death of Bertrand Russell at the age of 97. Mrs. Eliot’s husband, the famous Anglo-American poet, had died some five years earlier in 1965.

Sir, My husband, T.S. Eliot, loved to recount how late one evening he stopped a taxi. As he got in, the driver said: ‘You’re T.S. Eliot’. When asked how he knew, he replied: ‘Ah, I’ve got an eye for a celebrity. Only the other evening I picked up Bertrand Russell, and I said to him: ‘Well, Lord Russell, what’s it all about’, and, do you know, he couldn’t tell me.’

Yours faithfully, Valerie Eliot

Do we find ourselves smiling at the predicament of one of the great philosophers and mathematicians of the twentieth century, seemingly perplexed and floundering when asked the most simple yet profound question a human being can pose? Or are we more amused at the casual impudence of a taxi driver who expected a brief and concise answer while dispensing the change? In as few words as possible, he seems to be saying, give me a capsule answer to the meaning of life!

‘What’s it all about’ is a question that refuses to go away. As Stephen Hawking observes in A Brief History of Time, ‘We find ourselves in a bewildering world. We want to make sense of what we see around us and to ask: What is the nature of the universe? What is our place in it and where did it and we come from? Why is it the way it is?’ The first words that Jesus speaks in the Gospel of St John are addressed to two of John the Baptist’s disciples: ‘What do you seek?’

Questions such as these have been the traditional provenance of religion, but the materialist worldview espoused by the so-called ‘new atheists’—people such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris—asserts that the ‘modern scientific method is the only way for reasonable, truth-seeking people to gain knowledge of the real world.’ Ironically, such a claim itself demands an act of faith. To the new atheists we could put this question: ‘What are the scientific experiments that lead you to conclude that science alone can be trusted to lead you to truth?’ We could also ask a further question, ‘Can you deny that there are avenues other than scientific method by which you experience, understand and know the world you inhabit?’ As human beings we have ideas and experiences that we cannot explain rationally. The 17th century physicist, mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal once observed, ‘The heart has its reasons which are unknown to reason.’

Problem and Mystery: Logos and Mythos

The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) makes a useful distinction between ‘problem’ and ‘mystery’. ‘Whenever a problem is found,’ Marcel wrote, ‘I am working upon data placed before me...’ Problems can be subjected to empirical verification and scientific testing. A mechanic repairing an engine, a computer programmer tracking down an error in the system, a student grappling with a mathematical equation, a scientist studying the AIDS virus, a person challenged by a crossword puzzle, or someone absorbed in a whodunit, are all immersed in a ‘problem’. Time and experience will eventually yield an answer to these kinds of problems. They may totally
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absorb us, at least for a while, but we are capable of divorcing ourselves from them and getting on with something else. The ancient Greeks called this kind of logical, pragmatic and scientific mode of thought logos.9

‘Mystery’, as Marcel defines the term, describes those problems that engage us at a more profound level of our being. A mystery is a problem that encroaches upon and invades its own data.9 It involves those questions in which we ourselves are immersed, questions that we cannot put to one side. Mystery includes what Darryl Reanney calls ‘the bruising questions that trouble this generation as they have troubled all that went before it: ‘Who am I? Where did I come from? What happens when I die? Is there a God?’10 We are actors, not detached spectators, in the theatre of mystery. The answers to ‘mystery’ are not ‘in the back of the book.’ They may be rationally explained, but unlike ‘problem’ they are not amenable to scientific proof or empirical verification.

If we are to communicate the Good News to our contemporaries we must discover how to navigate our way through the realm of mystery. Traditionally, we have done it through myth—mythos in Greek—a word that has the same etymological root as ‘mystery’. Sadly, we use the word ‘myth’ today in a pejorative sense; it is a story that may sound plausible at first hearing, but it doesn’t stand up to closer scrutiny. Prior to the last federal election, for example, the Howard Government ran a number of advertisements about the workplace relations system. It is a ‘myth’, the advertisement told us, that ‘nowadays, employers can do practically anything they like.’ The ‘fact’ of the matter is ‘No, they can’t.’11 Myth in this sense is synonymous with ‘misinformation’ or ‘falsehood’.

Bill Moyers describes mythology as ‘an interior road map of experience, drawn by people who have traveled it.’12 It ‘points beyond history to what is timeless in human existence, helping us to get beyond the chaotic flux of random events, and glimpse the core of reality.’13 Myths may or may not be based on historical events. The truth of these epic stories, however, lies beneath the narrative level and we will be unduly distracted if we become overly preoccupied with their historicity. Being children of the Enlightenment we have developed a scientific view of history; ‘we are concerned with what actually happened’ rather than what an event had meant.

The Journey of the Hero. Our Own Story Writ Large!

The American writer Joseph Campbell has written extensively on the subject of myth. One of his most popular works is entitled *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The significance of the title is the realisation that the heroic figure in all the great stories of humanity embarks upon what is essentially the same journey of discovery. Whether the story be Homer’s *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, or the story of King Arthur in Camelot, Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest, Wyatt Earp in the American West, Tarzan in the jungles of Africa, Luke Skywalker in worlds yet to be discovered, or even Bilbo the Hobbit deep in the Lonely Mountain—we are essentially hearing the same story. Only the ‘face’ of the hero and the setting of the story change. And ultimately, the story of the hero is our own story writ large! The great stories of humanity ‘carry the keys that open the whole realm of the desired and feared adventure of the discovery of the self.’14

Story and myth give us our identity. ‘When a nation is in trouble, it often returns to its traditional stories to look for direction and heal-
ing, to regain a sense of what made it great in the past and what will nurture it into the future...Individuals, families, and communities also have their identifying stories that link them to who they are, to their culture...A region or a nation has its story concretized in a shrine, statue, museum. A person without a story is a person with amnesia. A country without its story has ceased to exist. A humanity without its story has lost its soul.¹⁵

All of us, consciously or otherwise, adopt a narrative framework (or story) to make sense of the world around us. As M. Scott Peck observes, we all have ‘an explicit or implicit set of ideas and beliefs as to the essential nature of the world.’¹⁶ Our view of reality ‘is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. If the map is true and accurate, we will generally know where we are...If the map is false and inaccurate, we generally will be lost.’¹⁷ Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, tells of an interesting phenomenon he read about in James Surowiecki’s *The Wisdom of Crowds*. The American naturalist William Beebe came across a strange sight in the jungle of Guyana. ‘A group of army ants was moving in a huge circle. The ants went round and round in the same circle for two days until most of them dropped dead. The reason is that when a group of army ants is separated from its colony, it obeys a simple rule: follow the ant in front of you. The trouble is that if the ant in front of you is lost, so will you be.’ By contrast Rabbi Sacks reflected upon a wonderful tutor he has recently acquired—a satellite navigation system. ‘What happens is this. Once the machine has worked out the route, a polite lady’s voice tells you something along the lines of: ‘Keep straight for 300 yards, then turn right.’ Normally, this would suffice. But as anyone who has shared a journey with a Jewish driver knows, the response is likely to be: ‘What does she know? I’ve been driving this car for 20 years. I know the neighbourhood like I know my own mother. Anyone knows that in 300 yards, you turn left.’ What happens then? Well, ‘it goes silent for a few moments...It then sends up a signal: ‘Re-calculating the route.’ Seconds later it provides you with a new set of instructions, based on wherever you have landed up as a result of going left when you should have gone right.’¹⁸ Not a bad metaphor for evangelization!

Evangelization is about telling the story, about sharing the narrative framework that gives our lives a sense of meaning and purpose. As Christopher Booker observes, ‘At any given moment, all over the world, hundreds of millions of people will be engaged in what is one of the most familiar of all forms of human activity. In one way or another they will have their attention focused on one of those strange sequences of mental images which we call a story.’ Stories are far and away one of the most important features of our everyday existence. ‘We spend a phenomenal amount of our lives following stories: telling them; listening to them; reading them; watching them being acted out on the television screen or in films or on a stage.’¹⁹

Evangelists must therefore be effective storytellers. Patrick Dodson, an Australian Aboriginal leader who had been thoroughly trained in European thought patterns tells this story against himself. He was once addressing an Aboriginal community and one of the elders sat on the ground beside him. After a while the elder became agitated and started constantly interrupting him with the advice, ‘Talk in pictures, talk in pictures.’ Bishop Geoffrey Robinson makes the observation that much Christian preaching on Sundays would vastly improve if preachers paid heed to the advice of this Aboriginal elder rather than speak in abstract ideas.²⁰

**Telecommunications Revolution: A New Set of Challenges**

Talking in pictures has been a perennial challenge for preachers. The telecommunications revolution now offers evangelists a totally new set of challenges but also a bewildering range
COMPASS

of opportunities. According to a survey released on 18 March, 2008, by Nielsen Online, Australians now spend more time online than watching television. We spend 13.3 hours per week watching television, and 13.7 hours online. On average, Australians are spending 84.4 hours per week across a range of media and leisure activities, up from 71.4 hours in the previous 12 months. This is a significant portion of our spare time considering that the average Australian is only awake for around 112 hours per week. The internet participation rate in Australia now stands at 80 per cent, well above the global participation rate of 20 per cent. More Australians than ever before are accessing the internet, but fewer Catholics are attending Mass regularly. Last year the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference released the results of a research project on Catholics who have stopped attending Mass. Weekly Mass attendance has fallen from an estimated 864,000 in 1996 to 765,000, or 15.3 per cent of the Australian Catholic population, in 2001.

What implications do those figures have for evangelization? How can the church participate in the media marketplace and how can the media be used as a means of reaching out to the large percentage of Australian Catholics who no longer attend Mass regularly? The recently-released pastoral plan for the Archdiocese of Sydney lists Evangelization and Spiritual Renewal as its first priority, and it commissions the ‘Office for Evangelization, in partnership with Catholic Communications and the chancery, to develop a website providing information relating to evangelization by June 2009.’ Catholic Communications is also charged with the responsibility of developing a programme for the utilisation of new communication technologies to enhance the dissemination of Catholic teaching by December 2008. The Archdiocese also plans to use the internet as a means of tapping into the enthusiasm generated by World Youth Day in Sydney next July.

Roy Greenslade, professor of journalism at London’s City University, believes that newspapers are dying in the United States, and the death knell is also sounding for newsprint in Britain and across the rest of Europe. Sales of big city regional papers in the US and Britain are in freefall. As a journalist he is saddened, but as an ‘unashamed digital revolutionary’ he can see that we are now ‘in the process of moving from one news platform to another. The stagecoach is giving way to the train.’ This trend away from print media should lead to an examination of the effectiveness of diocesan newspapers, particularly in light of the success of internet services such as CathNews, launched in 1997. CathNews is a daily news service with prayer, meditation and Catholic website reviews. It is the most visited Catholic website in Australia, providing a mix of news and prayer updated daily, which is also available free of charge by email. As of February 2008, there were more than 15,000 email subscribers and almost 9000 visits to the site each day. Religious periodicals such as The Tablet, America, National Catholic Reporter, and Compass are available online at a fraction of the cost of hardcopy subscriptions.

Evangelization in Cyberspace

The Church has already launched into cyberspace to proclaim the gospel. Most dioceses, religious orders, church agencies, Catholic education offices and a growing number of parishes have already harnessed the internet for the task of evangelization, and many of them have impressive websites. The Archdiocese of Brisbane, for example, has just substantially remodeled its website, and it is an impressive introduction to all sorts of Church activities including evangelisation, education, information, everyday prayer and spiritual growth, communication and organisation. And then there are blogs. Check out, for example, Cardinal Sean O’Malley’s blog - a professional but personal sharing of the Archbishop of Boston’s reflections and experiences. On the local scene, a number of priests
have a Facebook profile. See, for example, Bishop Julian Porteous’s profile (although you’ll have to sign up with Facebook to connect with the bishop through this medium). Bishop Peter Ingham of Wollongong presented his Lenten Pastoral Message on YouTube, and the Australian Catholic Bishops recently issued a Pastoral Letter on Internet Safety, accompanied for the first time by an introductory video, presented by Bishop Ingham and posted on YouTube. This Pastoral Letter acknowledges that the newest phenomenon to sweep the Internet is known as social networking. ‘Young people, in particular have flocked to these sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, which are seen as being the electronic equivalent to hanging out with your friends. Simply by creating a profile on one of these sites, you can share all manner of information with those people who you nominate as one of your social networking ‘friends’. This can include photos, profiles of your likes and dislikes, as well as messages, music etc. The Church in Australia is helping young people to engage in faith-based social networking with the emergence of a number of such sites.’

In the musical comedy *My Fair Lady*, Eliza Doolittle is fed up with elocution lessons and sings, ‘Words! Words! Words! I’m so sick of words!’ Well, Eliza, will you settle for a picture, an image, a video clip? Technology now offers us new platforms and opportunities to proclaim the Word and reach out to people who no longer attend church regularly. As pastor of a Sydney parish I have been experimenting over the past four years with Powerpoint (and now, after a conversion to Apple, Keynote) as an aid in preaching. The use of images and video clips offer new opportunities to break open the Word. I also make copies of my homilies available electronically (and also in hard copy), and a growing number of people receive a weekly copy via email.

A four-year-old child awoke one night frightened, convinced that in the darkness around there were all kinds of spooks and monsters. Absolutely terrified, she ran into her parents’ bedroom. Her mother calmed her down and, taking her by the hand, led her back to her own room where she put on a light, tucked her back into bed, and gently reassured the child with these words: ‘You needn’t be afraid, you are not alone here. God is in the room with you.’ The child replied: ‘I know that God is here, but I need someone in this room who has some skin!’ Jesus is the eternal Word of God become flesh, and in our day we must put electronic ‘skin’ on our proclamation of the Gospel, to incarnate its truth in picture, image and story, and proclaim it throughout cyberspace with an ever-increasing range of platforms, such as websites, podcasts, videocasts, blogs, MySpace, and Facebook. Never before has the church been confronted with such opportunities and challenges for evangelization.

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8 Karen Armstrong, 31.
9 Gabriel Marcel, 186.
10 Darryl Reanney, *Music of the Mind*, (Hill of Content, 1994), vii, viii
11 This full page advertisement appeared, for example, in Melbourne’s *Herald Sun*, on Friday Au-
When the foundations are shaken, however, and essential certainties are lacking, the impelling need for those values once again makes itself felt: thus today, the request for an education which is truly such is in fact increasing. Parents, anxious and often anguished about the future of their children, are asking for it; a great many teachers going through the sorrowful experience of their schools’ deterioration are asking for it; society overall, seeing doubts cast on the very foundations of coexistence, is asking for it; children and young people themselves who do not want to be left to face life’s challenges on their own are also asking for it in their inmost being. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, moreover, have a further and stronger reason for not being afraid: they know in fact that God does not abandon us, that his love reaches us wherever we are and just as we are, in our wretchedness and weakness, in order to offer us a new possibility of good.

THE THEME OF JOURNEY IN LUKE
LESLEE SNIATYNSKYJ

OF ALL THE THEMES that may be teased out from the rich weave that is the Lukan text, one that speaks with clarity and resonance to modern readership is that of the journey. Journeys abound in Luke’s Gospel-Acts. The undeniably central one is that undertaken by Jesus towards the cross; in Acts, we see the journeying of the disciples, culminating in their arrival in Rome; and lastly, the journey of the implied auditor towards God.

In this paper we shall make a brief examination of this recurrent theme, with a special focus on the Emmaus story. In so doing, we aim to establish the metaphor of journey within the context of a theology of ‘end-time’ fulfilment. We hope also to underscore the thought that the journey in Luke is an invitation to believers to see the life path as God’s glorious gift to humanity: we have been granted the thrill of the open road, and with it creative freedom, to make of life what we will. All this, and then at the end of the road an assured eternal life in God awaits.

Every journey undertaken has purpose and a final destination in mind. It progresses in a linear fashion towards an end point. For the evangelist there is firm intent to reflect the motif of journey in the very structure of the narrative. We note this in the logical sequencing of events that he is at some pains to establish. Each little section in the plot has a ‘separate but complementary function’. (Johnson, p.10,11.) Every consecutive event is like a little step along the way, making up in sum the whole journey. The reader is moved purposefully from one event to the next, and we are asked to trust in the accuracy of the author’s chronology.

We are reminded by Johnson that Luke’s Gospel is only half of the story, to be read in conjunction with Acts. The end of the former is but a hiatus along the way, waiting for the remainder of the story to be picked up. Acts will continue the account, with a focus on the journeying of the early Church.

Not content with placing his story within a logical framework, Luke seeks to position the journey within the wider context of world history. Thus, his emphasis on establishing a firm chronological base will be an attempt to lend legitimacy and a measure of historicity to his account. What began in the Galilean hills decades before, will end with Paul’s arrival in Rome. The story of Jesus will lead naturally to the story of the early Church. But Luke’s narrative will hark back even further, retracing its antecedents all the way to Adam (Lk3:38). It will begin with the telling of the story of Israel (Lk1:5), and progress chronologically, mapping the journey of all God’s people since.

Luke is concerned with the ‘prophecy and fulfilment pattern within the narrative’. (p.12) At the beginning of his account, we are made aware that the story he is about to re-tell is actually the culmination of something begun long before. (Lk 1:1) The writer, Johnson reminds us, establishes a firm link between the story of Moses and that of Jesus. (p.19) Thus the reader will have the sense that there has been but one long and uninterrupted journey from the Hebrew Testament to Acts. Yet another ‘fulfilment’, (referred to at the end of Acts) is still in store, that of the eschatological promise. There is the guarantee of an eternity...
dwelling in God. This moment has not yet arrived; and the book of Acts finishes on a note of open-endedness. As in all the best creative acts and works, there has been room allowed for endless potentialities. Future progress is in the hands of the reader. The story and the journey are far from over.

If we situate the origins of Luke’s journey narrative with the first response of the Israelites to God, it becomes clear that the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem will occupy a central position within the linear movement of the story. After the crucifixion event will come the journey of the witnesses of Acts. Then, further along the continuum will be the stories of believers still to come. But it will be against the pivotal journey made by Jesus that the success of all the other journeys in Luke is to be measured. The movement towards Jerusalem is a steadfast embrace of the Father’s will; and this will become the point of each journey, either side of the central one. It is in this light that all the journeys—both those that precede the Jesus journey, and those that come after—will need to be viewed: as movements towards the ultimate fulfilment of God’s plan; as progress towards complete rapprochement between God and humanity.

The journey leitmotif is inextricably linked in Luke with the theme of discipleship. Indeed, it might be said that one cannot be properly considered without the other. Whoever embarks on the journey to God will listen, as Jesus listened to the Father. The disciple is the one who follows and, hearing the word, responds. It is interesting to note the similarity between the Greek terminologies for ‘listen’ and ‘follow’ (respectively, akouo and akoloutho); the one an expansion of the other; suggestive of a theological link that Luke wants to establish between the two. The closing verses of Acts assure us that in listening, God’s people will know salvation (28:28). We observe that the final chapter of both the Gospel and Acts has been reserved by the evangelist for an unequivocal message: an exhortation to discipleship. He specifies what this will entail: namely, one must listen to the word of God. In biblical Greek, words carrying the most weight tend to be placed last in a sentence. This being the case, it is safe to assume that such positioning of the chapters, on both counts, at the tail end of the narrative, has been a deliberate act by the writer to underscore something he considers of utmost importance. Thus it is that in the closing chapter of Luke’s Gospel we arrive at the Emmaus story.

The account of the journey to Emmaus has an appealing and accessible universality about it. It is the perennial, personal story of every human. Like the Matthian account of Peter’s attempt to walk on water, it resonates deeply within us. For it is an authentic representation of our humanity at its weakest; yet, when buoyed by the power of Christ, that same humanity becomes capable of magnificent resolve.

On the face of it, Emmaus is a story where nothing much happens. A couple of disciples, fleeing the city after the crucifixion, are headed for an inconsequential village a short distance from Jerusalem. They meet a stranger who talks scripture at them, allays some of their fears, and proves himself a comforting companion. They invite him to dinner and, at the breaking of the bread, they suddenly recognise in their fellow traveller the risen Jesus. He vanishes at this point. Then, we are told, with joyful hearts they return to Jerusalem to tell their friends. End of story.

But there is far more to the account.
Emmaus is, in fact, a cameo depiction of the human journey through life. That is me on the road, running away, as one often does in life, from a difficult situation, a situation that is demanding far too much from one little individual. I am deeply troubled, confused and frightened. I have lost a beloved friend in the very worst of circumstances, and I have not even begun to grieve. I had set such store by him—and now he is dead. Luckily, I have a companion with whom to share my woes and fears. The only problem is that he is not much good at assuaging my pain, since he is in the same predicament as I am. In reality, we are nigh on useless to each other.

Then a stranger joins us on the way. He reminds us of predictions and promises made long ago that certain events would come to pass. The more we listen, the greater the assurance and comfort that we draw from his words. As he makes to leave, my friend and I cast about for ways to prolong the moment of contact with our new companion. He makes us feel safe, and ridiculously, hope has begun to burgeon within us. We invite him to join us for dinner. As we begin the meal there is something he does, some little gesture that is immediately familiar. In that instant we recognise the stranger in our midst. We understand that our friend who was dead, now lives. And we remember how he foretold even this.

At the moment of clarity, our friend disappears from sight. No matter. His physical presence is no longer required. We have all the validation we need to keep going. He is everything he said he was. And we can rest our faith on all the things that he told us over time, for we know them now to be true. The Promiser fulfilled all the prophecies. And now it is our turn to keep promises. We had said once we were ready to follow him, to help spread the Good News. Now we are sure of our mandate. In the little village of Emmaus we turn around and face Jerusalem from whence we fled. We are ready to make the journey back, to fulfil the mission. If the mark of discipleship is the preparedness to 'hear the word', then the Emmaus travellers have not earned the right to call themselves disciples: at least, not until that moment on the road when they allow Jesus’ words—his explanation of the scriptures to them—to percolate deep into their understanding. Before that instant they were the antithesis of disciples: their behaviour characterised by a profound alarm and anxiety. (Kealy, p245) Their blind fear had prevented them from recognising God in their midst. But when they truly began to listen, the scales fell from their eyes, and Jesus was revealed to them.

We may extrapolate from the account that sometimes it is all right, and even important, to move away from the centre—the Jerusalem of our traditional faith—in order to gain greater clarity. Luke makes a case for those on the fringes—the outcasts, the vulnerable—repeat-edly having the best recourse to God. Jesus himself was a man of the margins. (Moxnes, p 10.) Often it will be that the one running away becomes aware, to his joy and amazement, that Jesus—the very one we were seeking to elude—is there, running with us.

The acquisition of clarity and firm purpose are only possible, though, if, on our journey we allow ourselves to become open to what God is telling us, whether through the Scriptures, or through the people we meet along the road. If we are prepared to listen with the heart, even though we are standing outside the centre of things, we may well become the outsiders who are enlightened by an encounter with the risen Lord. (p22, Johnson.) As we progress towards our Emmaus, we begin to glimpse the fulfilment of God’s word in our own lives. We see it acting in our midst. And like the Emmaus travellers, we too begin to believe the promises. We understand that the journey undertaken must be brought to completion in executing God’s plan for us. And for this, Jesus is the key. He is the companion we must first invite into our midst. Then we must be willing to hear his message, and permit it to take root in our hearts. For this to happen, we must
cultivate a certain open disposition, a receptivity to the delicate movements of God within us.

The road stretching before each of us is not endless, but it is open. We have creative freedom to enact all our choices. We can either keep going, on past Emmaus, or we can return to confront our private Jerusalem. If we really want to commit to the life of a disciple, we know that what we have to do is listen and follow our road through to its completion. Jesus, the fellow-traveller and guide, will supply for all the rest. He is the one mandated with the fulfilment of the end-time.

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I, too, lament the conditions that diminish and marginalise the presence and tradition of Catholicism in our society. But at the same time I see signs of renewal. I want to speak to you about the desire for spiritual renewal of which I see the signs among the young and others who have responsibility in our society… I think especially of the young and the adults I have met in recent weeks…

I think of a woman of 77 years who has cared for her paralyzed husband for twelve years; she wrote to me of her desire to pray for those who do not pray: ‘It will be like a light in the night’.

And that young man of 21 years, a circus performer, who has known violence, and who in his letter meditated on the mystery of Jesus crucified: ‘It teaches us to die to ourselves in order to live with him and through him and then in him for ever.’

But the most astonishing was the young girl of 14 years who told me that she had been a victim of sexual violence perpetrated by two members of her family. When I asked her and her friends of 14 to 16 years of age, to write messages for the people who were present for their Confirmation day, she wrote: ‘We must look the challenges of life in the face, and not avoid them. God is stronger than the difficulties that can be so violent and that we would like to hide. And God can help us to pardon those who have done us harm, so much harm.’

And one of her friends made a similar appeal: ‘Stop doing harm to people around you. Trust in yourself, a life without trust is not a happy life. Make peace.’

I call this the elementary grammar of human existence. The question I ask myself is simple: are our Christian communities fully aware that they are to call more visibly and in solidarity on the interior resources that are theirs?

A MODERN ITINERARY

Keynotes in the Search for Meaning

CHRIS FLEMING AND JOHN O’CARROLL

This is an essay about meaning—especially what its felt absence itself means in the contemporary world. Key sociologists of the modern era have long asserted that many people, even entire groups of people, struggle to make sense of the world and the place they occupy in it. In this essay we trace how the rise of the modern world brought with it ways of describing that world that—paradoxically—have made it harder for individuals to actually answer the questions they ask and learn not to ask as modern subjects. That is, within a widely thriving secular society, many people relegate inquiry into ‘what it all means’ to fields like evolutionary psychology and ‘memetics’ (the attempt to apply neo-Darwinian models to study cultural ‘evolution’), believing that the weight of evidence has revealed that there is no inherent meaning to human existence. But, as this essay seeks to show, such a view has blindspots, and is far from being a simple, self-evident explanation.

In any effective analysis of the narrative of modernity, we believe there are essential historical and philosophical signposts whose deep interrelationship we’ll have reason to explore. Understanding them entails a journey through a series of crucial stopping points or way-stations. But where are they—and how to make this journey? In our view, we are in need of an itinerary. The itinerary we sketch is one that we believe can be deployed over and over again in different ways by different readers and writers. We use the term itself with a nod to the overtly atheistic (but often insightful) critic, Régis Debray. At the outset of his God: An Itinerary, an account of the ‘prophetic religions’ which he sees as emerging after the rise of civilisation, Debray remarks that he is embarking on an itinerary of the Gods not ‘in order to debate the existence of God for the umpteenth time, but in order to understand how the only carnivore to practise voluntary fasting succeeded in generating his very humanity’ (p.2). For Debray, our religions and our very nature are somehow enmeshed. On this point at least, we find it hard not to concur.

Yet, the itinerary we seek to build is obviously a very different one from Debray’s. Where his concerns a tour of ‘ways of doing God,’ ours concerns the narrative of modernity itself. But why is it necessary to concern ourselves with this? From the time of the Greeks, the injunction to ‘know thyself’ has stood as an exacting demand of human self-reflection. A crucial part of this, in our view, entails an historical understanding of the path to the present. Yet, we contend, a defining feature of modernity is its lack of self-understanding.

An entry point: The most typical and widely accepted characterisations of modernity talk of anomie—a state of individual disorientation and disconnection. This is the essential first port of call in our journey. Emile Durkheim utilised the term to depict the way in which, in modern societies, traditional norms and cultural values are undermined but not replaced by new normative frameworks; norms may remain in some form, but are not significant determinants of individual behaviour. Sociologists from the time of Durkheim and Simmel onwards have pointed to the consequences of anomie and loss of centre in the modern world.

Once we grasp, in broadest terms, the psycho-social dimensions of anomie, then a sec-
Closely related concept is the next destination: this is the famous idea of a ‘disenchantment’ of the modern world—a notion heavily indebted to the work of Max Weber. It is closely related to *anomie* because like that idea it depicts a stripping away or loss of meaning—and this in two senses: first, a loss of religiously-grounded cosmology or worldview, and second, the resulting, intensely-felt, loss of sense for the individual. ‘Disenchantment’ refers both to a metaphysical stripping-away of the transcendent domain and also to the subjective sense of de-moralisation in the most literal sense imaginable (demoralise: loss of morale and anomic depression; demoralise: loss of moral basis or meta-ethical grounding).

These characterisations of modernity undoubtedly capture something of the reality of the *intellectual consensus* on modern life, on the one hand, and the *experience we have of it* on the other. We cannot skirt them in our treatment of modernity. Left unsupplemented, however, they are profoundly misleading; they certainly do *not* bring self-awareness. They *look* like empirical reportage, but in their original contexts, they are nothing of the sort. To the contrary, they reflect long-held views and partly forgotten debates. If we leave to others the task of showing the contexts of *anomie* in other domains—like psychology and sociology—we do so only because we assume an experiential familiarity on the part of the readers of this particular journal—and because we have sketched its place in our itinerary. But we make no such assumption in relation to the notion of disenchantment—that way-station must be explored in a special and even detailed way, even in a sketch like ours because it is here that some of the characteristic paradoxes, blindspots, and absurdities of modernity’s self-account come to light.

**Disenchantment: the Work of Max Weber**

Weber’s argument that modernity is the end-product of a gradual process of bureaucratic and rational development has been widely accepted—indeed sometimes rendered formulaic and over-simplified. Regardless, there is considerable value in retrieving Weber’s thesis, albeit in outline. Weber famously called the process of modernisation the ‘disenchantment of the world’ (*Entzauberung der Welt*). As many people know, lying behind the ‘disenchantment of the world’ (*Entzauberung der Welt*) is the process he calls ‘rationalisation.’

But what does this entail? For Weber, rationalisation has two main facets, even if these are, he says, ultimately inseparable (*Essays* 293). First, rationalisation names the process whereby instrumental rationality—reason in the service of practical or pragmatic ends—is increasingly refined and assumes greater importance: in economics, science, law, art, and religion. It is ‘the methodical attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of adequate means’ (*Essays* 293). Rationalisation displays itself in the way social institutions are increasingly constituted by rules that determine the most efficient means of attaining a given
goal. This takes place in a way fairly independent of those values which had previously impacted upon the domain (Weber, *Theory* 115; *Essays* 293-4). Rationalisation leads to the application of precise regulations to social life in a way analogous to the application of scientific method to industrial production.

Another dimension of rationalisation is a form of intellection by which systematic thought is directed to the task of uncovering some objective reality. The process involves ‘an increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts’ (*Essays* 293). This he sometimes calls ‘intellectualisation,’ and more negatively, ‘disenchantment.’ The transformation of thought has consequences well beyond the university—it affects people’s conceptions of themselves as social agents, as well as their notion of what the world is like.

Needless to say, the consequences of this thesis—and the phenomena to which it refers—for religion, are profound. In the religious domain, we see both notions of rationalisation intermingle. To start with, in their attempts to rationalise their world—to calculate and attempt to predict what had previously been thought to have been governed by chance—the capricious whims of the gods have had to make room for the determinable. Here, rationalisation ‘means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted’ (*Essays* 139). Weber’s point is that science is no longer either the gift of prophets or the result of contemplation of philosophers and sages about ‘the meaning of the universe.’ ‘This,’ Weber asserts without qualification, ‘is the inescapable condition of our historical situation’ (*Essays* 152).

One might think therefore that science and religion were, for Weber, antithetically opposed in history. But contrary to what many believe, he argued, this is not his view. For him, both modern capitalism and science were the result of a long development of ‘rationalisation’:

*Only in the West does science exist at a stage of development which we recognize to-day as valid. Empirical knowledge, reflection on problems of the cosmos and of life, philosophical and theological wisdom of the most profound sort, are not confined to it, though in the case of the last the full development of a systematic theology must be credited to Christianity under the influence of Hellenism.* (Weber *Protestant Ethic* 13)

Other cultures had developed forms of empirical theorisation, but only in the West could this theorisation be called ‘science.’

This brings us to the next—and, for Weber, cruellest—point. Born of religion, science comes to make life meaningless:

*Science has created this cosmos of natural causality and has seemed unable to answer with certainty the question of its own ultimate presuppositions. Nevertheless science, in the name of ‘intellectual integrity,’ has come forward with the claim of representing the only possible form of a reasoned view of the world. The intellect, like all culture values, has created an aristocracy based on the possession of rational culture and independent of all personal ethical qualities of man… Viewed in this way, all ‘culture’ appears as man’s emancipation from the organically prescribed cycle of natural life. For this very reason culture’s every step forward seems condemned to lead to an ever more devastating senselessness. The advancement of cultural values, however, seems to become a senseless hustle in the service of worthless, moreover self-contradictory, and mutually antagonistic ends.* (*Essays* 355-7)

Weber’s choice of the term ‘disenchantment’ is, therefore, apposite, because—unlike other possible terms, like ‘secularisation’—it conveys both the sense of a socio-structural reality and a sense of felt, subjective loss.

This leads to a sharp and unprecedented paradox, the paradox of rationalism. On the one hand, through rationalisation, religion and ‘ultimate’ values have become ‘subjective,’ both in the sense that they no longer appear to
possess an objective status, and in the sense that they are relegated to the realm of private experience, having ‘retreated from public life’ (Weber, Essays 155). On the other, the scientist is unable to offer a justification for the idea that what he or she does is valuable; unable to verify the idea that ‘what is yielded by scientific work is important in the sense that it is worth being known’ (Weber, Essays 143). Or, as he starkly tells us, only ‘big children’ would presume to think that science could tell us ‘anything’ about what the world means.

The Myth of Subtraction

As important as Weber’s contribution to the understanding of modernity might be, his own despair at the ‘disenchantment’ of the world has itself become part of the problem we are seeking to address. In this sense, there have been further inroads made on the inquiries he initiated. In their different ways, the philosopher Charles Taylor and the theologian John Milbank, have closely explored the nature of modernity in terms of a myth of subtraction. Let us look at Milbank’s work first. Milbank contends that modernity is not self-evidently secular. In Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason, Milbank argues that the picture we (and he includes theologians and atheists alike) have of modernity is this one:

It belongs to the received wisdom of sociology to interpret Christianity as itself an agent of secularization, yet this thesis is totally bound up with the one-sided negativity of the notion of desacralizing; a metaphor of the removal of the superfluous and additional to leave a residue of the human, the natural and the self-sufficient. For this negative conception it is convenient that there should always have been some perception of the pure remainder, and the hybrid ‘Judaico-Christianity’ is cast in this role… (p.9)

But the constitution of this ‘secular order’ is deeply enfolded within the history of Western religious traditions. For Milbank, it was designed to ‘exclude the religious’ from its purview only in a very restrictive or attenuated sense. This is because the modern origin of the term ‘secular’ lies in the deliberate classical Christian theological distinction between the saeculum and the eschaton—so-called ‘historical time’ and the ‘end time.’ For Milbank Christianity itself instituted the secular (9). There is no doubt that he is right, in a certain factual, historical sense, about this. But we have to ask an additional question: what does this actually mean to modernity today?

Milbank himself provides some clues. Questioning the quasi-structural version of modernity, he attacks the view that modernity is definable simply in terms of social or cultural plurality. For him, the very structure of plurality which both the sociologists and communication thinkers presuppose to be a matter only of techno-social transformation is itself a profoundly Christian thing. For Milbank, this is especially the case on those terrains where Christian dimensions are most denied. For instance, as he puts it, this is the case wherever we find:

…the notion of the recognition of the ‘other’ itself, which is so important an imperative to dialogue. Hence…a postmodern position that respects otherness and locality and yet at the same time still seeks the goals of justice, peace, and reconciliation, can only, in fact, be a Christian (or possibly a Jewish) position’ (Milbank, ‘End of Dialogue’ 175-76).

This is very clever analysis—but it is not Sophistry. Rather, it is the kind of work that is needed for our journey into the paradoxical self-account of modernity itself.

Milbank’s account is compatible with—and a useful prelude to—the last of our waystations, what is best called the myth of subtraction. The work needed to understand this has been conducted by the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor. Taylor’s inquiry is broader. He has, since his Sources of the Self (1996), posed questions about the nature of modernity on its own terms. In questioning ‘what sort of thing modernity is,’ he develops the argument that modernity is primarily a cultural, rather than a technological or bu-
For Taylor, Western modernity is a horizontal social system that can only with difficulty admit older notions of vertical relations, be they with god or king. The epistemological dimensions of this are obvious: modernity comprises a number of what Taylor calls ‘closed world structures,’ which is to say, world views that are closed for some reason or reasons to transcendence: ‘A CWS ‘naturalises’ a certain view on things’ (p.52). Taylor suggests in this system first superstitition (by seventeenth century Christianity) and then belief itself (in the Enlightenment) comes to be seen as child-like, while unbelief seems adult, even heroic (p.53).

Obviously, Taylor does not overturn the hierarchy of structure/culture simply to reverse a polarity. Both structure and culture are crucial aspects to modernity. What is at stake in a cultural explanation of modernity is the attempt to furnish the account with a sense of the moral universe that gave rise to it, and which perhaps enabled it. This decisive insight is itself an essential one on any itinerary seeking to grasp not just what the self-account of modernity is, but also, why it seems—for all its negativity—to be plausible. When modernity is understood more correctly as a moral constellation, however, then we pass effortlessly to the next step, which both Milbank and Taylor in their different ways have sought to describe.

Both offer consonant accounts of the ways in which modernity hides from itself. Milbank contends that the dominant narratives of modernity are those whose ‘received sociology’ impelled them to take over the ‘human half’ of what was left of the ‘privatized, spiritualized and transcendentalized…sacred, and concurrently reimagined nature, human action and society as a sphere of autonomy, sheerly formal power’ (p.9). In a related way, Taylor suggests what he calls a ‘subtraction’ view of history. That is,

On this ‘subtraction’ view of humanity, as what arises from the washing away of old horizons, modern humanism can only have arisen through the fading of earlier forms. It can only be conceived as coming to be through a ‘death of God’. It just follows that you can’t be fully into contemporary humanist concerns if you haven’t sloughed off the old beliefs. (p.60).

But the question of faith-patterns now begins to require more nuanced examination, as those who espouse reason’s cause turn out to be engaged in complex ‘acts of faith’ of their own. In this version, the value attached to science by unbelievers is itself moral—or morally determined. This, we believe, is why so many otherwise thoughtful commentators miss the key turn-offs—and why less thoughtful ones like Richard Dawkins miss the boat entirely.

**The Significance of the Journey**

We have traced an itinerary of the modern world which has shown how, with Weber, we arrived at the paradoxical situation of a rational science which could not supply the grounds of objective value for its own inquiry. This, however, only led us to inquire further into Weber’s own founding contention that modernity entails a stripping away of superstition. With the works of Milbank and Taylor, we see that it is not possible to take these things away without leaving the entire fabric of modernity threadbare. In addition, we realise a story about the history of modernity is at stake.

Modernity, then, is not quite as it appears. It is, above all, a moral constellation, and ultimately, a descendant of a Christian desacralisation. The moral imperatives that motivate us are still, in many respects, sacred. Our allergies are as strong as those of antiquity. But we are profoundly unaware of them. We are indeed, it seems, in modernity’s theatre—in which the strings that make us twitch and jump have become invisible to us (Bandera 32); we are actors in the hypothetical scenario in Macintyre’s *After Virtue* that our sense of what happened in history is profoundly awry, disturbed.

How to re-open the problem of modernity?
How to see it as both a historical process and yet also, remaining aware of its own tendency to self-delusion, a kind of anti-method or method gone awry? We have explored the way the past can be misconstrued and narrativised in problematic ways. We have suggested that what is taken for granted about modernity should be put back into question. In generating the sketch of the possible path to such inquiry, we have suggested it is a journey that needs to be conducted over and over again—by writers with insights different from ours, and approaches that yield different fruits. We believe we have done the preliminary work towards clearing a way—one that involves grasping how and why the self-account of modernity has slammed the gates on the very meaning of life itself.

Note:
1 For Ferdinand Tönnies, indeed, the modern world ushered in a world of systems (Gesellschaft) which damaged the earlier community basis of life (Gemeinschaft).

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SUFFERING, PRAYER AND HOPE

An Australian Perspective on the Encyclical of Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi: On Christian Hope

DAVID RANSON

If the First Letter of Peter asked that we might be people ‘ready for those who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have’ (1 Peter 3:15), Australians may well offer their own contextual response.

It may be held that the experience of hope is embedded within our national mythology. It is a hope forged through a recurring frustration as we have pitted ourselves against the strangeness of the land itself. ‘Despite our affection for it,’ notes the author Tim Winton, ‘we remain essentially at war with [it], like our invading ancestors. Some part of us still feels that landscape is enemy territory until we transform it, make it in our image.’ (Winton, 1999).

Through its natural vicissitudes the land consistently resists such a transformation. We hug the edge of this vast continent, ‘surrounded by ocean and ambushed from behind by desert—a war of mystery on two fronts,’ as Winton elsewhere remarks (Winton, 1993). In that war, we are often left to hope against the elements that threaten us with a certain reduction. One thinks of Lawson’s account of Tom in ‘Settling on the Land’:

Even then Tom didn’t give in—there was grit in that man. He borrowed a broken-down dray-horse in return for its keep, coupled it with his own riding hack, and started to finish ploughing. The team wasn’t a success. Whenever the draught horse’s knees gave way and he stumbled forward, he jolted the lighter horse back into the plough, and something would break. Then Tom would blaspheme until he was refreshed, mend up things with wire and bits of clothes-line, fill his pockets with stones to throw at the team, and start again. Finally he hired a dummy’s child to drive the horses. The brat did his best: he tugged at the head of the team, prodded it behind, heaved rocks at it, cut a sapling, got up his enthusiasm, and wildly whacked the light horse whenever the other showed signs of moving—but he never succeeded in starting both horses at one and the same time. Moreover the youth as cheeky, and the selector’s temper had been soured: he cursed the boy along with the horses, the plough, the selection, the squatter, and Australia. Yes, he cursed Australia. (Quoted in Crombie, 1987).

Perhaps, there is a part of us that still wishes to curse this land for its unrelenting vastness that threatens, at times, to engulf us. The land has resisted domestication. Yet it is, precisely, this resistance that has spawned our national heroes, men and women who, in different ways, pitted themselves against such force in a frustration of hope. Time and time again, they lost. Yet, in their loss they recognized, along with David Malouf’s words for Voss in the libretto of the opera of the same name, that ‘the mystery of life is not solved by success, but by failure, by a perpetual becoming.’ Subsequently, Australians have a natural affinity with those, who in their defeat, continue to hope. As Joachim Dirks has commented:

The preoccupation with struggle against overwhelming odds is surely a significant component of the Australian national psyche in so far as there is a marked tendency for Australians to see themselves as strugglers or to identify them-
selves with those who struggle to survive or to improve their lot…

…[In] the Australian version of the[e] perennial myth the quest seems to end in failure (glorious) more often than not. Our hero seems to be the tragic hero, the would-be hero who is undone by a flaw or weakness in his character of who simply cannot match the strength of the forces pitted against him, and so is vanquished (Dirks, 1984).

From penal settlement and convict experience, through to the mythology of the pioneer farmer, and to the shores of Gallipoli, Australians, historically, have defined themselves as those who pitch themselves against overwhelming odds with every prospect of defeat, yet discovering there a new sense of solidarity with one another.

Such is the contextual experience of hope in Australia. Behind the highly charged symbolic attraction of Anzac Day, I contend, lies such a national acknowledgement and identification. It is a spirit re-enkindled as communities discover a depth of bond as they face the natural disasters of fire and flood. As Seamus Bradley wrote in his commentary ‘One Hot Day in Hell’, an account of the deadly Victorian bushfires on 26 January 2003, and which acted as a commentary to Campion Decent’s play, Embers:

Again and again the fire attacks, again and again it is pushed back. When, on January 30, a huge ball of flame and smoke rolls over Omeo setting much of the town alight, Benambra again fights for survival…Reid [the CFA operations manager] pays tribute to the townsfolk and the local CFA for putting up such a dogged fight. ‘It’s the only community that didn’t need contract catering,’ Reid says. For an independent community, it’s the highest compliment possible.

A similar grit, fully open to the prospect of failure, but, nonetheless, hoping, and in such a way to experience an unexpected shared solidarity even with the stranger, is touched upon, I suggest, in the annual cycle of the ritual of sporting competition.

The experience at the heart of the Anzac Mythology—pitching ourselves against overwhelming odds, and finding ourselves defeated, yet having discovered an unmistakable experience of solidarity with each other precisely in the possibility of defeat - enables us to understand the purifying outcome of a hope, deepened, and as springing from the experience of contingency.

Though on the surface we appear to lead affluent lives, unaffected by civil and political disorder, perhaps our smallness against the tyranny of the continent’s distance and isolation, gives us a native understanding of the solidarity of a shared experience of hope, and the suffering with another: the con-solatio, the experience of consolation in the heart of suffering, about which Spe Salvi speaks, and in which we might intuit the redemptive dynamism disclosed through suffering that is shared (nn. 36,38). At least, we celebrate such in a national mythology that, in a sustained way, prefers those who, in Les Murray’s words, do not stray from the common dish—‘that vessel of common human sufferings, joys, disappointments, tragedies and bare sufficiencies from which most people have to eat in this world, and from which some choose to eat in order to keep faith with them.’ As Murray explains:

This dish is the opposite of the medieval Grail, which was a vessel attained only by a spiritual elite. To refuse the common ration, or to fail at least to recognize and respect it, earns one the contempt of the battlers and all who live under the laws of its necessity. It is a harsher vessel than the Christian chalice, and not identical with it, except perhaps for the saints, but I believe it
lies close to the heart of the Australian consciousness, and can never be safely ignored. (Murray, 1982)

It is the Common Dish that provides us in Australia with a proletarian spirituality.

Such national experience provides us, perhaps, with a worthwhile window through which to begin to reflect on *Spe Salvi—On Christian Hope* (2007). In many ways, in distinction perhaps from the experience of the United States, we have not been allowed, in this place, the luxury of many of the counterfeits of hope, a number of which *Spe Salvi* identifies—political ideologies promising utopian idealism, on the one hand, or the illusion that the collectivization of property makes for selflessness (nn. 24-31). The grand idea has never had much attraction in such a landscape of contingency. Though we have not been rendered immune from scientific and secular counterfeits of hope, manifest in uncritical trust in human progress and technological advance, we have been spared, too, those religious counterfeits of hope in millenarian movements, prosperity gospels and various forms of theocracies.

From this context we come to read *Spe Salvi* as Australians and, in particular, the section, ‘Settings for learning and practicing hope.’ (nn. 32-40) Surely, our national context is one such setting, too easily taken for granted, but one from which we can derive much insight into the encyclical’s treatment of hope.

It is the section, ‘Setting for learning and practicing hope’ on which I especially wish to focus in this paper. In the section prayer is what is presented as a more immediate context from which hope arises. Prayer is described as a ‘school of hope.’ It is so, perhaps, because prayer is essentially that place of intersection between our own hoping, on the one hand, caught up into a process of increasing purification and deepening, and, on the other hand that hope given us in the mystery of Christ.

The understanding of prayer as a place of intersection might enable us to recognize more clearly the implicit affirmation in *Spe Salvi* that Christian hope enjoys a kind of typology. The paragraphs in the encyclical that discuss prayer as a school of hope are woven on the basis of this typology, though not made quite as explicit as one, perhaps, would expect. Though they are enmeshed, one in the other, there are, in fact, two types of hope: human and theological. They are experienced in the other, but they are, nonetheless, differentiated.

This typology of hope, finding its concrete realization in the experience of prayer, might be understood as firstly, human hope—arising from what we do not have, and secondly, theological hope—arising from what we do have, *i.e.* from what we have been given in Christ.

**Human Hope**

Human hope, firstly, is born of what we do not have. This is the hope that we might draw from the lessons of our own national mythology. Such hope can present as the catalyst for our praying. We pray out of a desire that seeks its fulfillment.

...Our desires imply a condition of incompleteness because they speak to us of what we are not, or do not have. Desire is also, therefore, a condition of openness to possibility and to future. Desires may ground us in the present moment but at the same time they point to the fact that this moment does not contain all the answers (Sheldrake, 1994).

In this way, we hope because we desire, and desire, within the Christian tradition, is what we might call ‘the royal road of prayer.’ All prayer is permeated by hope. To pray is to hope, and, to hope is, in some ways, to pray - the truth of which is realized more fully, the deeper the ground of our hope. Drawing from the experience of Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, imprisoned in Vietnam, Pope Benedict suggests that such hope, informed by our desire, arises most profoundly from the experience of our solitude (n. 32). Yet, the solitude from which human hope stirs finds us in a diversity
of ways. The conciliar colleague of Joseph Ratzinger, Karl Rahner, reminds us of this when he poses the rhetorical questions:

Have we ever been silent although we wished to defend ourselves, although we were treated with less than justice? Did we ever forgive although we got no thanks for it and our silent pardon was taken for granted?…Have we ever made a sacrifice without thanks, acknowledgement or even sentiments of inner peace? Have we ever been thoroughly lonely? Have we had to take a decision purely on the verdict of our conscience, when we cannot tell anybody or explain to anybody, when we are quite alone and know we are making a decision no one can make for us and for which we shall be responsible to eternity?…

We can all perhaps see ourselves in such life experiences, or think of our own similar ones.

Rahner concludes:

[If] we can, then we have had…spiritual experience… the experience of eternity…If we experience grace-filled spirit in this way…we are at prayer. (Rahner, 1975)

Human hope begins when our spirits come to a limit, and negotiate such a limit against that which all limit finds its relief—the incomprehensible horizon into which we are drawn ineluctably. As Spe Salvi beautifully traces, citing Augustine, in such a deepening of hope, our desire broadens and heightens (n. 33). However, as our desire purifies in the way that Spe Salvi indicates, our prayer itself changes. It grows from intercession though trust to contemplative desire.

The English spiritual author, Bernard Basset, writing in the 1950’s, gives an account of such a transformation in this quirky but wonderful description of prayer. He has the character, Miss Copsely Smith trace her way of praying through the imagery of that flat little cardboard man used in ancient days by doctors and nurses in their training. Just as each flap is opened up to reveal further organs, so we are to open ourselves in prayer, layer by layer, until, as Miss Copsely Smith recounts, we:

…arrive at the Ego or what I would prefer to call the heart. Lift up the flaps and I uncover the central longing, this yearning, this desire and I invite God to look in and to fill it up. I sit or lie down and being very liturgical, though the Canon does not think so, I say inside: ‘Take a peep O Lord.’ (Basset, 1968.)

The disclosure of this central yearning, the culmination of human hoping, achieves its greatest poignancy in the experience of suffering, particularly in the swirl of those questions that resist answer (n. 36).

Pope Benedict’s predecessor, John Paul II, expressed this same sentiment of that hope born in the midst of suffering in Salvifici Doloris (1984):

…the suffering human being knows that they are suffering and wonders why; and they suffer in a humanly speaking still deeper way if they do not find a satisfactory answer. This is a difficult question, just as is a question closely akin to it, the question of evil. Why does evil exist? Why is there evil in the world? When we put the question in this way, we always, at least to a certain extent, are asking a question about suffering too.

[We] put this question to God with all the emotion of [our] heart and with [our] mind full of dismay and anxiety; and God expects the question and listens to it, as we see in the revelation of the Old Testament. In the book of Job the question has found its most vivid expression (nn. 9-10)

Spe Salvi rightly indicates that such a question finds insertion into an entire tradition of prayer (n.34). The Psalter is the prayer book par excellence of such hope. In this liturgy of hope, about which both Spe Salvi and Salvifici Doloris speak, we touch upon what Metz terms that ‘mysticism of suffering unto God’:

This language of prayer is itself a language of suffering, a language of crisis, a language of affliction and of radical danger, a language of complaint and grieving, a language of crying out and, literally, of the grumbling of the children of Israel. The language of this God-mysticism is not first and foremost one of consoling answers for the suffering one is experiencing, but rather much more a language of passionate questions from the midst of suffering, questions
turned toward God, full of highly charged expectation...[This] is not a language of exaggerated affirmation, no artificial song of jubilation that would be isolated from every language of suffering and crisis and which all too quickly falls suspect to being a desperately feigned naïveté. What occurs in this language is not the repression but rather the acceptance of fear, mourning and pain; it is deeply rooted in the figure of the night, the experience of the soul’s demise. It is less a song of the soul, more a loud crying out from the depths—and not a vague, undirected wailing, but a focused crying-out-to.

...It is found today...wherever we pose to ourselves the ultimate and decisive God-question, the question about God in the face of the world’s abysmal history of suffering (Metz, 1998).

This mysticism of suffering unto God, part of Jesus’ own God mysticism according to Metz, is a thread that runs throughout the scriptural tradition, which might, itself, be viewed as an articulation of hope.

**Theological Hope**

Human hope, however, comes to its limit. It stands in need of receipt of another hope—that which we know as theological hope.

Theological hope is born, not of what we do not have, but is born, rather, of what we have been given. Theological hope, the second of the three theological virtues, identified by Paul, (1 Cor 13:13), and thus by which we participate in God’s own life, is more than the realization of our own human aspirations, no matter how ardent they might be, and no matter how passionately they stretch out into the incomprehensible horizon of God’s mystery.

As Pope Benedict writes in *Spe Salvi*, truly Christian hope ‘is the great hope based upon God’s promises that give us courage and directs our action in good times and in bad.’(n. 35)

Theological hope has its genesis, not within us, but outside of us. We have been given a word of hope. That hope is faith in a promise given (Gen 12:2-3; 13:15; Ex 6:5-8; Is. 65:17). Christian hope breathes on the irrevocable nature of this promise. It is the confidence (faith) that this cannot be forever frustrated.

The promise received, culminating in the proleptic event of Christ’s Resurrection, changes the way in which we see our life and which changes the way in which we do things. It is that promise that opens up for us new possibility even in the midst of what might be extraordinary limitation. The promise we have been given, and the hope that springs ever new from this faith, enables us to celebrate even in the face of frustration, distortion or limitation.

Such is the paradox of genuine Christian hope that it is most keenly experienced in the face of all that would seem to deny it. Genuine Christian hope is, therefore, exercised in the midst of evil: it is the projection of the Promise, given and received, over the absurdity of evil. St. Paul put it this way, ‘Affliction makes for endurance, and endurance for tested virtue, and tested virtue for hope. And this hope will not leave us disappointed’ (Rom 5:3-5). This, then, becomes the basis for Paul’s prayer of celebration:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8: 35-39)

In *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict inserts such a proclamation in the moving testimony of Paul le Bao-Tinh, one of the Vietnamese martyrs (n.37).

**Conclusion**

In ‘The Flowering Light of the Godhead’ Mechthild of Magdeburg penned:

And God said to the soul
‘I desired you before the world began
I desire you now
As you desire me’
And where the desires of the two come together
There love is perfected.

If Christian prayer finds itself in this confluence of desire, Christian existence, more generally, can be said to be that which finds itself in the intersection of these two hopes. In Christian life, hope meets hope. The hope that arises from our hearts in our struggle to find meaning in the face of all that threatens to overwhelm us, meets a hope that is the celebration of a Promise given to us.

In this intersection of hope, Lawson’s curse becomes not a weed, like Patterson’s, even spiritually, which threatens suffocation of our spirit. Now, even in the frustration of our human hope, we can celebrate in the assurance of a gift irrevocably given. Our ANZAC mythology finds its surest foundation as Christians we are the people who live in this intersection. As those full of hope, we are the people to whom another hope has been entrusted. We are custodians of this hope received, and we are called to celebrate that hope. That hope received, meeting the hope that rises from our hearts, will enable us to act differently than the predicted concerns of the world dictate to us. We celebrate even in the face of the world’s darkness. It is a celebration of the freedom we have now because of that hope, of the beauty that we can create now because of that hope, and of joy that we can share now because of that hope.

Our prayer perseveres even in the face of suffering, and perhaps, because of it.

We can dance now even in our grief, we can love now in our fear. We can live now even in our death.

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THE SIGNING OF Pope Benedict XVI’s second encyclical, Spe Salvi, on the feast of St Andrew the Apostle (30th November), 2007, is widely interpreted as an ecumenical gesture. The theology of hope is one whose major themes are shared by all denominations, and some commentators see in the dating of the encyclical a year after Benedict’s visit to Istanbul—of whose patriarchal see St Andrew is both patron and legendary founder—a sign of the Pope’s ‘hope of unity’ between the Churches.

But the date also holds a clue that something more is being offered. In Spe Salvi the Pope offers a unique and unusual olive branch to Orthodoxy with a gesture of recognition and respect that both transcends the confessional divide and goes to the heart of the communion between the Churches.

In the twenty-eighth paragraph of the encyclical Pope Benedict writes about this communion:

Being in communion with Jesus Christ draws us into his ‘being for all’; it makes it our own way of being. He commits us to live for others, but only through communion with him does it become possible truly to be there for others, for the whole.

The Pope then goes on to quote from the writings of a seventh-century Greek monk, Maximus the Confessor, who wrote that:

Love of God leads to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others…[A]n interior freedom from all possessions and all material goods…is revealed in responsibility for others.1

This quotation from the writings of the Saint known also as Maximus of Constantinople and to the Greeks as Maximus the Theologian says much about Pope Benedict’s approach to communion. Maximus is not, of course, the only saint mentioned in the encyclical; the Pope also quotes from Gregory Nazianzen (another Greek known as ‘the Theologian’), Thomas Aquinas, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo and Bernard of Clairvaux; additionally he cites the nineteenth century saints Josephine Bakhita and Paul Le Bac Tinh, and the twentieth-century cardinals Henri de Lubac S.J. and Nguyen Van Thuan (formerly Archbishop of Saigon).2 Yet it is in this encyclical that for the first time Maximus the Confessor is called a Doctor of the Church—and not just a Doctor of the Church but ‘the great Greek Doctor of the Church’. Considering that apart from Maximus there are only thirty-three other Doctors of the Church, this is quite an accolade.

Doctor of the Church

In the past, Doctors (literally ‘Teachers’) of the Church were announced with fanfare. A requirement for the nomination was that the teacher possessed outstanding holiness, depth of doctrinal insight, and an extensive body of writings which the Church could recommend as an authentic expression of its faith. This last requirement was waived in the case of the next-to-last saint to be named a Doctor, Therese of Lisieux, whose body of writings—though inspiring—was not extensive. Nevertheless her
teaching had to be examined by both the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints before it could be pronounced ‘eminent’ and her Doctorate proclaimed in a public ceremony at St Peter’s by Pope John Paul II. Other saints—Peter Canisius and Albert the Great—became Doctors on the day of their canonisation; there is inevitably some sort of procedure and always a ceremony. Yet Benedict’s reference to Maximus as a Doctor in the course of his second encyclical is almost casual: it is as if Maximus always was a Doctor, and the Pope has merely confirmed it for us, albeit somewhat belatedly.

In a way, this isn’t as strange as it seems. Maximus always has been respected as a teacher: he has been revered as a saint since his death in exile in 662; his teaching on the two wills of Christ became orthodoxy at the sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III, 680-1); and he left a substantial body of writings that fill two volumes of the *Patrologia Graeca*. The only thing preventing his being named a Doctor was the requisite ecclesiastical approval—namely the Pope’s go-ahead—which until last November just hadn’t been granted.

The history of these Doctors of the Church makes an interesting study. Up until the late sixteenth century, only seven saintly teachers had been awarded the title—four of them fathers of the Western church (Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and Gregory the Great) and three from the East (Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom, who are even today honoured by the Orthodox as ‘the three Holy Hierarchs’). By the Middle Ages the number seemed to have become fixed: there were seven Doctors in the same way that there were seven sacraments, seven days of the week and seven ecumenical councils. Only occasionally was the name of St Athanasius included to equalise the number of Eastern and Western Doctors.

The great Dominican Pope St Pius V changed all this when, in 1567, he added the name of the Dominican theologian St Thomas Aquinas to the list, and the Franciscan Sixtus followed suit with the Franciscan St Bonaventure in 1588. From the time of Clement XI in the early eighteenth century two out of every three Popes (there have been eight exceptions among twenty-three pontificates) have invoked their privilege of adding a new name to the list. Most of those named have been Westerners; only four (Cyril of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, John of Damascus and Ephrem of Nisibis) were from the East. The vast majority of the Doctors who lived in the second millennium (all except Francis de Sales) belonged to religious orders; only three (Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena and Therese of Lisieux) were women. Most Popes have restricted themselves to naming only one Doctor during the course of a pontificate; four Popes—Pius IX, Leo XIII, Pius XI and Paul VI—have named two or more.

It has become customary, then, for a new Pope to name a new Doctor, and for the theologian Benedict XVI it was only a matter of time. Yet the method of nominating Maximus has proved surprising, and encyclopedists and list-makers are now scratching their heads and wondering if it is actually *official*. It is, of course: Pope Benedict is simply doing it his own way. It reminds me of the time he dropped the title ‘Patriarch of the West’ from his list of titles: without fanfare, it was simply there in the *Annuario Pontificio* one year and gone the next. In this pontificate the encyclical—that most authoritative of papal writings—has suddenly become the place to announce which other writers or writings on the faith may also be considered authoritative. Or is this encyclical unique?
because it is an encyclical about hope?

**Maximus and the Two Wills of Christ**

So who exactly is this St Maximus, whose nomination to the position of Doctor of the Church has not happened in the way we would have expected? Born around 580 at Constantinople (probably) and called Megistos (‘greatest’—the Latin *Maximus* is a translation) perhaps in order to compensate for his small stature, he was the son of a Byzantine civil servant. Well educated, by his early thirties Maximus was secretary to the Emperor Heraclius; some time after 610 he experienced a call to the religious life and became a monk at the monastery of Philippicus at Chrysopolis (modern Scutari, the Asian suburb of Istanbul). Around 615 he transferred to the monastery of St George at Cyzicus (modern Erdek) on the Sea of Marmara, but with the advance of the Persian army through Asia Minor in the mid-620’s, and along with many other Greeks, he emigrated. By 630 he was at Carthage in North Africa, where his friend and former tutor Sophronius (the future Patriarch of Jerusalem) was also in exile. Encouraged by Sophronius, Maximus wrote extensively—his works are exegetical, mystical, ascetical and devotional in nature, but his favourite topic was the union of God with humanity brought about through the Incarnation. Maximus is considered one of the Church’s finest teachers on this subject.

The seventh century was one of ongoing controversy about the person of Jesus. While the nature of Christ’s *nature* had been clarified two centuries earlier at the council of Chalcedon (451), in the 600’s it was the nature of Christ’s intellective faculties that occupied the minds of theologians instead. Earlier in the century the Emperor had tried to heal the rift between non-Chalcedonian Monophysites (who said that there was only one [divine] nature in Christ) and orthodox Dyophysites (who said that Christ is both true God and true man, of one being with the Father as regards his humanity) by imposing a proviso to the effect that, despite these two natures, Christ had only one (divine) ‘energy’ (sometimes known as ‘activity’ or ‘operation’). This theory (‘monoenergism’) was demolished by the most perceptive theologians of the day (among them Sophronius), only to be replaced by another according to which Christ had only one (divine) will (in Greek *thelésis* or *thélēma*)⁵. This theory was known as Monothelitism.

It was Maximus’ insight that the Will belongs to Nature, and therefore that if Christ has two natures he also has two wills—one divine and one human. Though the churches of the East by and large supported Monothelitism, Maximus’ position was shared by Rome and the West.⁶ In 649 Maximus was invited to the Lateran synod convoked by the new Pope, Martin I, and invited to state his position publicly. To do so would be to invite the wrath of the Emperor, yet Maximus held the view that ‘the smallest point of faith is to be held at the risk of one’s life’⁷. In 653 both Martin and Maximus were arrested and brought to trial (separately) in Constantinople. Pope Martin was imprisoned, humiliated and exiled to Cherson, where he died as a martyr to the faith two years later. Maximus also was exiled, to Byzia in Thrace; six years later he was brought to trial again. This time he was imprisoned, beaten, and had his tongue and right hand cut off so that they might never again ‘minister to your blasphemous argument’⁸. Exiled to Lazica, near Colchis on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, he died on August 13th, 662, at the age of eighty-two.

Maximus may have been small in stature but he was great in his defence of the truth. Though commemorated liturgically as a Confessor, he surely died as much a martyr (literally ‘witness’) to the faith as Pope Martin. As for his holiness and teaching, we can probably apply to Maximus the words which Pope Paul VI applied to St Catherine of Siena, another Doctor who suffered for the unity of the Church: ‘What strikes us most about the Saint is his infused wisdom, that is to say, his lucid, profound...
and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and mysteries of faith”9. In a world which wanted Christ to be—at least on some level—fully divine, Maximus insisted that on all levels Christ is fully human as well.

As One in Compassion

Though the possessor of two wills (one divine and one human), in the Gospels Jesus only ever uses the pronoun ‘I’. Though both God and man he is a single Person, and in most cases the divine will and the human will are in perfect accord—for Maximus, the human will assumed by the Logos submitted to the will of the Father as an example of obedience for the sake of our salvation. Only in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus eventually said: ‘Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt’ (Mt 26:39 and parallels), was there any trace of a conflict: in the Garden, the all-too-human fear of suffering and death was at odds with the divine plan10. Maximus cites as evidence of Jesus’ humanity the numerous other scriptural passages which reveal him as possessing the faculty of will according to his human nature. According to these Christ:

...willed to go to Galilee; willed his disciples to be with him where he is; did not will to drink sour wine mingled with gall; did not want to walk in Judea; did not want anyone to know it; though he could not be hidden, wanted to pass by his disciples walking on the sea; and became obedient to the point of death.11

In today’s world, however, where the humanity of Jesus is taken for granted, it is instructive to examine more closely those other passages in Scripture where Jesus uses the word thelē (‘I will’, sometimes translated as ‘I desire’ or ‘I choose’). Maximus pointedly does not, for example, cite Jesus’ quotation of the prophet Hosea (‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’ [Mt 9:13; cf. Hos 6:6]), or the resurrected Christ’s ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’ (Jn 21:22), or Mark’s reference to the calling of the apostles (‘And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired’ [Mk 3:13])—here no doubt because the calling of the Twelve has a divine aspect. But are there places in the Gospels where Christ’s words can be said to represent both his divine will and his human will?

The first use of thelē in the Gospels is found at Matthew 8:3 (and parallels), and here the supremely communal nature of two wills is clear. Confronted with the misery and human suffering of a leper, Jesus responds to his request for healing with the words: ‘I will: do thou be made clean’. Here the union of the two wills in the person of Christ finds expression in humanly charitable yet divinely miraculous healing, providing for the leper hope in a previously unimaginable future. Later in the Gospel Jesus is unwilling to send the crowds away hungry lest they faint on the way (cf. Mt 15:32), and follows this up with a miracle of loaves and fishes; later still he wishes he could have gathered together the children of Jerusalem ‘as a hen gathers her brood under her wings’ (Mt 23:27, with allusions to Isaiah 49:15 and 66:12-13). In all three of these examples we see the divine will and the human will in perfect accord; see also that in their union in Christ they are as one in compassion for Christ’s fellow human beings.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus’ divinity is expressed more clearly and thelein used more widely. As ‘the Father raises the dead and gives them life,’ Jesus says, ‘so also the Son gives life to whom he will (thelē)’ (5:21); and he desires ‘that they…may be with me where I am, to behold my glory’ (17:24). Those to whom the Son would give life are identified as the disciples, which in a Johannine context means all the faithful. Those who ‘abide in me [may] ask whatever you will (thelēte) and it shall be done for you’ (Jn 15:7); and in John’s first Letter this confidence becomes ‘ask anything according to his will (thelēma) [and] he hears us’ (1 Jn 5.14). This doesn’t mean that Jesus’ will is to be identified with ours, however. Rather, Jesus seeks—or came to do—not ‘my own will but
the will of him who sent me’ (Jn 5:30, 6:38; cf. 4:34), and the content of the Father’s will is then explained in three ways. Firstly, it is that ‘I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day’ (6:39)\(^1\); secondly, with a linguistic recapitulation, it is identified with Jesus’ teaching, which is ‘not mine, but his who sent me’ (7:16); and thirdly, it has to do with Jesus’ passion (cf. Mt 26:42 and parallels; Heb 13:12) and death—which is offered for us (cf. Jn 10.15) and for all (cf. 12:32).\(^1\)

**The Perichoresis of the Wills**

For Mary Coloe, ‘the greatest teaching in the Gospel of John’ is that of the mutual indwelling, or reciprocal relationships, between Father and Son, Jesus and believers: ‘the same loving communion of life experienced within the divine Godhead is opened up as a possibility for all’.\(^1\)\(^4\) The incorporation of humanity into Jesus’ use of *thelein* in John’s writings reflects this invitation into the divine life. While there is in the coexistence or union of the two wills in Christ a real 

perichôresis—a ‘genuine reciprocal penetration’—analogous to that among the persons of the Holy Trinity\(^1\)\(^5\), there is also a profound communion with others such that we might even be able to speak of this communion as a ‘constitutive dimension’\(^1\)\(^6\) of the perichôresis of the wills. In the perichoresis of the divine and human wills in Jesus Christ we find his compassion for the suffering individual, the multitude, the nation, the human race. In the perichoresis of the divine and human wills in Jesus Christ we find a dwelling place even for ourselves.

Similarly, in the Body of Christ which is the Church—animated by the Spirit of life whose law sets us free from the deficiencies of the human will\(^1\)\(^7\)—this communion of wills simultaneously reveals not only the nature of God, but what it means to be fully human. In the perichoresis of the two wills in Christ we find the willingness to participate in compassionate and affectionate acts of charity (or love)—‘in the justice and generosity of God towards others’\(^1\)\(^8\)—such that there is a place for us in the ‘sanctification of men in Christ and the glorification of God’\(^1\)\(^9\). In the perichoresis of the two wills in Christ we find the desire to ‘fully reveal man to man himself’\(^1\)\(^0\) such that there is a place for us in the redemptive death that ‘has definitively restored his dignity to man and given back meaning to his life in the world’\(^1\)\(^1\). And in the perichoresis of the two wills in Christ we find the mystery of God’s will set forth in Christ, whose purpose is ‘to unite all things in him’\(^1\)\(^2\) such that there is hope in the life after this life for us all.

Intra-ecclesiastically the communion of wills also finds expression in the Ignatian attitude of *sentire cum ecclesia* (‘think/feel with the Church’), an approach to theological thinking which in a world of *disunion* is essential for ecclesial communion. We find this attitude above all in the teachings of the Doctors of the Church, whose lives and sanctity are reflected in theologies which are faithful yet creative reworkings of the essential deposit of the Gospel. With teachers like these in our traditions and in our midst, it is clear that we are already participants in a communion of teaching with the Eastern Churches, with whom we share these Doctors’ stories, honour their writings and celebrate their feast days. The Orthodox may not recognise our Eastern Doctors under the same title, but they surely recognise that the Pope means them a great deal of respect with his nomination of St Maximus of Constantinople—whose doctrine of the two wills in the one person of the incarnate Christ has become ‘a pillar of union rather than a source of division between the churches’\(^1\)\(^3\)—on the feast day of St Andrew the Apostle. This is a significant olive branch. There is hope for the future.

**The Doctors of the Future**

The nomination of St Maximus the Confessor brings the number of Doctors of the Church to thirty-four, and the number of Eastern Doctors to nine. This is not a large number if we consider that the other twenty-five Doctors are all
COMPASS

Westerners, but it at least equals the number of Western Doctors of the first millennium (including St Bede). The split between Catholicism and Orthodoxy occurred around the turn of the millennium (1054 is often cited as a convenient date), and until the Churches are reunited it is unlikely that a Pope will name as Doctor a second-millennium non-Catholic.

But are there other Doctors from the ‘Great Church’ of the first Christian millennium yet to be nominated? A number of saintly teachers who united faith with learning and wisdom, and whose writings ‘draw us into Christ’s ‘being for all’, might still merit the title of Doctor of the Church in addition to those already named. The bishops Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus (a Jewish-Christian), Gregory of Nyssa (the Cappadocian described recently by Pope Benedict as a ‘pillar of orthodoxy’),24 and Fulgentius of Ruspe (a North African) were all influential writers as well as spiritual leaders. The Church in Spain already acknowledges three ‘Spanish Doctors’—Ildephonsus of Toledo, Leander of Seville and Fulgentius of Ecija. And the feast day of the lay theologian Prosper of Aquitaine is celebrated in the diocese of Lourdes-Tarbes as that of an ‘Aquitainian doctor’.

As for the Catholic teachers of the second millennium, there are a number of great saints among these too. The Scottish Franciscan and scholastic John of Duns25 was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1993, and the Italian Jesuit Antonio Rosmini-Serbati by Benedict XVI in 2007 (coincidentally just twelve days before the signing of Spe Salvi). The causes of two Venerable cardinals—Cesare Baronio (the ‘Father of Ecclesiastical History’) and the Anglican convert John Henry Newman—are also nearing completion, while St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)—author of a substantial body of work incorporating the themes of phenomenology—was canonised in 1998 and (if the example of St Therese of Lisieux is prophetic) will probably be named a Doctor for the centenary of her martyrdom in 2042. And perhaps the contributions of Henri de Lubac, source of much of the ecclesiology of the second Vatican Council, and Nguyen Van Thuan, whose reflections on the experience of imprisonment have been a source of hope to many27, might one day be recognised as eminent as well—to the building-up of the Church and to the praise and honour of God.

NOTES

2. Other sources include Jesus, St Paul, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, Plato, Martin Luther, Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.
3. In 1997, the centenary of her death (on Mission Sunday). The story is told that the priest who was chaplain to the Carmelites of Lisieux used to call Therese ‘the little Doctor’; cf. The Story of the Canonization of S. Thérèse of Lisieux, 144.
4. In 1925 and 1931 respectively.
5. By ‘will’ is understood that rational desire (to use an Aristotelian term) or cognitive faculty or capacity which desires ‘what is in accordance with nature. For every being, and especially the rational beings, desires by nature what is in accordance with nature, having been given by God according to essence the capacity of that for its own constitution … In accordance with this will we willingly think and …wish and…search and consider and deliberate and judge and are inclined towards and choose/decide and rush and use’. Cf. Demetrios Bathrellos, The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor, 123 & 127, citing Maximus’ Opusculum 16 & Disputatio.
6. During his trial Maximus was asked: ‘Why do you love the Romans and hate the Greeks?’ In answer he replied: ‘We have a precept which says not to hate anyone. I love the Romans as those who share the same faith, and the Greeks as sharing the same language.’ Cf. George C. Berthold (ed.), Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings, 26.
8. P. Allen & B. Neil (eds), Scripta saeculi VII vitam Maximi Confessoris illustrantia, 119. Maximus’ two assistants—both called
Anastasius—were similarly dismembered and exiled to Perberis.


10. For Andrew Louth, Maximus’ defence of two wills in the Incarnate Christ is not intended to suggest that there are two subjects in Christ, but ‘to safeguard the full humanity in which the Second Person of the Godhead lives out a human life’ (Maximus the Confessor, 28). Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane shows, ‘in the shrinking’, the determination of the human will to be shaped and brought in harmony with the divine will ‘in accordance with the interweaving of the natural logos with the mode of the economy’ (p. 61).

11. Bathrellos, The Byzantine Christ, 138. Scripture references are to Jn 1:43, Jn 17:24, Mt 27:34, Jn 7:1, Mk 9:30, Mk 7:24, Mk 6:48, Phil 2:8. The question addressed to Christ by the disciples, ‘Where do you want (theleis) us to go and prepare, that you may eat the Passover’ (Mt 26:17 and parallels) is an additional reference to the human will. 12. ‘For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day’ (Jn 6:40).

13. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews adds: ‘By that (i.e. the Father’s) will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’ (10:10).

14. Mary Coloe, Dwelling in the Household of God: Johannine Ecclesiology and Spirituality, 196. Cf. also 1 Jn 3:2, where ‘all are open to the possibility of the divine presence’.

15. Cf. Aidan Nichols, Byzantine Gospel: Maximus the Confessor in Modern Scholarship, 109. Nichols points out that, according to G.L. Prestige, Maximus was the first to use the noun perichôresis (circumincession) in Christology, ‘even if Gregory Nazianzen did centuries before employ the verb’.

16. To appropriate the terminology of the 1971 Synod of Bishops.


22. Ephesians 1:10.

23. Pauline Allen & Bronwen Neil (eds), Maximus the Confessor and his Companions: Documents from Exile, 30.


26. The septicentenary of Duns Scotus’ death will be celebrated in November this year.

27. Nguyen’s prison writings were published under the headings Road of Hope, Testimony of Hope and Prayers of Hope. The cause into his beatification was opened in 2007, five years after his death.

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IT IS NOT SCIENCE that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. This applies even in terms of this present world. When someone has the experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of ‘redemption’ which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realize that the love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: ‘neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Rom 8:38-39). If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man ‘redeemed’, whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances. This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has ‘redeemed’ us. Through him we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote ‘first cause’ of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can say: ‘I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2:20).

In this sense it is true that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. Eph 2:12). Man’s great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—who has loved us and who continues to love us ‘to the end,’ until all ‘is accomplished’ (cf. Jn 13:1 and 19:30). Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what ‘life’ really is. He begins to perceive the meaning of the word of hope that we encountered in the Baptismal Rite: from faith I await ‘eternal life’—the true life which, whole and unthreatened, in all its fullness, is simply life. Jesus, who said that he had come so that we might have life and have it in its fullness, in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10), has also explained to us what ‘life’ means: ‘this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (Jn 17:3). Life in its true sense is not something we have exclusively in or from ourselves: it is a relationship. And life in its totality is a relationship with him who is the source of life. If we are in relation with him who does not die, who is Life itself and Love itself, then we are in life. Then we ‘live’.

Ben Quash and Michael Ward (eds), *Heresies and How to Avoid Them*, SPCK/Willow Connection, $32.95, paperback, 160 pages.

Talk of heresy, and its opposite, orthodoxy, sets off a negative reaction in the general public in our time, and even in some within the Church. The idea of heresy is seen to be linked to the notion that the Church is a repressive organisation, suppressing original thinking and creativity, and even ‘the truth’.

One of numerous revealing points made in *Heresies and How to Avoid Them* is that often the position that came to be understood as the orthodox Christian belief was much more radical and original than the heresy. Those promoting what came to be understood as heresy failed to fully wrestle with the full spectrum of the biblical tradition, or tried to make sense of an aspect of Christian belief in a way that surrendered to commonsensical thinking that failed to do justice to the fullness of Christian revelation.

An example is Arius, who denied the full divinity of Jesus. While he was a devout Christian, Arius was greatly influenced by Neoplatonic philosophy, and he could not accommodate within his philosophical beliefs the idea that Jesus was as much God as the Father was.

Another important aspect of heresy that is not commonly appreciated is that the views proposed that came to be understood as heresy, were the trigger for a debate about an aspect of Christian belief that had the end result of an orthodox view on the matter being decided upon (at a Church Council and generally enshrined in one of the Creeds). In other words, if there were no heresy, there would be no articulated orthodoxy.

*Heresies and How to Avoid Them* is an excellent guide to key Christian heresies, presented by twelve experts from a variety of Christian traditions, principally Anglicans, but also an Eastern Orthodox and a Society of Friends (Quakers), as well as two Catholic scholars, Janet Martin Soskice and Denys Turner.

The core of the book is a series of twelve essays, one on each of the heresies. Each begins with a concise account of the heresy and its history, followed by key biblical texts relevant to the issue. The rest of the essay discusses the heresy in more detail (working to understand what was behind the heresy, not demonising those involved), and its relevance for believers today.

The essays were originally given as a series of sermons at Peterhouse Chapel, Cambridge, where the editors serve as Anglican priests. In keeping with their origins the essays are very accessible, engaging and concise (each is around ten pages).

The book also has an informative introduction and afterword by the editors, along with a glossary, further reading list, and indexes.

Readers of this book should find not only will they gain a better understanding of the fundamental heresies the Church has struggled with in its history; they will also be challenged to think through their own understanding of fundamental aspects of Christian belief.

—Kevin Mark


This is a small but powerful book of just over one hundred pages which, to use the author’s own words, ‘explores Frederic Ozanam’s involvement in the revolutionary politics of his own day and…reflects on current [Australian] discussions about social justice and the role of religion in politics’.

While the book does outline Frederic
Ozanam’s life and foundation of the St Vincent de Paul Society (for which Frederic is best known), it examines the roles of Charities and Welfare in Australia and the need for love and justice in our society. Dr. Honner points out the many similarities in the times of Frederic and those of present day Australia. He describes Frederic’s concern for people’s spiritual development and the need for self-sacrifice. Dr Honner wonders about those attributes in Australians today.

He quotes from Frederic’s writings of 1834: ‘I believe in authority as a means, in liberty as a means and in love as the end.’

The introduction to the book sets the tone and outlines the subject matter. The author gives a brief outline of Frederic Ozanam’s life and his ambitions. With a few short paragraphs Frederic and his times come to life. ‘Imagine him at a desk in a small room three or four storeys up, a small window, a candle burning’…’

Frederic wrote to a friend: ‘We need poetry in the midst of this prosaic and cold world, and at the same time a philosophy which gives some reality to our ideal conceptions.’

Dr. Honner quotes Frederic’s three aims in life: ‘Three things should be the object of my studies: law, the moral sciences, and some knowledge of the world looked at from the Christian point of view.’

The Introduction is entitled ‘What is the World Coming To?’ and is followed by five chapters dealing with the many issues of our present day society—Charities, Politics, the Economy, Truth and Justice, to name a few. The final chapter tries to answer the question set out in the Introduction.

The book is written in a scholarly fashion but is easy to read by the not-so-scholarly. Each chapter begins with a summary of what is to come and so focuses the reader’s attention on the issues to be discussed. The chapter is further divided by sub-headings which make for easily finding a point of special interest to the reader.

I found the book fascinating because of its story of Frederic and for the wonderful contribution to discussion of problems in our own time.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul in Victoria commissioned the book and it was launched by John Molony, Professor Emeritus of History, of the Australian National University. To quote him as he launched the book: ‘It is not often that I have come away from a book with the feeling that practically every page has enriched me. In this case it is the simple truth.’

Love and Politics is obtainable for $10.00 from the National Office and State Offices of the St Vincent de Paul Society, or by calling 03 9895 5815

—Margaret McCarthy

The knowledge of social well-being and of reform is to be learned, not from books, nor from the public platform, but in climbing the stairs to the poor man’s garret, sitting by his bed-side, feeling the same cold that pierces him, sharing the secret of his lonely heart and troubled mind.

—Frederic Ozanam
NEW RELIGIOUS BOOKS BY AUSTRALASIAN AUTHORS

KEVIN MARK

The Black Dress: Mary MacKillop’s early years; Pamela Freeman; Black Dog Books, www.bdb.com.au; PB $18.99 [9781742030395]; 270pp; 210x140mm; 2008
Reissue of a novel, first published 2005, for teenage and young adult readers and based on the early life of Blessed Mary MacKillop (1842–1909), the founder of the Sisters of St Joseph. Cover of new edition features photographs of MacKillop. Story is told as the recollections of MacKillop at the end of her life as she faces death. She recounts the trials of growing up in a poor family and her developing sense of religious vocation. Includes guide to further information; teacher notes are available from the publisher’s website. Book was awarded the Young People’s History Prize, 2006 NSW Premier’s History Awards, and named a Notable Book in the 2006 Children’s Book Council of Australia Awards. Sydney-based author is an experienced writer for children and young adults.

The Existential Jesus; John Carroll; Scribe Publications; PB $35.00 [9781921215179]; 278pp; 235x150mm; 2007
Rejecting the traditional presentation of Jesus by the Christian Church but believing that ‘Jesus is the core of the Western Dreaming’, the author undertakes a retelling of the first written Gospel, that of Mark, reflecting on its contents in the context of today. Carroll’s Jesus is an existential hero, the West’s great teacher on the nature of being. Part 1 consists of the author’s translation of Mark, each section followed by his interpretation. Part 2 focuses on five characters who represent the different reactions to Jesus (this section also draws on the Gospel of John): Peter, Magdalene, Judas, Pilate, and John. Endnotes; bibliography; index. Author is Professor of Sociology at La Trobe University, Melbourne. Previous books include Ego and Soul: The modern west in search of meaning (1998) and The Wreck of Western Culture (2004).

The Pastoral Care of Italians in Australia: Memory and prophecy; Anthony Paganoni (editor); Connor Court; PB $24.95 [9781921421013]; 185pp; 210x150mm; 2007
Collection of papers exploring the contribution of Italians to the Catholic Church in Australia. Anthony Cappello’s chapter is ‘A Brief Survey of the Italian Catholic in Australia until the Second World War: An Italian Problem?’ Ilma Martinuzzi O’Brien contributes ‘Italian Australians and the Australian Catholic Church through War, Internment and Mass Migration’. Desmond Cahill contributes ‘From Dagoes to Doers: Accommodating Australia’s Italian Families by Church and State. Christopher J. Monaghan CP considers the bibliographical perspective on exile, the challenge of whether to assimilate, and the handing on of traditions. Anthony J. Kelly CSsR’s paper is ‘The Italian Experience: Lessons in Catholicity for the Emerging Multi-cultural Church in Australia’. Editor contributes an introduction and conclusion. Each chapter includes endnotes and further reading lists. Foreword by Apostolic Nuncio Ambrose De Paoli; contributor notes; index. Editor is a Scalabrinian now based in Australia who founded the Scalabrini Migration Centre in Manila.

Prayer and Relationships: Staying connected: An Ignatian perspective; Patrick O’Sullivan SJ; David Lovell Publishing; PB $22.5 [9781863551250]; 126pp; 215x140mm; 2008
Inspired by the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola, but avoiding Ignatian terminology, the author presents an account of prayer that focuses on the relationships we have in prayer. By making choices that allow space for our relationship with God, we progress in the way of prayer. Author is a Jesuit priest who has been the Society’s Australian Provincial, head of the Jesuit Secretariate in Rome for the Christian Life Communities, Director of Campion Retreat Centre, Melbourne, and is presently spiritual director at Corpus Christi Seminary, Melbourne. Previous books include Sure Beats Selling Cardigans: Fostering our relationship with God (1995) and God Knows How to Come Home: Reflections on an active spirituality for today (1999).

Prince of the Church: Patrick Frances Moran, 1830–1911; Philip Ayres; Melbourne University Publishing (The Miegunyah Press); HB $55 [9780522853735]; 384pp; 240x160mm; 2007

The first book-length biography of Patrick Francis Moran (1830–1911), Australia’s first cardinal. Born in Ireland, after many years in Rome, including during the Roman Revolution of 1848, Moran was made Bishop of Ossory (at Kilkenny, Ireland) in 1872. He was appointed Archbishop of Sydney in 1884 and made cardinal the following year. Moran was vocal on moral and religious issues in Australia and was influential in the movement for Federation. Book was commissioned by the current Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Pell. Account is based on the author’s extensive research in Australia, Italy and Ireland, and Moran’s diaries 1850-1911. Photographs; endnotes; bibliography and iconography; index. Author was head of English at Monash University, and professorial fellow and visiting professor at Boston University. Previous books include Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England (1997) and Mawson: A life (2003). He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (London) and the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Putting Life Together: Findings from Australian youth spirituality research; Philip Hughes; Rainbow Book Agencies (Fairfield Press); PB $34.95 [9781875138074]; 215pp; 235x165mm; 2007

Detailed study of the views of Australians aged between 13 and 24 about the world and their relationships with self, society and nature. Examines the influences on the young people’s spiritual and moral development. Based on interviews and surveys from the ‘Spirit of Gen Y’ project undertaken between 2003 and 2006 by the Christian Research Association (CRA) in conjunction with researchers from the Australian Catholic University (including Michael Mason and Ruth Webber) and Monash University. Executive summary; tables and charts (some in colour); references list; index. Author is the senior research officer of the CRA, a research fellow in the Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, and a Uniting Church minister. He is editor and major contributor to Australia’s Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration (2004).

This Is You; Gerard Dowling; Spectrum; PB $19.95 [9780867863871]; 69pp; 210x145mm; 2007

Guide to assist readers to reflect on their own human life, appreciating God’s concern for them. Section one considers Your Identity, including personality, emotions, sexuality and talents. Section two considers Your Journey, from birth to old age. Section three considers Your Company, including family, teachers, friends, enemies, and the community of believers. Section four considers Your Destiny, including purpose, prayer, perseverance, and death and eternal happiness. Author is a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. His radio talkback program, ‘The Family Consellor’, on AM Radio Sport 927, has been broadcast since 1973. He received a Medal of the Order of Australian for services to the commu-
Heart priest, a former editor of Compass, and has been President of SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communication. His numerous books include the Lights, Camera, Faith: A Movie Lover’s Guide to Scripture series (2001-2006).

Through Ecological Eyes: Reflections on Christianity’s environmental credentials; Robert Barry Leal; St Pauls; PB $29.95 [9781921032073]; 206pp; 215x140mm; 2006

First volume in the ‘Theology in Global Perspective’ series. Author of two earlier books on the Trinity, Hunt explores the interconnection of the mystery of the Trinity and the other great mysteries of Christian Faith, synthesizing the tradition and her and other theologians’ work in this area. Chapters include: Faith Seeking Connections; the Development of Trinitarian Theology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods; Contemporary Approaches to Trinitarian Theology; Trinity and Christology; Trinity, the Paschal Mystery and Soteriology; Trinity and Creation, Evolution and Ecology; Trinity and Church; Trinity and World Religions; Trinity, Grace and the Moral Life; Trinity, Spirituality and Worship; and Trinity and Eschatology. Preface by series edi-
Understanding the General Instruction of the Roman Missal; Gerard Moore; St Pauls; PB $25 [9781921032387]; 132pp; 230x150mm; 2007
Commentary on and exploration of The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM, 2002 edition). Author’s primary goal is to reveal the underlying principles and theologies that shape the GIRM. Chapters are Principles of Interpretation, Theological Themes, The Mystery of the Church, The People of the God Arrayed Hierarchically, and The Eucharistic Celebration. Endnotes. Author is Associate Professor and Director of Research at the Sydney College of Divinity. He has a doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, has been a member of the National Liturgical Commission of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and been a consultant to the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). Other publications include Eucharist and Justice (2000) and Why the Mass Matters (2004).

Unintelligent Design: Why God isn’t as smart as she thinks she is; Robyn Williams; Allen & Unwin; PB $17.95 [9781741149234]; 171pp; 195x130mm; 2006
Author uses facts from nature and science for a no-holds-barred attack on the Christian fundamentalist theory of Intelligent Design (ID). He sees ID as at odds with the true purposes of science and religion. The bulk of the book, Part 1, is devoted to this critique of ID, concluding with a chapter specifically on ID in Australia. The final two chapters, which form Part 2, are a more general critique of belief in God, including autobiographical material by the author. Author has presented science programs on ABC radio and television since 1972. He is the first journalist to be elected a fellow of the Australian Academy of Science. Other books include Future Perfect (2007).

Witness to Wonders: Healings and miracles today; John Rea SM; Comsoda Communications, dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB $17.50 [9780958091213]; 156pp; 210x140mm; 2005
Autobiographical account by a New Zealand-born Marist priest of his experiences of the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the gift of healing. He first discovered the power of prayer with faith on a missionary journey to Fiji, and his healing ministry has taken him to the Pacific Islands, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, the United States, Europe and Australia. Also tells of author’s involvement with Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Includes texts of numerous healing prayers by author. Foreword by Cardinal Thomas S. Williams, Archbishop of Wellington, New Zealand. Photos.

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The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed while this issue of Compass is current. It focuses on the readings for Sundays between July and October 2008, from the Fourteenth to the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The readings over this time offer a unique opportunity to proclaim the readings of Ordinary Time, with only the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross (September 14) interrupting the flow of Ordinary Time readings. We can trace Matthew’s Gospel over this period, given the Lectionary’s unique method of Gospel selection and the way the First Reading is chosen with the Gospel in mind. The Second Reading, as usual, follows Paul’s writings in a semi-continuous but selective fashion.

1. The First Readings allow us to proclaim selections mainly from the prophets (chiefly from Isaiah, but also Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Malachi), though readings also appear from the Torah (Exodus–OT 30), and the historical (1 Kings–OT 19) and wisdom (Sirach–OT 24) writings. The Book of Isaiah is frequently divided into three sections or ‘books,’ not written by the same author but reflecting a common spirit of the prophet and dealing with different periods of Israel’s religious life around the time of the Exile. For this reason, commentators talk of First-Isaiah (Is 1-39), Second-Isaiah (Is 40-55) and Third-Isaiah (Is 56-66). Our present selections cover all three books. First Isaiah (OT 21, 27 & 28) celebrates God’s holiness and power which shapes the destinies of peoples. It calls Israel to integrity of life and fidelity to their covenant with God. Second Isaiah (OT 25, 29) seeks to comfort the exiled people of Israel and ensure them that God is always with them. Third Isaiah (OT 20) envisages a new moment where all peoples are gathered as one on God’s holy mountain. All the prophetic writings enable present Christian communities to reflect on God’s presence in the midst of our political and religious lives. They invite us to identify God’s action in our world.

2. The Second Readings allow us to follow Paul’s theological message to three of his communities, either ones that he was responsible for (Philippians, Thessalonians) or one that he was planning on visiting (Romans). In these Sundays of Ordinary Time we read Romans, from chapter 8 to the end of the letter. Paul is writing from Corinth around 55CEs and focuses on God’s promises to Israel (OT 20, 21). He encourages the Roman Christian to live authentically within their own culture, conscious of God’s presence with them (OT 22, 23). The readings from Philippians (Triumph
of the Cross, OT 25-28), written around 56 CE from Ephesus, offer an opportunity to meditate on the power of life with God and the kind of life that flows from this unity with God. Paul models and encourages the qualities of a faith-filled life focussed on Jesus. On OT 29-31 (October 19-30) we turn our thoughts to the final weeks of the liturgical year and begin reading from the earliest writing of the New Testament. I Thessalonians. The letter was written around 50CE from Corinth and explores some of the most fundamental concerns of Christian living: need for fidelity, openness with God and hospitality.

3. The Gospel readings continue from the Gospel of Matthew. This is a Jewish-Christian gospel, written in the late first century, to a community undergoing transition, struggle and searching for how to live in its own culture, faithful to the spirit of Jesus and engaging life. Our selection covers Mt 14-23. This part of the gospel is concerned with missionary endeavour, dealing with internal division and understanding religious history. The evangelist presents a portrait of Jesus concerned about disciples who want to know how to handle conflict and develop a form of leadership that is clear and embracing of those who are excluded. The passages of Mt from OT 19-31 offer wonderful opportunities for contemporary Christian communities to reflect on their own issues: internal division, leadership and engagement with the wider society. These are the perennial and ever relevant concerns for all communities throughout history.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

July 6—Ordinary Time 14: Zech 9:9-10. God as King will come to deliver, protect and offer peace. Rom 8:9.11-13 We possess God’s Spirit who empowers our daily lives. Mt 11:25-30 We are invited to come to Jesus who wants to be with us in our daily struggles. Theme—God’s Comfort. Many people today feel the burdens of life. Our faith community gathered in this Sunday Assembly reflects a gentle God who seeks to offer support and comfort to those who struggle. How is this happening practically at a local level?

July 13—Ordinary Time 15: Is 55:10-11. God’s Word is eternally effective. Rom 8:18-23. The whole of creation is caught up with humanity in the inward search for God and the release of God’s spirit of renewal. Mt 13:1-23 This is the ‘Great Parable’ chapter of Mt’s Gospel: God’s Reign is present mysteriously and unexpectedly. Theme—God’s Presence. To dispirited people the invitation to contemplate a God who is present, active and mystery is an essential truth. It uplifts, converts, strengthens and offers a fresh perspective.

July 20—Ordinary Time 16: Wis 12:13-16-19. God teaches, offers hope and wisdom. Rom 8:26-27. God’s Spirit helps us in our weakness. Mt 13:24-43. This is the parable of good and evil. Theme—Weakness. The human experience of weakness and disaster invites us to draw close to a God who is present in our struggles. Mt’s parables remind us of the realism of life’s ambiguities which are part of discipleship and mysteriously reveal God’s presence.


of difficulty, experiences of desertion, or even feelings of separation from God—all these can be interpreted as invitations for deeper spiritual nourishment. The journey ever continues. **August 10—Ordinary Time 19:** 1 King 19: 9, 11-13. The prophet experiences God in the unexpected silence of nature. Rom 9:1-5. Paul affirms the role which the Jewish people play in God’s plan of salvation. Mt 14:22-3. Jesus walks on the water, overcomes the powers that threaten to annihilate the household of disciples. Peter accompanies him. **Theme—God’s Presence in difficult times:** Elijah experiences God’s presence in the silence of nature after the natural violence that precedes it; Jesus overcomes the violence that attempts to overcome Mt’s community represented by the boat. God’s presence never deserts the household of disciples. This conviction continues today. **August 17—Ordinary Time 20:** Is 56: 1, 6-7. Justice lies at the heart of being open to God and acting religiously. It is the source of unity. Rom 11:13-15, 29-32. Paul continues to acknowledge the role which the Jewish people have in God’s plan. Mt 15:21-28. A non-Jewish woman’s persistence pays off. Jesus blesses her and heals her daughter. **Theme—God’s Attraction:** Faith communities show the attraction which God has for people; everyone is on the search for God. It is revealed in people’s commitment to justice (1st reading) or their search to deal with seemingly insurmountable problems (Gospel). **August 24—Ordinary Time 21:** Is 22:15, 19-23. Shebna, a royal official, is removed from office and Eliakim is given authority (‘the key’) over the royal household. Rom 11:33-36. Paul celebrates God and God’s wisdom. Mt 16:13-20. Jesus is acknowledged as God’s Messiah; Peter is commissioned with leadership. **Theme—Leadership and Authority:** Examples abound of political and religious leadership that is empowering and inclusive of those conventionally excluded. This is the kind of authority envisaged in Isaiah and Mt, and needed still. **August 31—Ordinary Time 22:** Jer 20:7-9. The prophet recognises the struggle of the prophetic vocation and mission. Rom 12:1-2. Paul encourages total spiritual renewal that is personal and social. Mt 16:21-27. Jesus prepares his disciples for the suffering that awaits. Peter, commissioned last week, becomes a stumbling block to Jesus this week. **Theme—Struggle:** Today’s liturgy offers a moment to name the ways that faithful Christians in the local community struggle. They are authentic witnesses as contemporary prophets and disciples. **September 7—Ordinary Time 23:** Ez 33:7-9. The prophet is entrusted with the task of speaking God’s truth, even though this may be unpopular. Rom 13:8-10. Love of neighbour is the summary of the commandments. Mt 18:15-20. Jesus offers practical advice for dealing with internal tension. Ultimately, he is always present. **Theme—Tensions:** Faith communities will always experience difficulties and tensions. They are part of living out of God’s truth (1st reading) and the humanity of communities (Gospel). What are some present difficulties being encountered? **September 14—Exaltation of the Holy Cross:** Num 21:4-9. The struggle of the desert experience brings the Israelites to a renewed faith in God. Phil 2:6-11. Paul’s hymn about Jesus praises his communion with human beings and his exaltation by God. In 3:15-17. God’s love and desire for our world (and all humanity) is revealed in Jesus. **Theme—Suffering and God’s presence:** Stories abound of human suffering and struggle. God’s communion with creation and humanity in the midst of pain, even death, is celebrated as we reflect on those who show us God’s compassion evident through their own suffering. This is a good moment to offer the Anointing of the Sick. **September 21—Ordinary Time 25:** Is 55:6-9 The Prophet’s invitation to seek out and experience the surprising and mysterious God. Phil 1:20-24,27. Paul acknowledges his deep desire to die and be with God, and his commitment for his people. Mt 20:1-16. The parable about God’s surprising generosity and the reversal of fortune. **Theme—A Surprising God.**
Today’s readings invite us into a meditation and celebration on the surprising nature of God, as generous, loving and unfathomable. What are our dominant images of God? How do these shape our actions and influence our faith communities?

**September 28—Ordinary Time 26:** Ez 18:25-28. The prophet celebrates God’s forgiving nature and the human possibility of change and repentance. Phil 2:1-11. We are invited to have the mind of Jesus as we reflect upon the great hymn about Jesus’ mission and status. Mt 21:28-32. The socially and morally unexpected who have the capacity for change and repentance are invited into God’s community. **Theme—Change and Repentance:** The liturgy presents a moment to encourage and offer hope for those who feel cut off or excluded. Repentance and change are always possible (Gospel). God always embraces the repentant (1st Reading) and this Eucharist can be the moment of forgiveness and healing.

**October 5—Ordinary Time 27:** Is 5:1-7. God’s people are like a cared-for vineyard, sometimes fruitless. Phil 4:6-9. Paul offers encouragement not to worry, but live faithfully and confidently in peace. Mt 21:33-43. The parable of what happens to the servants and son of the vineyard owner is an allegory of Mt’s community: its struggles and suffering. **Theme—Suffering:** Mt’s Jewish Christian community sees its own story in today’s Gospel. To live with integrity and authenticity comes at a cost. Are there local and pertinent examples of this?

**October 12—Ordinary Time 28:** Is 25:6-10a. Paradise is presented here as a mountain feast with choice foods and wines. Phil 4:10-14,19-20. In all that happens to him, no matter his physical or financial resources, Paul’s ultimate focus is always God. Mt 22:1-14. God lavishes a banquet is for all, ‘good and bad.’ **Theme—Eucharistic Inclusiveness.** The local Eucharistic celebration is a reflection of the Universal Church: How does it celebrate inclusiveness in a world of cultural diversity?

**October 19—Ordinary Time 29:** Is 45:1,4-6. An unexpected non-Jewish military emperor becomes God’s agent of salvation. 1 Thes 1:1-5. Paul addresses a community with faith and openness in God. Mt 22:15-21. Jesus avoids a trap set by the religious leaders. God is the true source of all life, even political. **Theme—God and Politics.** An opportunity to reflect on the way God and religion have been co-opted into contemporary politics and military affairs, and offer an alternative focus: The heart of life and human community is God (1st Reading and Gospel), not the human whim for power or the seduction of privilege.

**October 26—Ordinary Time 30:** Ex 22:21-27. God’s concern for the Israelites is to attend to the poor and not oppress the resident alien. 1 Thes 1:5-10. Paul praises the Thessalonians for their hospitality and openness to God’s preached word. Mt 22:34-40. Jesus summarises the heart of ethical life: love of God and neighbour. **Theme—Hospitality to the Stranger:** The treatment of the socially forgotten, excluded and the poor in our communities is the touchstone of authentic religious life. A number of positive examples from the local scene can illustrate the living out of such faith.

**October 30—Ordinary Time 31:** Malachi 1:14-2:8-10. God critiques the practice and infidelity of Israel’s religious leaders. 1 Thes 2:7-9,13. Paul offers himself as a model of care, commitment and fidelity. Mt 23:1-12. Status and privilege are not part of the life of the Christian community. **Theme—Authentic Leadership:** The readings (1st Reading and Gospel) offer an opportunity to highlight the qualities of authentic political and religious leadership: integrity, humility and service of others.