A STRANGE THING to say, no doubt, but God really is important. True, God is important in God’s self, as the Almighty One. God is the First and Last, the Supreme Being—not as highest on some graduated scale, but as transcendent, utterly Other. God is supremely important as God. This we know and wonder at. But God is important for us, and therefore we are invited to respond with all our being.

Our experience of the world in which we live makes us realize how important God is for us. The world can be a very ugly place and without God and what our faith tells us about God we would find it very hard to cope. How people manage without faith is beyond my comprehension. The Scriptures are filled with the most reassuring teachings about God’s love, God’s concern, God’s support, and the extraordinary gift and privilege that is ours to be called to be God’s children—to be part of God’s family.

You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (Rom. 8.15-16).

If we have some faith and awareness that God is always near no matter what is happening then we are far better placed to face the world and all that goes on in it.

At present there is plenty to lament about the world we live in. I hesitate to make a long list because it would be too depressing. One has only to watch the evening news broadcasts to be aware of the ugliness. People can be so brutal to other people. The global economic crisis, reported to have been caused by greed, is real and near at hand: our St Vincent de Paul group reports a tripling of the number of calls for assistance this year. The marginalisation of Aboriginals continues to shame our nation, as does the wide-spread culture of binge drinking, drugs, and other harmful behaviour. But most shameful and distressing of all is the predatory behaviour of clergy and religious that has so badly harmed many young, vulnerable people. The revelations of sexual abuse seem to be never-ending and the damage inflicted is incalculable. Apologies, saying sorry, seem so feeble.

In the days of my relatively care-free youth I used to take issue with the words of the prayer ‘Hail Holy Queen’: ‘…to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping, from this valley of tears’. Now that I know a little more about the world and the way it runs I am less inclined to dismiss the sentiments the prayer expresses.

The world we live in can be a valley of tears. It can be very ugly, and the present moment might tempt us to send up our sighs, mourning and weeping, to Mary and the whole court of heaven.

However, weeping and mourning pure and simple is not the Christian way. St Paul tells us to rejoice even as we weep and mourn: ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.’ (Phil. 4:4.) And he warms to his theme: ‘Have no anxiety about anything’ (v.6). St Philip Neri ‘ was outstanding for…joyfulness in the service of God’ (Prayer of the Church for the Feast of the saint, 26th May). And Philip had many reasons to weep and mourn in his times.

How can we weep and mourn and rejoice all at the one time? St Augustine, as he so often does, clarifies things for us: ‘The Apostle tells us to rejoice, but in the Lord, not in the world’ (Sermon 171.1).

Our faith in God enables us to hope in a new day that is dawning for all those who weep. We need to thank God for being God! Without God life would be hell.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor.
ANY NEW ZEALAND teenagers are lost to violence and drug abuse. The Justice Ministry reported a 39% increase in youths committing violent crime in 2006. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in young people (after motor vehicle crashes), and accounts for approximately 25% of all deaths of young people aged from 15 to 24 years.

In 1998 Judith Rich Harris proposed a theory to explain why, in a family where other siblings are faring well, one teenager may be attracted to peers whose values differ radically from their parents. Harris asked researchers in child development a question which poses a challenge to practical theology: How can we break the vicious cycle of aggressive kids becoming more aggressive when they get together with others like themselves?

This paper is a conversation between media studies, human development theory, mythology and pastoral ministry. A special focus is on the unique characteristics and challenges represented by ‘Generation Txt’. Because cellphones enable adolescents to establish ‘secret networks’ off limits to parents, they may exacerbate whatever conflicts already exist within the family. I will argue the need for Christian family counselling agencies and youth ministries to create an extended family for wounded adolescents and their families.

**Youth Crisis in New Zealand**

Almost daily, New Zealanders are assailed with images of teenagers involved in crime. In a report focusing on youth crime, the Justice Ministry revealed a 39% increase in violent crime in 2006, with violent offenses increasing from 2690 in 1995 to 3743. Another report stated that young women’s binge-drinking is now matching males, with girls drinking to ‘get smashed’ and leaving themselves vulnerable to sexual assault, robbery and violence. Yet another reported that a 14-year-old was pulled over by police because he was driving drunk at 3.35 a.m. with a reading of 695 mg. blood alcohol level. (The NZ norm is 80 mg.) Finally the Canterbury Suicide Project revealed that suicide is the second leading cause of death in young people in New Zealand (after motor vehicle crashes) and accounts for approximately 25% of all deaths of young people aged from 15 to 24 years.

These statistics are mind-numbing. What is happening to these young people during one of the most critical times of their development? Why aren’t they working hard at school or playing sport? Why aren’t they making a vision quest in New Zealand’s majestic native bush?

Many committed New Zealanders working with ‘at risk’ youth have been asking these questions for some time. This paper is yet another attempt to understand some of the causes of adolescent antisocial behaviour and suggest some modest solutions. Here we hope to bring into dialogue the disciplines of media studies, human development studies, mythology and pastoral ministry.

**Growing up in the 21st Century**

The transition from childhood to adult society has always been a challenging time in a person’s life. Adolescence is typically a time of...
rebellion against adult authority as young people pull away from parents in order to establish their own identity. But it need not be a time of trauma—either for teenagers or their parents.

The role of parents is to support the emerging young adult in his/her quest for a unique identity, independent of them and yet related in terms of their overriding values. Parents are to listen to their children’s dreams and goals, advise them, be there to support them, and yet allow them to make the important decisions in their lives. This is the theory. Yet the practice can often be quite different.

I submit that this important dialogue is not taking place because many parents are not able to be elders, and therefore cannot accept the most crucial responsibility of being a parent, which is to embody wisdom.

When families were still embedded in a village culture, other capable adults were able to assume responsibility for raising children. Even today, when at least an extended family is intact and functioning adequately, capable relatives are able to step in and care for a child who is not faring well at home. This is because the extended family views all children in the family as their own.

Today, however, both extended family and village have collapsed, and parents are often on their own coping with the challenges of raising children in one of the most violent and chaotic eras of human history. Indeed, an appalling aspect of contemporary violence is that we have come to accept it as normal. In fact, if I might borrow Stuart Sellar’s phrase, we can speak of the ‘metanarrative of violence’ that permeates our culture and saturates our children’s view of the world in the media. I will analyse three elements of the ‘violence matrix’ that has invaded the culture of adolescents with the explicit purpose of corrupting them.

Of the three types, structural violence is institutional and systemic. Interpersonal violence is defined by the violence between and among individuals and groups while intrapersonal violence is defined as violence directed toward the self. (James, Johnson, Raghavan, Lemos, Barakett and Woolis, 2003:131)

The authors of ‘The Violence Matrix’ also describe ‘the innermost or microsystem level of structural violence, which refers to the collective psyche... violence at this level is displayed psychologically. Psychological violence occurs when other forms of structural violence become accepted, promoted, and integrated into the collective psyche often forming stereotypes about particular groups.’ (ibid. p. 132)

The Impact of Media and Technology

Psychological violence includes the effects of media and technology on impressionable adolescents. The interpersonal levels of violence include family and community breakdown, and the intrapersonal levels of violence include whatever toxic substances adolescents ingest in order to deal with their situation, however inappropriately. This violence is enabled by both our society and its technologies. I will discuss some examples briefly.

A Culture of Violence

We live in an age of violence and danger. Cinema and television have become agents of corruption. The media markets violence—in images, music, news—to the most avid target audience: our adolescent daughters and sons. I recall the movie Mr. and Mrs. Smith starring Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, both professional assassins leading secret lives, even from one
No, I did not watch this movie. I watched the people who were watching it on Air New Zealand when I was travelling to the United States to visit my family. I watched twenty minutes and was so repelled I could not watch any more. But everyone around me was watching it—young and old, men and women—and the teenagers were mesmerized. Since Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie have enormous ‘cultural capital’ among young people, I wondered what was going through their minds as they watched these celebrity icons killing people for profit and then taking aim at each other.

The world mediated to teenagers via movies, rap and hip-hop music and most other popular entertainment is dark, ugly and violent. Hurtful, exploitative relationships dominate the movie industry and adolescents observe their culture heroes use one other for sex, status, and money. Furthermore, all this is presented to them as ‘normal’. In *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out The Way They Do*, child psychologist Judith Rich Harris writes:

> I believe the media’s glamorization of violence—or, what might even be worse, their banalization of violence—is the source of much of the increase in criminal behavior over the past thirty years. The children of San Andres grew up thinking that aggressive behavior is normal because that’s how a lot of the people in their village behaved. The children of North America and Europe grow up thinking that aggressive behavior is normal because that’s how a lot of the people on their television screens behave. Kids bring these notions with them to the peer group and, since their peers live in the same village or watch the same shows, they incorporate them into the norms of their group. People in our society, they think, are supposed to behave that way. (Harris, 1998: 284)

If young people have not been taught by their parents to work through conflicts constructively, they will probably emulate behaviour they see on television.

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**A World Without Limits**

In ‘Flat and Happy’, media studies scholar Todd Gitlin writes:

> television’s largest impact is probably as a school for manners, mores, and styles—for repertories of speech and feeling, even for the externals and experiences of self-presentation that we call personality. This is not simply because television is powerful but also, and crucially, because other institutions are less so. (Gitlin, 1993: 49)

From the time children sit in front of the television set, they learn the basic facts of life in the post-modern world: we live in a world without limits or moral boundaries. If you have enough money, you can buy whatever you want and do whatever you want. You can even commit murder if you can afford a high powered lawyer to get you acquitted. Forget about right and wrong; these concepts are quaint and meaningless. We live in the postmodern world; all meanings and values are socially constructed.

As a matter of fact, since most young people have money, they are targeted by the mass media and advertising industry as a ‘growth market’. The goal is to make them consumers as young as possible. The word ‘enough’ is never heard in popular culture. The media and advertisement industry teach young people that they never have enough, and so they continually want more.

Consider also the impact of Reality TV, where shows like Temptation Island recruit young people who crave celebrity status and subject them to the crassest humiliation and degradation. Young people will do anything to win. They will undermine one another and even prostitute themselves. Celebrity status matters more than human decency. In God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It, Jim Wallis observes:

> The real enemy here isn’t sex, but rather the commodification of everything - turning all values into market values, gutting the world of genuine love, caring, compassion, connection, and commitment for what will sell, for exam-
Harris, Gaitlin and Wallis may be American thinkers echoing the venerable Frankfurt school critiques of commodity culture, but since New Zealand has imported American popular culture, I am on safe turf in sharing their insights and observations about how television and movies affect the collective psyche of adolescent New Zealanders.

Cellphones and Secret Networks
Of all the technologies that have captured the minds and hearts of adolescents, cellphones may be viewed as less dangerous than the potential for abuse via chat rooms, for example, in which hapless teenagers can be lured into horrendous situations. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will discuss only the impact of cellphone technology because of its huge influence in shaping the personality of an entire generation of young people. It has also played an immense role in influencing the dynamics of contemporary family life.

My 21- year-old daughter’s generation got their first cellphones when they were 15 years old. She, like many teenage girls, spent countless hours texting her ‘mates’. But they were also able to focus on other things, like school and family. The cellphone was a part of their lives, but did not dominate them.

A mere three or four years later, members of my 17-year-old daughter’s generation, however, have had a very different relationship to their cellphones. The cellphone seemed more like an appendage to their bodies than a tool of communication. It is with them at all times—day and night, disturbing their concentration on important tasks during the day, and their sleep at night. I was not surprised, therefore, when I came across references to ‘Generation Txt’, in my research for this paper.8

Cellphones enable adolescents to establish ‘secret networks’ that are off limits to parents. The text message is the medium that makes this possible. The ‘secret network’ exacerbates whatever conflicts already exist within the family. By the time parents and teenagers have the opportunity to discuss whatever problems exist, a hundred text messages have been exchanged among the adolescent’s peer group. In Cellular Phones, Public Fears, and a Culture of Precaution, A. Burgess reports that many parents believe they are out of touch with the circle of friends surrounding their child and thus the variety of influences upon their social development, their thinking and behavior.9

To be sure, cell phone technology makes it possible for parents to communicate with their children, but a brief text message is not the same thing as dialogue. Dialogue requires a personal encounter in which people are truly present to one another. In dialogue, people really hear what others are saying and respond accordingly. Indeed the purpose of dialogue is communion and conversion, so that real understanding takes place.10

SMS technology enables young people to be free and in charge of their lives but their autonomy is constrained by their slavish dependence on their mobile phones. To quote Thurlow, Generation Txt is ‘young and free but tied to the mobile’. (Thurlow, 2003: 1.2) If adolescents are sending 2000 text messages a month,11 they are in a constant state of distraction. Thus, how can they really concentrate on anything else? What was supposed to free them has ended up enslaving them.

I believe we might compare members of Generation Txt to another group, Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) who are ‘born into a home where their natural ability to speak is never able to be either modelled or shared by their parents’.12 In ‘Youth Ministry in a World of Diversity’, Paul McQuillan argued that young people socialised by western mechanistic culture are like children of deaf adults in that they have a limited capacity for religious experience, even though they are spiritual by nature—like all human beings. Likewise, I believe that members of Generation Txt have experienced a loss of interiority because they have been so defined by technologies that crowd the mind and confound the attention. If people are unable to be quiet, they will not be
able to hear their ‘inner voice’.

**The Fatherless Generation**

In 1979, Henri Nouwen wrote *The Wounded Healer* in which he described the young people he encountered as: ‘fatherless’, ‘inward’ and ‘convulsive’. The ‘fatherless generation’ he defined as:

…a generation which has parents but no fathers, a generation in which everyone who claims authority—because he is older, more mature, more intelligent or more powerful—is suspect from the very beginning….Today, seeing that the whole adult, fatherly world stands helpless before the threat of atomic war, eroding poverty, and starvation of millions, the men and women of tomorrow see that no father has anything to tell them simply because he has lived longer. (Nouwen: 1979, pp. 30-31)

This statement suggests that Generation Txt’s grandparents and great grandparents failed in their mission to bring about peace, justice or eliminate poverty. In the same work, Nouwen drew on the work of Jeffrey K. Hadden to describe the young people he encountered in 1979 as ‘the ‘inward generation’ which gave absolute priority to the personal and tended … to withdraw into the self….‘(p. 27) Nouwen believes that ‘it is the behavior of people who are convinced that there is nothing ‘out there’ … which can pull them out of their uncertainty and confusion.’ (p. 28.)

Note that this statement describes the parents of Generation Txt. Is it possible that many kids are lost today because their parents were lost?

Finally, Nouwen describes the ‘convulsive’ generation as ‘restless and nervous people, unable to concentrate and often suffering from a growing sense of depression… [Because] what is shouldn’t be, they are saddled with frustration, which often expresses itself in un-directed violence which destroys without clear purpose, or in suicidal withdrawal from the world, both of which are signs more of protest than of the results of a new-found ideal.’ (italics mine) (Nouwen: 1979, p. 34) He also suggests that authority figures often fail to recognize the great ambivalence underpinning this violent behaviour.

Nouwen’s observation is that of a wise, empathetic pastor who understands what it’s like to grow up in a world without meaning and value, where major political, economic and environmental problems seem unsolvable. The generations that were supposed to change the world did not do such a good job.

I introduce Nouwen’s ideas after a rather strident critique of the culture that has socially constructed our adolescents because I wanted to ask the rather obvious question: Who created this world? And now I will look at the impact of this culture of violence on family life in the 21st century.

**The Wounded Family and the Loss of the Elders**

Continuing with the framework of the violence matrix, we move now to discuss the interpersonal levels of violence which include family and community breakdown. Families are embedded in a particular culture, and a violent culture will have a devastating effect on family life. In New Zealand, Maori and Pacific Islanders tend to be more embedded in the culture of violence than middle or working class Pakeha families because of the cultural and historical effects of colonization which still affect their lives.13 For the purpose of this paper, I will present three theories of how a family becomes wounded: 1) Ulrike Uslar-Furkert’s theory of the Frazzled Family, 2) a brief discussion of Stephen Karpman’s Drama Triangle, and 3) Julia Rich Harris’ theory of why one child in a family fares worse than others during critical moments in adolescent development. The theories are psychological rather than structural but describe pathologies that may look familiar to those working with troubled families in many cultural groups.

**The Frazzled Family and the Drama Triangle**

New Zealand family counsellor, Ulrike Uslar-Furkert prefers the term “frazzled family” to
the popular term ‘dysfunctional family’ because every family is doing what it does in order to function/get through the day. There are no perfectly functioning families, because we are all human and constantly developing... According to Uslar-Furkert, the key reason why a family becomes ‘frazzled’ is that parents are not able to guide their children to become moral, competent adults.

We might say, therefore, that some parents are not able to be ‘elders’. What is an ‘elder’? According to the dictionary, an elder is: ‘one who is older than another or others; an ancestor; a person advanced in life, and who, on account of his age, experience, and wisdom, is selected for office.’ In other words, elders are responsible, self-confident adults who are capable of raising children to become moral, conscientious people.

If adolescents are not pushing against strong elders, they will collapse. In a healthy dialogue between parents and adolescents in the process of identity formation, parents establish boundaries that free adolescents to grow into healthy adults. Parents must embody what life is all about because they live it themselves. Teenagers must see the congruence between word and deed.

Parents are not able to be elders for a variety of reasons, such as illness, either psychological and/or physical, incompetence, ignorance, lack of confidence, drug and alcohol addictions, workaholism or religious fundamentalism, in short, any pathology which prevents a healthy dialogue within the family in which boundaries are clear and maintained, and adolescents are supported in achieving their goals.

When the dialogue breaks down to the extent that teenagers are out of control, the frazzled family quickly becomes the wounded family where parents ‘parent from their pain’, to quote Uslar-Furkert, rather than from an authoritative, assertive posture. Adults with serious unresolved family issues will typically fall into this type of parenting behaviour, which only intensifies the crisis for the young.

The so-called drama triangle will emerge in which there are three actors: persecutor, victim and rescuer. According to Stephen Karpman, these roles serve as a training ground for powerlessness and prevent psychological equality in relationships. These roles will continue as long as someone is willing to be victimised.

For the frazzled family to heal, the person who is most aware of what is happening must step outside their role and permit the family to collapse. This will take courage, because the outcome is unclear. However if parents refuse to rescue or be victimized by an irresponsible teenager, everyone can begin to function as psychologically healthy people who take responsibility for their lives.

I believe that the dynamic described in the Frazzled Family and the drama triangle are examples of interpersonal violence. In these situations, children will be struggling with anger, frustration, resentment and failure instead of living happy, carefree lives. Moreover, they will lack the spiritual and emotional resources to process these powerful negative emotions, and thus may also become self-destructive, which leads to the intrapersonal dimension of the violence matrix.

Teenagers may abuse alcohol and drugs to deal with their pain. Teenagers harm themselves because they are angry with themselves, their families, and their communities. They have lost hope. And, of course, suicide is the most dramatic manifestation of this inner turmoil.

We turn now to Judith Rich Harris’ theory which shifts the focus away from parental nurture per se to the role played by heredity and peers in human development.

The Impact of Heredity and Peers on Adolescent Development

In The Nurture Assumption, Harris offers a biological explanation of why some adolescents are more prone to become ‘at risk’ than others. She writes:

Though we no longer say that some children
are born bad, the facts are such, unfortunately, that a euphemism is needed. Now psychologists say that some children are born with ‘difficult’ temperaments - difficult for their parents to rear, difficult to socialize. I can list for you some of the things that make a child difficult to rear and difficult to socialize: a tendency to be active, impulsive, aggressive, and quick to anger; a tendency to get bored with routine activities and to seek excitement; a tendency to be unafraid of getting hurt; an insensitivity to the feelings of others; and, more often than not, a muscular build and an IQ a little lower than average. All these characteristics have a significant genetic component. (Harris, 1998: 295-296)

Harris believes that the family dynamic will begin to deteriorate in crisis situations when a child who is difficult to manage is born to a parent with poor management skills. It is not fair, but it is a fact of life that:

There is a statistical connection—a greater-than-chance likelihood that a person with psychological problems has a biological parent or a biological child with similar problems. Heredity is one of the reasons that parents with problems often have children with problems. It is a simple, obvious, undeniable fact; and yet, it is the most ignored fact in all of psychology. (Harris, 1998: 294)

Nature is unfair. Some people are born healthy and intelligent, others are not. Some children are even tempered, others are not. And when family relationships deteriorate, Harris believes that siblings with an even disposition with stable, pro-social peers will be able to weather the storm.

It would take a great deal of spiritual and emotional maturity for a person with a difficult temperament who has experienced failure and rejection as a child to accept these bad experiences as a challenge to grow. We can embrace this journey as adults, but not as children, and certainly not as angry, frustrated adolescents. Wounded adolescents will respond to perceived injustices in their lives with anger and resentment, turn on parents and siblings as the source of their misery, and seek out others like themselves. At this point, they become ‘at risk’ adolescents, to use the phrase of New Zealand youth worker, Lloyd Martin.19

‘At risk’ adolescents no longer feel connected to family or school, and thus have lost touch with the communities of meaning and value that previously informed their lives. And yet they have a intense need for belonging because it is a fundamental human need. Thus, they must find another avenue to experience success and forge an identity with ‘significant’ others who accept them. And when a new group accepts them, they will do whatever is required to fit in.

The Impact of Peers on the Troubled Adolescent

In The Wounded Healer, Nouwen shared an insight from the work of David Riesman to illustrate what happens to adolescents when adult authority deteriorates in their lives. He writes that ‘... being excommunicated by the small circle of friends to which they want to belong can be an unbearable experience. Many young people may even become enslaved by the tyranny of their peers.’ (Nouwen, 1979: 32)

And yet, if we can trust the experience of Lloyd Martin, wounded teenagers can begin to turn their lives around even if they have bonded with antisocial peers provided they are ‘resilient’ enough to renegotiate their identity once they feel strong enough to do so. For example, if they began to reconnect with family, pass a skills training course, get a job and maintain it, they will find the strength and confidence to distance themselves from more antisocial peers and associate with more prosocial ones.20 At this point communities of healing and liberation become crucially important for both wounded families and wounded teenagers, so that both can embrace the path to wholeness.

Communities of Healing for the Wounded Family

When the spiritual fabric of a community has
been ripped apart by violence, there always remains a scar, but at least scar tissue implies that the wound is not gushing blood anymore. Healing requires hope and confidence that everyone involved can move forward into the light.

**Healing the Wounded Parent**

There is no greater anguish for parents than when beloved children have lost their way. The literature of Al-Anon holds much wisdom for helping wounded parents put their lives back together again. In books like *The Courage to Change*, parents learn that their primary responsibility is to heal themselves before they can facilitate the healing of their children. They learn how to detach and yet care, because unless they step out of the drama triangle, no one will develop the spiritual, psychological or emotional resources to take responsibility for their lives.

In *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen offers parents a spiritual path to wholeness. He speaks of the necessity of ‘one who has been there before’ to step into the house of one who is wounded and lead him or her to the other side. He writes:

This service requires the willingness to enter into a situation, with all the human vulnerabilities a man has to share with his fellow man. This is a painful and self-denying experience, but an experience which can indeed lead man out of his prison of confusion and fear. Indeed, the paradox of Christian leadership is that the way out is the way in, that only by entering into communion with human suffering can relief be found. (Nouwen: 1979, p. 77)

No one can understand the grief, guilt, anxiety and fear of wounded parents more than parents who have been there before but have emerged on the other side. Of course, there are family counselling agencies to support parents on the road to healing but support groups modelled on Al-Anon would provide an invaluable service. In these groups, people who are coping with the same crisis share openly with one another in a setting of complete confidentiality. The conversation is delicate because parents are talking about their beloved children, how they have failed them, and how afraid they are for them. Only certain kinds of people should be privy to this conversation. Only another wounded parent, who has become the “wounded healer” can walk alongside them until they emerge on the other side.

This conversation is an exercise in compassion—sympathy and fellow feeling with another. Christian Family Agencies that specialise in family counselling can take the lead in providing support groups like this for wounded parents.

**Healing the Wounded Adolescent: The Hero’s Journey and Hauora**

In *The Nurture Assumption*, Harris asks a question which poses a direct challenge to practical theologians working with Christian family agencies or youth ministries: *How can we step in and break the vicious cycle of aggressive kids becoming more aggressive when in adolescence they get together with others like themselves?* (Harris: 1998, p. 353)

All the literature dealing with rehabilitating wounded teenagers stress the need for ‘protective factors’ to anchor them as they begin the journey to wholeness. These ‘protective factors’ include some way to reconnect with family, whatever therapeutic intervention is needed, as well as education and job skills programmes to enable them to function as responsible young adults in the community. Moreover, programmes like the ‘Break Away Adolescent Stopping Offending’ course are excellent avenues for rehabilitation in which teenagers learn to avoid ‘high risk’ situations by coming to understand themselves, peer influences and family backgrounds in order to make deliberate choices and plans for their future.

I would like to suggest that suitable rites of initiation would also be helpful, as well as an understanding of the Maori concept of *hauora* which emphasizes balance as the key
Aggressive adolescents Harris describe are begging for the kind of initiation ritual experienced by young Massai warriors, for example, who were expected to go out into the bush, kill a lion and bring it home. In achieving this feat, young men had an extraordinary sense of accomplishment and returned to the village in triumph. They earned their adult identity. Yes, there is the potential for failure, but that is part of the process. For that reason, young men prepared themselves—physically, psychologically and spiritually, so that when the time is right, they were ready.

According to Lloyd Martin, wounded teenagers have not experienced powerful moments of transition like this from adolescent to adult society because they missed out on the ‘markers’ that build a strong sense of adult identity. These markers include receiving the sacrament of Confirmation, finishing high school, getting a driver’s license, a job and a car. When teenagers are attached to their families and their schools, these markers are celebrated by family and friends alike. They become the most significant rites of passage for young people today. Because wounded adolescents have not experienced these important markers, a community of healing might attempt to re-create them in some way. Rites of initiation can be created to facilitate a spiritual experience that might enable them to make the transition from adolescent to adult society.

In The Hero with the Thousand Faces, mythologist Joseph Campbell believes that young men in modern society need rites of initiation as much as they did in tribal societies. This is because initiation rituals enable young men to discover their masculine power in constructive ways. I am convinced that the binge drinking, reckless driving, drug taking and other antisocial behaviors could be viewed as rites of passage that alienated, disaffected youth impose on themselves and one another, because they lack elders to guide them through critical moments in their lives.

Consider the native American vision quest. When a young man goes off to have his vision quest, he endures physical and psychological hardship so that his spirit becomes open to the powers of the cosmos. He goes off by himself into the wilderness, fasts and meditates on the meaning of life. Typically the young man will confront his demons, fears, mistakes, in short, all the negative attitudes and emotions that have entrapped him and shortcircuited his centres of spiritual energy. When he has entered a state of extremis, the universe reveals his spirit guide to him which will guide him throughout his adult life. The goal of the vision quest is to have a profound experience of spiritual death and rebirth, that is, an experience of personal transformation. He then returns to the village transformed.

Of course, wounded adolescents could not possibly endure an intense psychological experience like this without the presence of elders to make sure they are safe at all times. This is because they may have already experienced the darkness of the unconscious mind if they have abused drugs. And if they lacked the spiritual and psychological maturity to navigate in the waters of the unconscious mind, they may have already damaged themselves. We must remember that in traditional societies, drugs were only used for religious reasons—the vision quest—and thus were not abused. Today, however, young people use drugs for recreational purposes and the religious dimension is lost.

For young women in traditional societies, the onset of menstruation is the definitive sign that the girl has become a woman. Since woman is life itself, the young woman went into a hut to ponder what it meant to be mother, giver of life.

In Circle of Stones: Woman’s Journey to Herself, Judith Duerk suggests a contemporary rite of passage for young women. For women who have never known the power of the divine feminine, she asks:

How might it have been different for you if, on your first menstrual day, your mother had given you a bouquet of flowers and taken you to lunch,
and then the two of you had gone to meet your father at the jeweler, where your ears were pierced, and your father bought you your first pair of earrings, and then you went with a few of your friends and your mother’s friends to get your first lip coloring, and then you went, for the first time, to the Women’s Lodge, to learn the wisdom of the women? (Duerk: 1989, p. 9)

Contrast this rite of passage from the practice of many teenage girls to begin smoking at the onset of puberty!

The New Zealand bush is the perfect venue for an initiation ritual for wounded adolescents. Under the guidance of elders—female and male—they might begin to reconnect with their soul and experience the divine within. Discovering the world of mountains and rivers would be a life-giving experience for Generation Txt who believe that the social constructs they see on television have some relationship to the real world. Once they throw away their gadgets, they might begin to discover an inner voice leading them into the light.

Hauora: The Need for Balance in Healing the Wounded Adolescent

The lives of wounded teenagers are out of balance. Young people who have abused their bodies with cigarettes, alcohol and drugs are not healthy. They cannot breathe properly; they do not have the energy they once had; they cannot concentrate the way they once did. In short, their bodies and minds are out of balance.

Young people who have damaged their relationship with their parents to the extent that they cannot live at home are wounded. They must now fend for themselves in the world at a very young age (the legal age for leaving home in New Zealand is 16). When this happens, wounded adolescents have been cast adrift from the community that was supposed to be the most durable emotional, psychological and spiritual mooring of their lives—their family. Yes, parents and children can heal a relationship that has been damaged, but it takes time. The deeper the wounds, the more time it will take, and wounded adolescents simply do not have the emotional and spiritual resources to deal with the enormous grief, hurt, anger, guilt and fear they must be feeling. Therefore, in line with Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it may be useful to help wounded adolescents stabilise their lives before they can confront feelings that might paralyse them. The Maori concept of hauora is a good place to begin.

Hauora (well-being) offers a way to see health as the balance between the physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects of human being. Hauora (well-being) lies at the heart of the Health and Physical Education curriculum in New Zealand. In the curriculum document, hauora is portrayed as a whare (house) with four walls, each providing an essential function. The walls are physical well-being (taha tinana), mental and emotional well-being (taha hinengaro), social-well-being (taha whanau) and spiritual well-being (taha wairua). (Durie, 1994)

In their journey to wholeness, young people will have to embrace each wall of the house, beginning with the physical. Once physical health has been restored, they will think more clearly, feel less anxious, and maintain healthier relationships.

We know that the God of reconciliation is involved in this drama of redemption, but wounded teenagers will not be able to understand this mystery until their spirit has begun to find some peace.

The Need for Mentors

I recall a painful conversation with a young man who told me that he kept behaving in the most appalling ways because no one stopped him. The statement stunned me because I knew that his parents did everything in their power to stop him—but their efforts were completely ineffectual. The statement made me realize, however, that offending adolescents desperately want to be stopped, but simply do not have the emotional, psychological or spiritual resources to do it themselves, nor do their par-
ents, for reasons already described in the section on the ‘frazzled family.’

‘At risk’ teenagers need elders to stop them, elders who care and are in some way extensions of the family, but who are sufficiently detached to deal with them firmly yet lovingly. Martin believes that specialist services provided for youth ‘at risk’:

...must operate against a background of non-formal relationships with a range of adults-as-mentors, who represent the gender and cultural community of the young person. It is these relationships that help re-create a ‘whole’ village around a young person... They may be focused around a service (such as employment training), but their goal is to establish a meaningful and holistic relationship with the youth involved. (Martin, 2003: 119).

Youth workers need to be recruited from the generation Nouwen describes as ‘fatherless’, ‘inward’ and ‘convulsive’. Ideally, these youth workers have themselves survived a ‘rough patch’ because they were either lucky enough to have real elders in their lives or possessed the spiritual and emotional gifts to transcend difficult situations. This kind of person will be able to ‘enter the house’ of wounded adolescents, hear their pain, earn their trust and help them find their way. Their method will be compassion. Nouwen writes:

Through compassion it is possible to recognise that the craving for love that men feel resides also in our own hearts, that the cruelty that the world knows all too well is also rooted in our own impulses. Through compassion we also sense our hope for forgiveness in our friends’ eyes and our hatred in their bitter mouths. When they kill, we know that we could have done it; when they give life, we know that we can do the same. For a compassionate man, nothing human is alien: no joy, nor sorrow, no way of living and no way of dying. ... A fatherless generation looks for brothers who are able to take away their fear and anxiety, who can open the doors of their narrow-mindedness and show them that forgiveness is a possibility which dawns on the horizon of humanity. (Nouwen, 1979: 41-42)

To encounter a person like this is to find someone who can look into the eyes of wounded teenagers and throw them a lifeline which could lead them to tomorrow. Someone like this can see their great potential underneath the hard, brittle disguise, and accept them as they are right now—warts and all. When that happens, the moment of transformation can begin. This special person could introduce them to ‘power, love and self-discipline’ from which the gifts of the Holy Spirit can flourish and grow. (2 Timothy 1.6-8, 13-14)

Some Ways Forward

The Far, Lost Generation

We live in an age of violence, hopelessness and corruption, but surely there is hope. I can do no more than suggest some of the positive signs that we can build upon. Parents whose adolescent children have lost their way must become catalysts of cultural transformation. They may not have been able to be elders to their own children, but they might succeed in helping someone else. Harris again:

... our power isn’t zero. Adults do control a major source of input to their cultures: the media. Media depictions of smokers as rebels and risk-takers—of smoking as a way of saying ‘I don’t care’—make cigarettes attractive to teens. I see no way around this problem unless the makers of movies and TV shows voluntarily decide to stop filming actors (doesn’t matter whether they’re the heroes or the villains) using tobacco. (Harris, 1998: 283)

Would it help to get rid of television sets and iPods and cellphones? Maybe! If there is no television in the house, parents and children will talk to one another, children will play games with one another, discover the great outdoors, and more importantly they will read. In ‘Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television’, Jerry Mander makes a convincing case that the issue is not good vs. bad television, but rather how this type of technology has changed the way people process information. Television not only makes us passive
consumers but also blunts creativity. The same might be said for the other prevalent technologies, but burning them all is not realistic.

If possible, members of Generation Txt might critically engage with their technology, but to do this, they must become literate and reflective. Some will be able to do this, and others will not.

Though realistic about the challenges in ministering to Generation Txt, Hugh Mackay believes that they will probably reshape society. McQuillan quotes him:

They are a generation that beeps and hums,” one of their fathers recently remarked, and so they are. They are the generation who, having grown up in an era of unprecedented change, have intuitively understood that they are each other’s most precious resource for coping with the inherent uncertainties of life. Their desire to connect, and to stay connected, will reshape this society. They are the harbingers of a new sense of community, a new tribalism, that will change everything from our old-fashioned respect for privacy to the way we conduct our relationships and build our homes. The era of individualism is not dead yet, but the intimations of its mortality are clear. (McQuillan, 2007: 14)

Could it be that descendents of the ‘fatherless generation’ might come to embody a new vision of interdependence in their own ‘secular’ way— even though the core of their spirituality may be their passionate commitment to ‘their mates’?

To be sure a huge generation gap may exist between Generation Txt and many practical theologians engaged with Christian family counselling agencies and youth ministries. If we wish to break the cycle of violence and self-destruction among young people, it is imperative that everyone involved in this vital conversation create an extended family for wounded teenagers and their families. Together we might move western society forward into a new era of healing and reconciliation. If Nouwen is correct, ‘it is exactly in common searches and shared risks that new ideas are born, that new visions reveal themselves and that new roads become visible’. (Nouwen, 1979: 100)

NOTES

2. Emily Watt, ‘Young, drunk and female—the dangers are real’, Dominion Post, 27 September 2007.
5. Raising children is especially difficult for immigrant families without extended family for support and cut off from their cultural moorings.
6. Stuart Sellar believes that U.S. foreign policy is implicitly based on the ‘metanarrative of violence’ that salvation can be achieved through violence.
9. Reference to Burgess’ book has been taken from unpublished manuscript from Caro Mundt, 2007.
11. Most cellphone companies like Vodafone offer a ‘2000 text message a month’ package to young people.
14. In an email correspondence, 20 July 2007, Uslar-Furkert wrote: ‘Frazzled families’ and ‘Wounded Family’ are terms I have come up with, as I do not
believe in dysfunctional families: the family is doing what it does in order to function/ get through the day. There are no perfectly functioning families, because we are all human and constantly developing. It is just a matter of degree of frazzledness or smoothness. ‘Woundedness’ derives from the notion that in a case of severe frazzledness, most likely parents do their parenting from their own pain/ wounds.’ Ulrike Uslar-Furkert operates a counseling practice called ‘Living Changes’. As an EFT Practitioner, Ulrike uses this very fast tool to work with the underlying unresolved emotional issues of parents, children or teenagers in such Wounded Families. This makes for much faster and more thorough and lasting outcomes of therapeutic interventions. Cf. Livingchanges@actrix.co.nz to contact Ulrike Uslar directly.

15. The New Webster Encyclopedia, 1952, 278.
17. See Steve Karpman with Comments by Patty E. Fleener M.S.W., ‘The Drama Triangle’, from M H Today, http://www.mental-health-today.com. See also ‘Karpman drama triangle’ from Wikipedia, 19 September 2007. ‘The drama triangle is a psychological and social model of human interaction in transactional analysis (‘TA’) first described by Stephen Karpman, which has become widely acknowledged in psychology and psychotherapy. The model posits three habitual psychological roles (or role-plays) which people often take in a situation: victim, persecutor and rescuer. The covert purpose for each ‘player’ is to get their unspoken psychological wishes met in a manner they feel justified, without having to acknowledge the broader dysfunction or harm done in the situation as a whole. As such, each player is acting upon their own selfish ‘needs’, rather than acting in a genuinely adult, responsible or altruistic manner’.
18. The literature of Adult Children of Alcoholics also describes this syndrome well. Leona King, who has studied this literature extensively, writes: ‘The ACOA literature applies to any family situation in which addictions and other dysfunctional behaviors (workaholism, rigid religiosity, perfectionism) prevent an open, healthy dynamic. Generally the children adapt as best they can to survive and develop serious core issues all having to do with a sense of self, such as distrust, control, avoidance of feeling, all or none functioning, dissociation, low self esteem, ignore own needs, adrenalin junkies (drawn to high risk situations) which lead to eating disorders, intimacy problems, commitment problems, emotional and physical abuse giving or taking, etc.etc.etc...’ Email correspondence with Leona King, former Nurse Manager at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Montréal, Quebec, 21 July 2007.
22. See Martin Frisher, Llana Crome, John Macleod, Roger Bloor, Matthew Hickman, ‘Predictive factors for illicit drug use among young people: a literature review’, Home Office Online Report 05/07. ‘A risk factor is ‘an individual attribute, individual characteristic, situational condition, or environmental context that increases the probability of drug use or abuse or a transition in level of involvement in drugs. (Clayton, 1992) Conversely, a protective factor is ‘an individual attribute, individual characteristic, situational condition, or environmental context that inhibits, reduces, or buffers the probability of drug use or abuse or a transition in level of involvement in drugs’ (Clayton, 1992). Resilience is a process ‘whereby young people exhibit positive behaviours although they have been exposed to risk factors’ Werner, 1989, 3.
23. See Graeme Munford and Mike Garland, ‘Making choices for change’, Social Work Now, December 2005, 24. Of particular interest for those working with teenagers who have committed crimes is ‘offense chaining’ in which ‘participants map out the events, behaviour, emotions, feelings and thinking processes leading up to an offence.’ p. 24. The more they come to understand thoughts and feelings which prompt them to behave in certain ways, the more they will be able to avoid high risk situations.
27. For a good discussion of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, See Lloyd Martin, The Invisible Table, 29-31.

30. Lloyd Martin writes from his own experiences in youth ministry. He is involved in an organization called Praxis, a network of Christian practitioners in youth and community work which exists to help people connect with and serve their communities. See: www.praxis.org.nz for more information about Praxis.


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EASTERN CATHOLIC STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The Background Paper

Some Issues regarding the Education of Eastern Catholic children in Latin Catholic Schools.
—A paper co-authored by Fr Olexander Kenez and Fr Brian Kelty

Conversion is a strong word which makes demands of us. It is also a word that resonates well with the first preaching of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of St Mark where Jesus says,

The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand;
Repent and believe the Gospel (Mk. 1:14)

Why did the Holy Father urge Catholics with such forcefulness to change their ways? He replies, ‘to show concretely, far more than in the past, how much the Church esteems and admires the Christian East and how essential she considers its contribution to the full realization of the Church’s universality’.

History tells us that things were not always so. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Latin Catholic missionaries went to many countries in the Middle East and beyond inhabited by numerous Eastern Catholics.

Campaigns were mounted to convert these peoples to Latin Catholicism or at the very least to Latinize the various Eastern Rites in which these Eastern Catholics worshipped; the autonomy of many churches was abrogated to Latin bishops; the faithful were often denied the ministry of their own priests. It was frequently held at the highest levels of the Roman Catholic Church that the Latin Rite was superior to all other rites.

By the nineteenth century changes, which recognized the value and integrity of the Eastern Churches, made slow inroads on policies of the Catholic Church. At the Second Vatican Council the bishops of the Universal Catholic Church from both East and West met and proclaimed a renewed and more balanced theology of the Church. The Council taught that the Universal Catholic Church is ‘a communion of Churches’ [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium par. 23]. This was thrashed out with a clearer refinement in the Council’s document on Eastern Churches as follows:

The Church is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same governance. They combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy, and so form individual churches. [Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches Orientalium Ecclesiarum par. 2]
Recent immigration has ensured a place in the Australian Catholic Church for many Eastern Catholics. The largest of these Churches have their own bishop(s) and therefore exist as autonomous ritual Churches. They are: the Maronite, the Melkite, the Ukrainian and the Chaldean Churches. Their people are mostly from the Middle East and Slavic countries. There are other communities who may have priests of their own Church but who depend on the local Latin bishop for governance and pastoral care. Some of the Churches included in this group are: the Armenians, the Catholic Copts, the Russians and the Syrians.

Pastoral Care...

The Catholic School system in Australia was established to educate children in the Latin tradition of the Catholic Church. This being so, it is not surprising then, that they are successful in doing just that. When children of Eastern Catholic descent go to Catholic schools, they become educated in a Latin Catholic spirituality to the extent that they tend to become Latin Catholics themselves and abandon their Eastern Church of origin. This is obviously a highly undesirable state of affairs from the point of view of all the Catholic Churches.

There is a dichotomy here. Students from Eastern Catholic families find one spiritual experience at home, and another at school. At School they have a Latin Catholic spirituality which tends to emphasise salvation as mediated through the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At home they have a different spiritual experience. In the Eastern churches there is an emphasis on the Resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. The Latin Catholic Church talks about Grace, the Eastern Churches talk about Theosis (becoming like God). Grace tends to emphasise a finality, whereas, Theosis puts an emphasis on a process of becoming.

The cold reality is harsh. Many things continue to happen which do harm to the Christian upbringing of Eastern Catholic children and adolescents. Eastern Catholic Bishops frequently deal with complaints about the many attempts to confirm the children of their churches who have already been baptized and chrismated in infancy. Latin Catholic clergy frequently refuse communion to young children who are entitled to receive holy communion from the time of their reception of the mysteries of initiation which includes first Eucharistic communion. The lamentable ignorance of some Catholic school teachers is demonstrated by the not infrequent claims that Catholic schools are designed and meant for the education of Latin Catholics exclusively; all others must simply accept the regular religious practices offered in a one size fits all approach. Thus on Ash Wednesday it is common practice in the school setting to insist that all students accept the imposition of Ashes whether they be Latin Catholic, Eastern Catholic, Orthodox or even Buddhist. This seems to fly in the face of canon law and the principles of Catholic education as found in this recent authoritative Vatican statement:

The personal conscience of individual students and their families must be respected, and this freedom is explicitly recognized by the Church.1

The same document goes on to refer to the imposition of religious practices as, “a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and Church law”. In support of this assertion the following item of Canon Law is cited:

It is never lawful for anyone to force others to embrace the Catholic faith against their conscience.2

How much more so (one might hope) for fellow Catholics! The very enrolment of students in schools does carry certain rights as well as obligations. It is high time that the Catholic school system systematically respected the rights of all those Eastern Catholics who choose to enrol in Catholic Schools. Take for example the wearing of the prayer rope (chotki) which is clearly a religious emblem; most schools treat this as a piece of jewelry
and thus forbid it. Eastern and Orthodox youth respond to such intolerance with an attitude of keep your head down, tell no one that you are different; they feel that they must hide their identity and comply with the expectations of the school’s dominant religious practices.

**Spirituality…**

If anything is to change practical strategies must be thought out which directly address the issues raised. Therefore, the following recommendations are made. The whole issue of sign and symbol in the Eastern Churches is of course central in Eastern theology as it is any deeply sacramental theology.

• First and foremost is the need to secure the appointment of an Eastern Catholic theologian at Australian Catholic University in order that the many recommendations made by the Holy See for theological education might begin to be fulfilled.

• The demands of ecumenism and international dialogue with the East have assumed primary importance in the agenda of Pope Benedict XVI. Not only ought we support this program of dialogue but we need to be very clear about our identity as Eastern Catholic Churches. We need theological support to do this.

• To make Eastern Catholic Spirituality visible in Catholic schools and Catholic institutions of higher education the use and veneration of icons with lamps ought be present. Iconography and its theology should be taught in theological institutes.

• It would be helpful to provide an icon packet consisting of icons with explanations about the symbolism involved to every Catholic school in the country.

• Not only is the sign of the cross made differently in the East, it also assumes greater importance. During the Divine Liturgy one makes the sign of the cross at least 36 times. In the Latin Catholic tradition this is not so.

• The making and wearing and praying the Jesus prayer (*chetki*) is one example of what may be done as a prayerful exercise perhaps during a retreat. All students especially Eastern Students could be encouraged to make and wear the prayer rope as a wrist band with strong religious symbolism.

• The Eastern Liturgy is accessible to schools in English these days. Every capital city in Australia has Catholic priests who can celebrate the Divine Liturgy. Pastoral hospitality for Eastern Catholic clergy ought be available especially in those cases where large numbers of Eastern Catholics are enrolled.

• In 1997, *Eastern Catholics in Australia*, was published. It was a very important document. Perhaps it is time to reprint and distribute this publication so that it might become an instrument for study and workshops on the many issues which concern Eastern Christianity.

• The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia have grown sufficiently to seek the appointment of an education officer within the National Catholic Education Office. This officer would coordinate all information about Eastern Churches for distribution to the Catholic school system, and function as an Eastern Catholic information service.

• The issue at hand is to provide the teachers and the schools of the Latin Catholic system with a way by which they can be made more aware of Eastern Catholic spirituality.

**Awareness…**

Perhaps it is time that we once again made religious education teachers more aware, of the presence of Eastern Catholic children in their schools. It is timely to offer a series of in-services for teachers sensitizing them to the presence and the needs of Eastern Christians in the schools. In addition, the preservice courses for teaching in Catholic schools at
ACU, ought include an Eastern Catholic awareness program. In this way, new teachers would at least be aware of the spiritual needs of these children.

Some of the issues raised in this paper might seem less of an imposition if we just consider how the late Pope John Paul II proposed to respond to this problem. He listed six approved means by which mutual understanding and unity might be improved between the Latin and the Eastern Churches. He reasoned that an improved knowledge of one another must be a good thing. The six means follow:

• To know the liturgy of the Eastern Churches; To deepen knowledge of the spiritual traditions of the Fathers and Doctors of the Christian East;
• To follow the example of the Eastern Churches for the inculturation of the Gospel message;
• To combat tensions between Latins and Orientals and to encourage dialogue between Catholics and the Orthodox;
• To train in specialized institutions theologians, liturgists, historians and canonists for the Christian East, who in turn can spread knowledge of the Eastern Churches;
• To offer appropriate teaching on these subjects in seminaries and theological faculties, especially to future priests.

The pope then added the following remark, ‘These remain sound recommendations on which I intend to insist with particular force.’ [Orientale Lumen par. 24]

Conclusion...

These days a great deal of attention is given to Christian spirituality and religious education in Catholic schools in Australia. Religious education syllabi include useful information about the Eastern Churches. In some schools this information is no longer taught. It is possible that the whole concept of Eastern Churches is simply neglected. For Catholic schools it is a matter of recognizing the true nature of the church as Catholic. Catholicity according to Karl Adam is the Church’s essential aptitude for the whole of mankind.[3] For schools to conform to such a lofty theological principle they must be far more adaptable to the varied religious identities now represented by the youth of the many other Catholic churches now present in them.

NOTES


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EASTERN CATHOLIC STUDENTS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Challenges and Responses

RICHARD RYMARZ

There has been much discussion recently, especially in the Catholic media, on the situation of Eastern Catholic students in Catholic schools in Australia. This follows a report commissioned by the Eastern Catholic bishops which will be discussed at the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference meeting in May 2009. (Cf. pp. above.)

The report draws attention to difficulties faced by Eastern Catholic students. In helping to frame an ongoing conversation on this issue, this paper will propose three points that provide a pastoral framework on how best to respond to the needs of Eastern Catholic students in Catholic schools. This framework takes into account the unique status of the Eastern Churches within Catholicism as well as the educational reality facing Catholic schools in Australia today. For the sake of brevity, differences between the Eastern Catholic Churches will not be elaborated on and the focus here will be on those Churches which are generally classified as Byzantine.

Who are Eastern Catholics?

Eastern Catholic Churches are in communion with Rome but do not follow the liturgical and disciplinary norms of the Latin Church. They share a common theology and history and are sometimes referred to as Eastern Rite Churches. This term does not, however, do justice to the autonomy of these groups as it implies that what distinguishes them from the Latin, or the more commonly used descriptor Roman, Catholic Church are merely liturgical practices. Eastern Catholics, amongst other things, also have quite different histories, spiritualities and are governed by a separate code of canon law. Thus many who work in this area prefer the designation Churches rather than Rites to distinguish them from the numerically dominant Roman Catholic Church. Four significant Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia are the Maronites who are the most numerous, Melkites, Chaldeans and Ukrainian Greek Catholic. Within Eastern Catholic Churches there is considerable diversity. Maronites and Chaldeans both follow a different Syriac Rite and are historically associated with the Antiochian Tradition. Both the Melkites and Ukrainians follow a Byzantine Rite and are part of the Tradition derived from Constantinople.

After many years of working in Catholic schools and with Eastern Catholics I have come to the conclusion that the key distinction that needs to be made, especially by teachers working in Catholic schools, is that Eastern Catholicism is not an ethnic expression of Roman Catholicism. If only differences of worship and culture are mentioned many teachers are confused about what is the difference between say, Melkite Catholics from Syria and Catholics from Chile. The latter group has a range of cultural practices and celebrates the liturgy in Spanish. They are, nonetheless, Roman Catholics. Melkites share many similarities with other Byzantine Rite Catholic Churches such as the Ukrainians but are quite distinct from Roman Catholics. Once this dis-
tinction is made then, in my experience, teachers working in Catholic schools see Eastern Catholics in a different light and are receptive to more information that can usually be delivered from existing resources without taking a protracted amount of time. The deeper issue, however, is how to respond to the needs of Eastern Catholic students in Catholic schools.

**The Need for a More Empirical Edge**

As far as I am aware there has never been a substantial survey of Eastern Catholic students in Catholic schools in Australia. Such an investigation would be an important first step in framing any future discussion. Firstly, it would provide some insight into the needs, concerns and aspirations of Eastern Catholic students. Until now too much of the discussion has been based on non-systematic, anecdotal reporting. While this has its place, certainly as a departure point, there comes a time when a more rigorous approach to identifying salient issues is required. One comment, for example, that is often made in this context is the fact that Eastern Catholic students receiving all the sacraments of initiation at baptism is not readily acknowledged in Catholic primary schools. Is this a widespread phenomenon or a relatively isolated occurrence? The only way to be sure is to do careful investigation. At the same time such work will shed light on the experience of Eastern Catholic students in Catholic schools.

The second feature of a survey should centre on current practices in schools. One critical area is the religious education curriculum. An audit of existing curricula, for example, would give a clearer picture on how Eastern Catholic Churches are covered. It is important to know what is being done now in order to adequately plan for the future. In the *To Know Worship and Love* textbooks series, for instance, there is a chapter in the Year 8 text on Eastern Catholic Churches. Is there other material that is being used? Finally such a survey would help to determine the number of Eastern Catholics students in Catholic schools. The exact numbers of Eastern Catholics in Australia is difficult to ascertain because official census questions fail to distinguish between Roman and Eastern Catholics. The size of the student cohort is a critical feature of any planned pastoral response. It is highly unlikely that any Eastern Catholic Church, certainly those which follow a Byzantine Rite, would have a sufficient population to even contemplate developing their own schools system. The exception here are the Maronites who have a number of independent schools in Sydney and who in recent years have established a school in Melbourne which is affiliated with the local Catholic Education Office.

**Where it Goes in the Curriculum**

Once existing practice has been established then careful consideration could be given to where in the curriculum the story of Eastern Catholic Churches could be heard more clearly. I am assuming here that the case for educating students about Eastern Catholic Churches is incontrovertible. There is a general recognition in educational discourse, certainly in religious education that exposure to other faith traditions is an important part of contemporary approaches to quality teaching and learning. In light of this it is hard to argue against the place of Eastern Catholic Churches in the religious education curricula of Catholic schools. These Churches are after all an integral part of the Catholic Church and at the same time they offer different and challenging perspectives on a range of standard issues that are at the core of religious education in Catholic schools.

Having said this the question remains about
where and how much attention should be devoted to Eastern Catholic Churches in the religious education curriculum. If we follow the current dominant educational paradigm in religious education, then the same discipline and demands that are placed on other areas of the curriculum should apply to RE. A key feature of conventional curriculum planning is a disciplined approach to pedagogical content. So if the current curriculum has a certain scope and sequence and a decision is made to include more material on Eastern Catholic Churches then what will be deleted from the curriculum to accommodate this? My intention here is to focus the discussion on what key elements need to be included in a curriculum model. There is always a tendency in religious education to approach the curriculum as a type of ‘wish list’ where all ideas are proceeded with but never with a firm resolve to see these suggestions come to any type of practical fruition.

Here I think a real contribution could be made by presenting characteristically Eastern Catholic perspectives on issues that are already a part of the RE curriculum in most Catholic schools. Units on the sacraments, for example, are standard fare in most Catholic schools. Whilst the Eastern Catholic Churches’ essential teaching on sacraments is completely orthodox they offer a different way of approaching and understanding, for example, sacramental worship. The Byzantine notion of the Divine Liturgy being a recreation of heaven on earth is a very challenging notion that could greatly enhance students’ appreciation of Christian worship. A very similar argument could be put on incorporating Eastern views on prayer into existing units. In my view this approach of embedding some Eastern Catholic insights into existing staples in the RE curriculum is one promising possibility for giving more prominence to the Eastern voice in Catholic schools.

There is also a place for a more focused approach to Eastern Catholicism in the RE curriculum. This work needs, however, to move beyond description and phenomenology, and into substantive theology. As a first step a range of largely descriptive information on Eastern Churches could be provided. If nothing else, if students in Catholic schools were given a good overview of the Eastern Churches, some key terminology and a brief history then this would a worthy achievement. But once this is done what is the next step? There is a tendency, even among Eastern Catholics, to distinguish themselves by pointing to matters of ecclesial discipline. Eastern Catholic priests can, for example, marry before ordination. This is, nonetheless, a matter of canon law and not bedrock belief. If Eastern Catholic themes are to be included as distinct units in RE curricula in Catholic schools then they must be derived from the great well-springs of Eastern Christian thought. An emphasis on the Trinity as the starting point for Christological exegesis, for example, is a characteristic feature of Byzantine theology. The question of how to best present this content to students is a pressing one but with sustained effort and cooperation between theologians, educators and others then these units could be crafted. They would be of value because they are moving beyond the surface and into what makes Eastern Catholic Churches part of what has been poetically described as the second lung of Catholicism.

**Importance of Catechesis**

In the discussion about how best to support Eastern Catholic students in schools it is of critical importance to stress the common challenges facing both Eastern and Roman Catholic Churches. There is immense pressure on young people today to maintain only tenuous associations with religious traditions. In many ways this indifference is more difficult to deal with than outright hostility. One the challenges that all Catholic Churches face is how best to provide the necessary catechesis for young adults and adolescents to move them toward discipleship. Catechesis here is understood as a lifelong process where the believer’s relationship with Christ is strengthened through prayer, liturgy, education and ongoing relation-
ships. Catechesis is, therefore, a broad concept. Education plays a role in catechesis. A key insight of Catholic educational philosophy is that knowing more about faith can lead to strengthening of faith. Schools therefore have a role to play in catechesis. It is, however, a complementary one. Catechesis must be situated within a faith community. The family, in particular, is the seat of catechesis.

Any discussion of Eastern Catholic children in Catholic schools must never lose sight of the irreplaceable role of family and the wider worshipping community in nurturing religious belief and practice. The idea that the school can ‘fill in the gaps’ misunderstands the nature of catechesis. Along with questions about how Catholic schools support Eastern Catholic students, the Eastern Churches should also concentrate on how parishes can reach out to families and how they can provide ongoing formation to children, adolescents and young adults. To take one example, how well do Eastern Churches explain the liturgy to young people? Is there a structured program in place that takes young people through the rubrics of the Divine Liturgy and the theology behind them? Education is, however, only one dimension of catechesis. A much more urgent concern amongst young people is the need for supportive peer networks. Here the challenge facing Eastern Catholics is acute and different in nature to that confronting Roman Catholics. There are relatively small numbers of Eastern Catholics in Australia. This is especially true for those Eastern Catholic Churches, such as the Ukrainian Greek Catholics, who have moved beyond the first generation of migration to this country. In the first years after arrival migrants often maintain religious roots as a way of coping with the demands of living in a new land. This effect, though, diminishes over time and religious communities need new methods of retaining the allegiance of those whose memory of the country of origin is limited to being part of the experience of older community members.

There is a wide literature that underlines the importance of peer support for sustaining and cultivating religious faith. A very pertinent question then becomes how do Eastern Catholic Churches, and Catholic schools, help to provide peer support to Eastern Catholics? What is needed is a much more vigorous discussion on how schools, families and parishes can cooperate to their catechetical role. This may result in radical proposals. Is there, for instance, any merit in the idea of establishing some Catholic schools as centres of excellence for Eastern Catholics? This is not a proposal for separate schools as the numbers of Eastern Catholics could not sustain them but rather schools which express a special interest in enrolling Eastern Catholics. If such schools were established then Eastern Catholics students could be offered a more explicit focus on Eastern Catholicism in religious education classes. Specialist staff could be employed who meet all the requirements of excellent teaching professionals but who have a special expertise in Eastern Catholicism. More importantly, perhaps, Eastern Catholic students could network with others like them. Students who are on the periphery of the Eastern Churches could now have a way of reconnecting with the worshipping community by meeting others who could support them on their faith journey. In such an arrangement Eastern Catholic priests and deacons could visit schools and establish links with students. For this plan and others like it to succeed, however, there is a need for the empirical edge to pastoral outreach mentioned earlier. If, for example, there is a concentration of Eastern Catholics in a particular area then this region could be a candidate for such dedicated, designated schools.

To illustrate the benefits that could arise if some Catholics schools took on an Eastern Catholic focus, consider the Canadian experience. I have just concluded a study which looks at, amongst other things, the religious identity of Ukrainian Catholic young adults in Alberta. It was clear that those with the strongest connection with the worshipping community were those who had multilayered links with the Church. One way these links were sustained
was through Catholic schools. A number of Catholic schools in the Edmonton region have a long running and successful Ukrainian immersion program. This program allows for bilingual instruction, an Eastern Catholic focus in RE and also for the building up of fellowship amongst Ukrainian Catholic students. In the schools Ukrainian Greek Catholic are able to express and cultivate their religious identity and to be supported by peers who share their backgrounds, beliefs and values.

To be sure the schools are only one part of a quite complex matrix of interaction but they do provide important continuity. Certainly the situation in Edmonton and surrounding areas is not directly comparable to that of Australia as the number of Ukrainian Catholics, especially in Western Canada, is far greater than in even the largest Australian cities. This, however, only makes the case for some type of concentration of Eastern Catholic students stronger. If we argue that peer support in schools is important then the fact that there are fewer Eastern Catholics in Australia makes the need for designated schools even greater.

In a similar vein, is there any possibility for collaboration between Eastern Catholic parishes and Catholic schools in developing educational resources and providing structural support? To give one example of possible educational support, could schools and Catholic Education Offices utilize personnel and resources to assist Eastern Catholic parishes develop catechetical materials? On a structural level could schools provide access to facilities to host youth meetings, retreats or camps for Eastern Catholic students drawn from across a whole diocese?

**Conclusion**

It should be a relatively straightforward task to include information about Eastern Catholic Churches for use in teacher preparation. The discussion needs, however, to move beyond teachers and to focus on student needs. The key task is, on the basis of accurate information, for schools to develop programs that better engage Eastern Catholic students both on a cognitive and affective level. In terms of the formal religious education curriculum there is a case for including more material on Eastern Catholic Churches in existing units as well as developing new ones that have a distinctive Eastern theological focus.

It is important that discussion of the place of Eastern Catholic students in Catholic schools takes place in the wider context of how best to develop links between schools, parishes and families. In many ways the discussion of the place of Eastern Catholic students in Catholic schools is a subset of a much broader concern that anticipates as its goal the catechesis of Eastern Catholic children, youth and young adults.

1. Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Ukrainian Catholic are used interchangeably in this paper. The former is the more correct term as it designates both the origin of the Church and its classification as Byzantine (or Greek) Rite.

**FURTHER READING**


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RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

Why Catholic Schools Should Teach About Them

KATH ENGEBRETSON

THE FACT THAT inter-faith education is a necessary part of Catholic education can be demonstrated on many grounds, including theological, sociological and educational. In the multicultural, multi-faith community of today’s Catholic classrooms, it is difficult to dismiss education about other religions on sociological or educational grounds. However, many Catholic teachers may not be able to argue for their teaching about other religions on theological grounds, even though this is a particularly rich area for theological consideration.

Indeed it is all too easy for some to argue against inter-faith education in Catholic schools, on the basis of the mistaken premise than the Catholic Church adopts an exclusivist approach to salvation, and categorically states that actual membership of the Catholic Church is necessary for salvation. This position denies the spiritual riches of other religions and is not in keeping with contemporary Catholic interpretations, particularly as given in papal statements.

This paper seeks to set out the contemporary Catholic theological position on salvific potential of other religions, with an eye to the educational implications of this. In the historical analysis I am deeply indebted to Francis Sullivan’s (1992) *Salvation Outside the Church?* surely the classic text in the field. Acknowledging this debt, I claim that the argument that the Church adopts an exclusivist approach to other religions cannot be cited in defense of leaving a study of world religions out of the Catholic religious education curriculum.

* * *

A Catholic Theory of Salvation in Relation to Other Religions

The Fathers of the Church

The axiom of ‘no salvation outside the Church’ was promoted during the patristic period, which is generally claimed to have ended with the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381). In these first three centuries when Christians were still facing persecution, the anathema was directed to those Christians who had formed or joined schismatic, heretical cults. These were believed to be guilty of the greatest sin of all, that against Christian love and the unity of the Church (Sullivan, 1992).

From 311 the respective edicts of the emperors, Galerius (311) and Constantine (313) ended Christian persecution, by the end of the fourth century most of the Roman empire was Christian, and the Emperor Theodosius, (379-395) ruled that Christianity was the official religion of the Empire. In this context of a solidly established Church, it was assumed that the whole of the inhabited world would hear the gospel, and that every human being would be brought into contact with the Christian message. At this time, Christian writers began to apply the axiom, ‘no salvation outside the Church’ to ‘pagans’ and Jews, for it was assumed that all had the advantage of hearing the gospel and those who rejected it were guilty of refusing God’s offer of salvation (Sullivan, 1992). Ambrose, bishop of Milan (340-397), Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) and St John Chrysostom (349-407) were among the prominent Church fathers who advanced this view.

Throughout this period, however, there was a central belief in God’s will for the salvation of all. Schismatic Christians were seen as guilty
of sinning against Church unity, and so had exempted themselves from salvation. Jews and pagans living in a time when Christianity was widespread, were believed to have been offered salvation through the gospel, and to be aware of the necessity of the Church for salvation. Those who rejected the Church were therefore deemed to have rejected the salvation offered by God (Sullivan, 1992).

**St Augustine**

St Augustine also held that schismatics and heretics they were guilty of sinning against Christian charity and so, without repentance and a return to the Church, could not be saved. Indeed, according to Augustine, even martyrdom in the name of Christ would not save a schismatic Christian from damnation1.

Augustine held little hope of salvation for any Christian outside the Catholic Church, even if he or she were born into a heretical sect and were neither a founder nor originator of it (Sullivan, 1992). In addition, Augustine assumed that those who had heard the gospel and had rejected it had misused their free will and would be denied salvation.

Soon, however, Augustine became aware that there were large areas of the world that had not been explored, and therefore numbers of people to whom the gospel had not yet been preached. This led Augustine to the question whether God really did want all to be saved, and he concluded that those who are saved are saved because God has willed it. ‘In those he condemns we see what is due to all, so that those he delivers may thence learn what dire penalty was relaxed into their regard and what under grace was given them’.2

With some exceptions, Augustine’s followers supported his views with Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-), Augustine’s disciple, making the statement much quoted in relation to this, which was to be incorporated into a decree of the Council of Florence in 1442 (Sullivan, 1992).

**The Middle Ages**

Augustine’s views were not accepted by the universal Church. His teaching that God did not indeed will the salvation of all was formally refuted by a local council called by Hincmar, archbishop of Reims3 (Sullivan, 1992). This council affirmed that God willed the salvation of all, for Jesus Christ had assumed the nature of all people. Those who did not choose to believe and to accept the gift of salvation brought about their own damnation.

Subsequently this was affirmed by the fourth Lateran Council (1215). The first canon of this Council declared: ‘There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation.’4 In a development of this, Thomas Aquinas explained that there could be no salvation outside the Church because it was only in the Church that the faith and sacraments necessary for attaining salvation were to be found. However Aquinas argued that faith in Christ could be implied in faith in God, for all of the articles of faith, he claimed, were held in the one verse of the New Testament: ‘And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists, and that he rewards those who seek him’. (Heb 11:6)

In some cases this implied faith would suffice for salvation, although normally explicit faith in God and in Christ were necessary. This principle led to questions about for whom and under what circumstances implicit faith would suffice. Certainly it would suffice for Gentiles who had died before the coming of Christ, and for Gentiles who believed in God but had not heard the gospel. Because God wills the salvation of all, Aquinas taught, God would provide...
the means by which the gospel could be heard. Once the gospel had been preached, ‘all both the learned and the simple, are bound to have explicit faith in the mysteries of Christ…such as those which refer to the mystery of the incarnation’.5

Aquinas’ teaching in this area can be summed up in three points. First, although belief in Christ is necessary for salvation, faith in Christ may be implicitly contained in faith in God as described in Hebrews 11: 6. Second, there was the possibility of baptism by desire when the sacrament could not be received in reality, and third, Aquinas taught that salvation may be awarded through a person’s first moral decision, for, if ordered to goodness, this was capable of cancelling original sin.

The mediaeval world view, that all people had had the opportunity of hearing about Christ, was to be challenged by the discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Before this however, the Decree for the Jacobites of the Council of Florence (1431-1445), contained the following:

The Holy, Roman Church …. firmly believes, professes and preaches that all those who are outside the Catholic church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics and schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will ‘go into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels’, unless they are joined to the Catholic Church before the end of their lives.6

The decree needs to be understood in light of what was then the common belief, that all pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics were guilty of infidelity, since they had refused either to accept the true faith or to remain faithful to it. This followed St Thomas who had distinguished three kinds of sinful unbelief: that of pagans, that of Jews, and that of Christian heretics and schismatics.

The Discovery of the New World

Fifty years after the Decree for the Jacobites Columbus discovered America, and proved that the world was not co-extensive with Christendom. Now Christian thinkers were confronted with whether they could continue to judge all pagans as culpably unbelievers, when there were countless people who had had no opportunity or hear the gospel. Furthermore they were challenged to reconcile their belief in God’s will for universal salvation, with the apparent fact that God had denied these countless people any possibility of becoming members of the Church, outside of which they could not be saved.

Spanish Dominicans were among the first to face these questions, seeking to reconcile St. Thomas’s teaching of no salvation outside the Church with their belief in the universal salvific will of God. Francisco de Vitoriio (1493-1546) argued that for someone to be guilty of rejecting faith, the faith had to be put convincingly and persuasively with ‘propriety and piety’7 not, as the Spanish conquistadores had done, with hatred and scandalous behavior. Domingo Soto (1534-1560) argued that implicit faith in Christ, demonstrated in the keeping of the natural law, would have sufficed for the salvation of people who died before the coming of the missionaries. Refuting Calvin’s (1509-1564) argument that it was predestination that gave salvation to some and denied it to others, the Flemish theologian Albert Pigge (1490-1542) claimed that all that was necessary for those who had not heard of Christ was faith in God, as declared in Hebrews 11:6. This led him to the question, never broached until then, of whether Muslims, who were inculpably ignorant of the truth of Christianity, but believed in God, could find salvation through this faith.

The Council of Trent and the Jesuits

The Council of Trent re-affirmed that faith in God and baptism were necessary for justification. It did not say than explicit faith in Christ was always necessary for justification, and so left open the questions that had been raised by the Dominican theologians and by Pigge. Furthermore it recognized that a baptism by desire could suffice for justification and did not refute Aquinas’s view that this desire may not always be explicit.

After the Council of Trent Jesuit theologians turned their mind to these complex questions.
In Japan St Francis Xavier (1506-1552) appears to have believed that those people of good will who had died in Japan before the missionaries, would experience the mercy of God. St Robert Bellamine (1542-1621) argued than while the Church had a visible body it also had a soul. It was possible for someone to belong to the body of the Church but not its soul, that is to be without grace. Similarly it was possible for someone to belong to the soul of the Church in faith and charity without necessarily belonging to the body of the Church.8

Bellamine also discussed the question of salvation for those who had never heard the gospel, explaining that because God willed all to be saved, God would provide help to achieve salvation to everyone, at some time and place.9 In view of the fact that multitudes of people in the newly discovered parts of the world had lived and died in ignorance of the Christian faith.

Francisco Suarez (1548-1619) drew the conclusion that just as there was the possibility of baptism of desire, the lack of actual faith in Christ could be supplied by the desire of having it. Suarez equated implicit faith in Christ with desire for faith in Christ, an implicit faith or desire for faith that would be rooted in the person’s faith in God. This, Suarez believed, God would always make possible, perhaps through an interior illumination for those who were doing what they could to please him.

Another Jesuit theologian, Juan de Lugo (1583-1660), went further, saying that implicit desire for faith, baptism and membership in the Church may be applied not only to those who had never heard the gospel, but also to those who knew about Christ but did not believe in him, or who had an unorthodox faith. In other words, contrary to the Council of Florence, heretics, Jews and Muslims might not be guilty of the sin of unbelief, and thus might be saved through their sincere faith in God expressed in their own religions. His conclusion rested on both a new understanding of geography, that there were vast continents whose inhabitants had lived for centuries without Christian faith, and on the developing understanding of human psychology that until people were convinced of the truth of Christianity they could not be guilty in their rejection of it.

The Nineteenth Century

In 1854, on the occasion of the definition of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Pius IX (Pope 1846-1878) reiterated what had become the official position, that it was necessary to belong to the true Church for salvation, understanding this in the context of the justice of God, and the fact that he does not condemn the innocent. Pius IX referred to those who were culpably outside the Church as being excluded from salvation (Sullivan, 2002, p. 114), and his statement apparently recognized that those who were inculpably ignorant of their obligation of belonging to the Church could be saved. Franzelin (1816-1886) amplified Pius IX’s teaching, clarifying that those who were inculpably ignorant of their obligation to belong to the Church, and were in the state of grace, could still be saved in and through the Church. They were saved in the Church by means of their adherence ‘to her spirit and also to her visible elements by their will, which is accepted by God in lieu of fact.’ They are also saved through the Church ‘to which the word of faith belongs and in view of which saving graces are given’.10

The Twentieth Century Prior to Vatican II

From the time of Pius IX, whose 1863 encyclical Quanto Conficiamur Moerore had authorized the view that while there was not salvation outside the Catholic Church, those who were invincibly ignorant of Christianity and cooperated with divine grace could arrive at justification, it was common Catholic doctrine that there were people in the state of grace and on the way to salvation who would never be visibly joined to the Catholic Church. However, such people must in some sense be joined to the Church in order to be saved.

One proposed solution to this was the notion of a visible Church and an invisible Church,
to which those who were not baptized Catholics may belong. The invisible Church existed and was hidden within the visible Church. While this notion of the invisible Church hidden in the visible Church was commonly associated with Lutheran theology, Catholic theologians put forward various interpretations of it.

During the period between the first and second world wars, a distinction was made between the Church as Mystical Body and the visible Church. Membership in the mystical body, which went beyond the bounds of the visible Church, was understood to depend on the degree to which one shared in the life of Christ by grace, whereas membership in the institutional Church required profession of the Catholic faith, reception of the sacraments, and being in communion with the Catholic bishops and the pope. ‘Mystical body’ was a traditional way of referring to the Church so the doctrine that no-one was saved outside the Church could mean that some people not joined to the institutional Church, but in a state of grace, could belong to the mystical body of Christ.

While this notion attracted support among Catholic writers during the period between the wars, the notion had the potential to lead to the same dichotomy between the visible and invisible Church (Sullivan, 2002, p.128). Congar (1937) refused to separate the Church into mystical body and the visible Church, but he did recognize that there were elements of the mystical body outside the Church. These elements such as faith and grace meant that non-Catholics living in the grace of Christ could be said to belong to the Church invisibly and incompletely yet really. For Congar there were not a visible and an invisible Church but one Church which was both visible and invisible (Potvin, 2003). The mystical body and the Church were not two difference realities, although elements of the mystical body could exist abnormally outside the Church. Where such elements exist effectively, i.e. where non-Catholics live by the grace of Christ, they belong to the Church by desire if not in fact.

Pius XII’s (1943) *Mystici Corporis* was premised on the fundamental principle that the Roman Catholic Church and it alone was the Mystical Body of Christ. Since only Roman Catholics were really members of the Church, only they were really members of the mystical body. However, the encyclical recognized the possibility, that those who are not yet members of the Church and are inculpably outside the Church, may be saved. Catholics were urged to pray for those separated from the Church by a breach of faith and unity, and also those who have not been enlightened by the gospel. The encyclical showed that non-Catholics could be saved by being related to the Mystical Body of Christ, and thus to the Catholic Church, by wish or desire (#143).

However, the encyclical was criticized for its lack of distinction between Christians and those of other religions. It was objected that the encyclical ignored the fact that by virtue of their baptism Christians are sacramentally incorporated into Christ, and must belong to the Mystical Body in a way that non-Christians do not. This was clarified in 1949 in a letter from the Holy Office to Archbishop Cushing in response to an argument that had arisen in his archdiocese, where he argued that people who are invincibly ignorant of the fact that God has established the Church as a means necessary for their salvation could have a saving relation with the Church by a desire which was implicit in their will to know and love the good. (Sullivan, 1992, p.139)

*   *   *

**The Second Vatican Council**

**In Relation to Other Christians**

The first change made by Vatican II was in relation to salvation for Christians other than Catholics. The Council did not claim that the Church of Christ was the Roman Catholic Church. Rather it stated that the ‘the Church of Christ subsists in the Roman Catholic Church’ (Pope Paul VI, 1964, #8) affirming that the
Church founded by Christ and entrusted to the apostles continues to exist in the Catholic Church, but not saying than the Church of Christ existed nowhere else but in the Catholic Church. In this wording there was a significant potential recognition of ecclesial reality in other Christian Churches and communities (Sullivan, 1992).

Vatican II also did not claim that only Roman Catholics are really members of Christ’s Church, instead saying that ‘only those Catholics are fully incorporated into the Church who are living in a state of grace’ (Pope Paul VI, 1964, #14). This statement introduced the notion of different degrees of incorporation into the Church, applying it first to Catholics. It follows that if some Catholics are more fully incorporated into the Church than others, degrees of incorporation on the part of other Christians should also be acknowledged, since baptism has always been seen as the sacrament by which one becomes a member of the Church. Now official recognition was given to the fact that that by their baptism, other Christians were really, if not fully, incorporated into the Church of Christ. Other Christian communities were referred to as ‘ecclesial communities’ (Pope Paul VI, 1964, #15) and it was stated that ‘in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit’.

This close connection between the Catholic Church and the ecclesial communities that belong to the wider Church of Christ was reiterated in the Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio [UR] 3#). The second Vatican Council reaffirmed what had been official Catholic doctrine since the time of Pius IX, that it is only those culpably outside the Church who are excluded from salvation. However, while in the past there was a presumption of guilt, (Sullivan, 1992), Vatican II presumed the innocence of the majority of those outside the Church. The question then became not whether they can be saved but how.

**Vatican II and Non-Christians**

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Pope Paul VI, 1964, #16) said that ‘those who have not yet received the gospel are related in various ways to the People of God’. According to the Constitution, God wills the salvation of all, and all are called to belong to the Church. The Catholic faithful belong to the Church through their baptism and their continued fidelity to the sacraments and life of the Church. Others are related to the Church in various ways which include relatedness though the covenant and promises of the Old Testament, relatedness through belief in God as one, as merciful and as creator, relatedness through seeking God in shadows and images, and relatedness through sincerity of heart and the genuine desire to do God’s will. While the Jews are in a unique relationship with the Church, other groups are included in God’s plan of salvation and are offered the grace that directs them towards salvation. Since all grace is directed towards a gathering of the universal Church in the eschatological kingdom, (Pope Paul VI, 1964, #2) it is therefore also directed toward the Church on earth. In addition, grace brings the possibility of faith, and no matter how conceptually imperfect (Sullivan, 1992) this faith is, it is ‘intrinsically directed towards the full profession of faith in divine revelation which is had only in the Church (Sullivan, 1992, p.155). Finally the grace of salvation brings the gift of charity which directs the person intrinsically towards the communitarian charity which is at the heart of the Church.

Vatican II, however, claimed that the Church was the efficacious sacrament of salvation, and has an instrumental role in God’s plan for salvation (Pope Paul VI, 1964, #9). In other words, in regard to the great majority of people in the world who have neither Christian faith nor baptism, Vatican II affirmed that they are not only related to the Church by the grace that the Holy Spirit offers to them, but that the Church is also the sign and instrument of their salvation.

**Vatican II on the Good to be Found in Other Religions**

The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (Pope Paul
VI, 1965) advocated Christ as the ‘way’ of salvation, then dealt very briefly with the issue of truth in other religions, claiming that ‘certain ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth’ ‘often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men’ (# 2). So while Christ is the fullness of truth, other religions in various ways reflect that truth. The document did not actually announce that salvation may be achieved through other religions, but implied that this was possible to the extent that they ‘reflect’ the salvific truth of Christ. Further, the document did not indiscriminately give this status to all religious phenomena, but left the way open for the process of critique and discernment. It encouraged a search for understanding and engagement between Catholics and those of other religions (#2).

In summary, the Second Vatican Council claimed the following in relation to religions other than Christianity. First, God wills the salvation of all, and this salvation is not offered or carried out in secret, but through visible mediations. Second, the Church recognizes in other elements that come from God. Third, these elements can serve as a preparation for the gospel. The Council, however, did not imply that, given the presence of these divine elements in other religions, the Church’s missionary endeavor should cease. However, it did insist that there be dialogue and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of other religions in which the spiritual and moral goods as well as values in these cultures would be acknowledged, preserved and promoted.

**Developments after Vatican II**

**Can Other Religions be Mediators of Salvation for Their Followers?**

Vatican II did not explicitly claim that other religions could be mediators of salvation for their followers, even though it recognized divine elements in these religions and affirmed that these divine elements related the followers to the Catholic Church through whom salvation comes.

Rahner (1904-1984) took this position one step further with his coining of the term ‘anonymous Christian’. If God’s salvific will is universal, Rahner argued, there is the possibility for all to be saved. However, the Church holds that salvation is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ and belonging to the People of God. This contradiction was solved for Rahner in the theory that because all people have a transcendental dimension, they can receive God’s grace and revelation. The response to God’s self-communication is given in loving others as oneself, for the love of neighbor is ultimately love of God. Consequently, Rahner argued, those who do not confess Jesus Christ explicitly and do not become members of the Catholic Church, ‘must have the possibility of a genuine saving relation with God’ (Rahner, 1993, p. 54) and therefore they are called ‘anonymous Christians.’ However, the anonymous Christian’s response to God’s self-communication is not private and anonymous. The social nature of the human person means that this response is carried out through a communal expression. Normally this will take the form of the religion to which the person belongs. Until non-Christians become so convinced of the truth of Christianity that they must abandon their religion and become Christian, their own religion continues to be the way that God intends they express their relationship with him and arrive at salvation.

From this it follows that non-Christian religions remain, under God’s providence, legitimate ways of salvation for the majority of the world’s people. These ways should not be thought of as independent of the salvation offered by Christ who is the unique source of grace through which adherents of all religions are saved. However, Rahner insisted that because of the role which the non-Christian religions play in the divine plan of salvation for most of the world’s people, we can expect to find supernatural elements in them which can serve as mediators of God’s grace.

There have been a number of objections to
Rahner’s notion of the ‘anonymous Christian’ and of the salvific dimension thus attributed to non-Christian religions. The first objection was that this made redundant the Church’s missionary efforts. It is true, Rahner responded, that missionary activity can no longer be undertaken on the basis of a belief that no-one can be saved without explicit faith in Christ, along with the reception of baptism and membership in the Church. The work of evangelization is now optimistic about the possibility of salvation for those who do not accept Christ. Catholic evangelizers must accept that many people who do not have explicit Catholic faith, are nevertheless living in the grace of Christ. Those who have this predisposition of grace in any case will be best disposed to respond to the Church’s missionary efforts. In addition, Rahner responded, the nature of the Church demands that it incarnate itself in every culture, just as God was incarnated in human flesh. The Church provides the fullness of the life of grace which other religions cannot do for ‘anonymous Christians’.

Papal Teaching After Vatican II

The thought of Pope Paul VI expressed most fully in Evangelii Nuntiandi (1974) was less positive. First great admiration is expressed for the spiritual values found in other religions, but alongside this is a re-affirmation of Christian identity as the religion which provides a genuine and unique way to salvation, and a minimizing of the potential of other religions to provide salvation (Pope Paul VI, 1974, #53). Following from this was a call for renewed efforts at evangelization throughout the world. However, the key element in the teaching of his successor, Pope John II, in regard to other religions was respect for the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in non Christians and in their religions—seen in their practice of virtue, their spirituality and their prayer. John Paul II claimed that the missionary attitude begins with a deep respect for what is already there ‘by the Spirit’ (Pope John Paul II, 1979, #15). Recognition of the truth and the action of the Holy Spirit in other religions, according to Pope John Paul II, made true dialogue possible.11

The theme of the universal action of the Holy Spirit was further developed in Dominum et Vvificantem (1986) where he spoke of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ, in history and ‘outside the visible body of the Church’ (#53). Reflecting on the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi (1986) he explained that ‘every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person’.12 Like Paul VI however, John Paul II insisted that recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in other religions did not diminish the need for Christian missionary activity. His thought on this should be quoted in full.

The universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all. But it is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his Sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free cooperation. (1986, #10).

Pope John Paul II saw inter-religious dialogue as part of the evangelizing mission of the Church, describing it as both connected with and distinct from the Church’s missionary activity. (Pope John Paul II, 1990, #55)

Dominus Iesus (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2000) encouraged the continuation of inter-religious dialogue, and again placed this within the context of the Church’s missionary vocation. Inter-religious dialogue is ‘part of the Church’s evangelising mission’ (#2). An important purpose of the document, re-
iterated several times, was to set down ‘certain indispensable elements’ of Christian doctrine in relation to world religions, particularly in the context of ‘relativistic theories’ which, in justifying religious pluralism, seemed to dismiss or down play the necessity of Christ for salvation, the definitive nature of the revelation of Christ, and the Christian economy of salvation or elements of it (# 4). The document then listed the elements of this economy of salvation as the creating and redeeming grace of God as offered to humankind, the Incarnation as the fullness of God’s revelation and the requirement of the ‘obedience of faith’ (Rom 16:26) to this revelation; the work of the Holy Spirit in effecting and teaching the mystery of salvation within the lives of the faithful and the role of the Church as the mediator of salvation. The universality of God’s will to save all people was re-affirmed, but it was made clear that this salvation is in and through Christ (#15).

Importantly however, the document did not identify the Catholic Church with the Kingdom of God. This kingdom is the ‘manifestation and the realisation of God’s plan in all its fullness’ (#19) and while it takes in the Catholic Church whose task is to promote the Kingdom of God on earth, it is not restricted by it: ‘the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church’s visible boundaries must not be excluded’ (#19).

The document asserted there fore the same two seemingly contradictory truths, that have appeared throughout the history of Church thinking about this issue. God wills all to be saved, and yet Christ, the Church and baptism are necessary for salvation. What then of the committed adherents of other religions? While acknowledging that this issue needs much more theological study, the document asserted that God ‘in ways known to himself’ (# 21) makes accessible and available outside the visible Church, a grace from Christ (# 20) which effects salvation within their ‘spiritual and material situation’ (# 20). While the Church is the way to salvation, those outside the Church are enabled, in an act of grace, to share in the salvific truth of Christ through their own religious paths. Therefore there is one way of salvation (# 21) but other religions, as affirmed by Nostra Aetate, contain ‘elements which come from God’ (# 21) and through these elements in a ‘mysterious relationship with the Church’ (# 20) salvation is offered.

The document finally cautioned Christian believers against an indiscriminate acceptance of all elements of religions, seeing that while some were ‘from God’ (#21) others arose from superstitions and were an obstacle to truth.

Dominus Iesus promulgated the same teaching as Nostra Aetate but in a more detailed and expository way. It asserted the centrality of Christ and the Church in the plan of salvation, but acknowledged that she does not have the last word, that the Kingdom of God is bigger than the Church, and that the elements of truth in other religions may certainly be channels of salvific grace.

To summarise then, the contemporary Catholic position is an inclusive one, with Christ and the Church deemed to be necessary for salvation but with the allowance that the grace of God can and does work outside of the Church in ‘mysterious’ (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2000, # 2) ways through the ‘rays of truth’ (Pope Paul VI, 1965, #3) that can be found in other religions, and which draw their adherents to the salvific grace which comes through the Church.

**Educational Implications**

We have established that the Catholic Church both recognizes that elements in other religions can be the means of salvation for their followers, and encourages Catholics to enter into respectful dialogue with other Christians and adherents of other religions. Furthermore we can be in no doubt that the Church sees Catholic schools as communities of inclusion.

In the certainty that the Spirit is at work in every person, the Catholic school offers itself to all, non-Christians included, with all its distinctive aims and means, acknowledging, preserving and promoting the spiritual and moral qualities, the
social and cultural values, which characterize different civilizations (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, #47) and

Catholic schools are at once places of evangelization, of complete formation, of enculturation, of apprenticeship in a lively dialogue between young people of different religions and social backgrounds’. (Pope John Paul II, 1995, #102.)

The ‘lively dialogue’ about religions referred to by Pope John Paul II is encouraged in the Catholic school. Yet, as Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, (2003) has pointed out, this dialogue cannot even begin unless there is first some basic education in the phenomenon of religion, and its expressions in the religions of the world.

We first have to try and understand them as they are, in their historical dynamic, in their essential structures and types, as also in their possible relations with each other or as possible threats to each other, before we try to arrive at any judgments (Ratzinger, 2003, p. 10).

Ratzinger asks those who would engage in inter-religious dialogue to enter objectively into the religious worlds of others. This involves listening, learning, asking questions and distilling knowledge before reflection and dialogue can take place. Learning about the other is the first task of inter-faith dialogue and both are within the work of the Catholic school. Ultimately attention to this goal will allow for the achievement of two other goals of the activities of learning about world religions and establishing inter-faith dialogue in the school, these being an enriched understanding and appreciation of one’s own religion, and the establishment of a foundation for common life and action for justice in the school. (Swidler, 1986).

NOTES

1 Augustine (400) On Baptism: Against the Donatists. Ch #12.
3 held at Quiercy-sur-Oise in 849.
4 Innocent III, 1215, Firmiter, Canon 1.
5 (II-II,q.2, a.7).
6 Pope Eugene IV, A.D. 1431-1447, at the Ecumenical Union Council of Florence.
7 De Indis p.144.
8 De Ecclesia Militante, cap.6; ed. Guiliano, vol2, p.80.
9 De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio, lib 2, cap.8; ed. Guiliano, vol4, p.308.
10 Theses De Ecclesiae Christi. Ed 2: 1907, p.413)
11 Address given in Madras to the leaders of the Indian religions 21/2/86.
12 Christmas address to the Roman Curia 22/12/86.

REFERENCES

MORE THAN A generation ago James Gustafson alerted theological ethicists to problems with the term ‘revealed morality.’ It had become the source of contention between the fundamentalist, radical, liberal and humanist wings of American Protestantism who all used it their own differing ways. Perhaps for these reasons it was not much employed by nor was it very familiar to Catholics. The Pontifical Biblical Commission’s recent document ‘The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct’ introduces it to explain Scripture’s bearing on moral matters. Starting from Vatican II’s definition of revelation in Dei Verbum as God’s self-communication in word and deed recorded in Scripture it situates morality within a biblical theology of God’s action in creation and Covenant culminating in Christ. ‘Morality is not primarily the human response but the revelation of God’s purpose and of the divine gift’ (no. 4). Assuming this perspective means that revelation can be employed to define and discern the moral character of today’s urgent moral problems. Morality therefore flows out of an experience of God and his loving attitude toward us. It is concerned less with making sense of worldly experience than with learning the way of salvation, the imitatio Dei taught by God.

The main problem addressed is the deep fissure opening up in contemporary society as it becomes ever more distant from such an experience of God so that many are now Christian only in a sociological sense. When Scripture is put aside people’s moral perception of God’s goodness and concern for them is dulled. A flood of rapid changes has overwhelmed society, a shock wave that disrupts traditional moral certainties and institutions, breeds a culture of relativism, and renders the Church’s mission as moral teacher harder. New technologies extend man’s dominion over nature and the exponential expansion of financial systems gives access to global political and military power. The result is violence against the environment, a widening gap between rich and poor nations, and new ways of exploiting the human person. The authors have no intention of examining such problems in detail, leaving the task of rational analysis to moral theologians. They are interested in the basic intuitions of conscience that arise from and are refined by contact with God’s word as it progressively reveals his intentions in history, e.g., respect for life in all its forms, particularly the absolute prohibition against the deliberate killing of an innocent person, and the life-long validity of monogamous marriage for both man and woman support this contention. Improvements in the condition of slaves, strangers, the oppressed and women, and the awareness of the need for social justice have all come about under the powerful influence of God’s word in Scripture as it dynamically transforms and shapes society. The horizon of Scripture is relevant to every moral problem even when no solution is clearly evident. The document asserts that God’s word and action determines (cf. nos. 7, 8, 138, 142) human action as a response to the divine initiative. People only become responsible agents by participating in and cooperating with God’s action in history. There seems to be an implicit premise in the document: its starting point is in God’s word and not in the humanum. No matter what occurs in the fluctuating adventure of human history the inexhaustible riches
of revelation will provide an adequate answer since God’s word is forever active and actual. Interpreted through the Church’s teaching it can supply the response needed in the present situation.

How does the document approach contemporary moral problems? The first part provides an initial answer at three levels. In creation everything comes under God’s transcendent lordship, especially problems of ecology and of humanity as the *imago Dei*. In the Covenant we discover the ‘underlying driving force’ (no. 73) of salvation history and ‘the basic theological structure <<gift-law>>’ (no. 151) that characterise the Decalogue. Interpreted in the horizon of the whole of Scripture, e.g. of Christ’s love commandment and the beatitudes, the Decalogue forms the axis of a universal revealed morality. It has more to do with God’s rights than with human rights claims as in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights*. It is relevant to a postmodern age and especially to the Western world for the way it lays down foundations for the juridical and legislative order. In Christ the Covenant comes to perfection. His unconditional love for his Father and commitment to us put the above concerns on an utterly different level. The document emphasizes two effects of his act of reconciliation: spiritually he heals the wounds inflicted on creation by sin and his resurrection breaks through the last barrier to human destiny, death.

The second part of the document answers our query about the use of Scripture in contemporary moral matters, first in the form of a paradigm, and second by its application. The quotation from the then Cardinal Ratzinger (no. 95) sets out a paradigm that is programmatic for the whole document. Revelation and contemporary moral problems are connected by means of a process of assimilation wherein faith purifies the elements making up a culture so as to discern the genuinely human in them. This statement sums the pivotal issue, ‘Whenever a judgment is required on the Christian morality of any action the immediate questions to be asked are how far this practice is compatible with the biblical vision of the human being, and to what extent it is inspired by the example of Jesus’ (no. 103). The paradigm’s purpose is to show how Christian morality is constituted. Its originality cannot come from its content, even from Scripture, since the content in question may be common to various cultures and religions, e.g. the golden rule. What is specific is the Holy Spirit’s power to bring a culture to maturity and to eschatological fulfillment in God. ‘The contribution of scripture is therefore originality, together with relevance to our own times, in which the complexity of many problems and the faltering of some of our certainties requires a deeper understanding of the sources of our faith’ (no. 95). Contemporary moral problems are not to be solved by merely humanistic means but from the resources of the faith. Jesus wanted to protect his disciples, ‘against the error of shutting themselves within an earthly perspective’ (no. 138). Scripture in both Testaments ‘prohibits us from ever treating a moral problem as if it were entirely self-contained; it must be viewed in the context of the great threads of God’s revelation’ (no. 154).

The above paradigm arises out of a profoundly spiritual discernment process. Its ‘theological foundation’ (no. 151) is established by distinguishing values that belong to one particular culture from those that are genuinely transcultural. The essential criteria for scripturally based models of moral judgment that meet today’s conditions are enumerated
in no. 151. This implies both that such judgments always have a sociological dimension and that an alternative paradigm might be chosen. In selecting a model ‘an a fortiori argument’ can be valid even if it leads to a ‘provisional compromise’ as we see in Acts 15. Prudence is the primary virtue that the community exercises in the discernment of contingent historical situations (cf. no. 152). The document argues that the permanently valid criteria discovered in Scripture are to be applied to contemporary moral problems. It goes on to assert that, ‘History must be read with one eye on the religious principles and values which God has revealed and continues to reveal, and the other on concrete events.’ This gives Christians the ability they need, ‘to discern this transcendental wisdom in their day to day activities’ (no. 72).

Because of sin’s influence the faith community is caught up in a tension between continuity and discontinuity with the surrounding culture. This tension focuses our perception on the profound paradox that underlies the ‘human inability to act in accordance with accepted ideals and its consequence - death’ (no. 106). Discontinuity should not, however, be allowed to determine the conception of human nature so that it can be constituted only by the sovereign free gift of God’s grace. This stance is reflected in no. 159 which leaves natural law an open question. The document’s second part seems to let the pessimism one finds in Scriptures predominate over the goodness of creation and genuine secular values.

The Book of the Apocalypse provides a paradigm for reading the signs of the times as the conflict between ‘the kingdom of God with Jesus at its centre together with his followers and the anti-kingdom of Satan’ (no. 116). It is invoked to prophetically denounce the evil in our world, from the crimes against humanity committed by totalitarian regimes to the abuse of human dignity among democratic nations, e.g. abortion, euthanasia, and the like. Against this onslaught ‘the Crucified and Risen Christ exerts his direct influence first on the Church, and through various activities of the Church, on the rest of the world’ (no. 142). The faithful mediate Christ’s Covenant love experienced in the Church in order to spiritually build up his Kingdom in the world till the marriage of the Lamb and the bride is consummated in heaven.

The task of the moral theologian in the face of today’s problems is to become a Doer of the Word. 2 This is achieved, first by welcoming God’s gift, his word in Scripture. It is only then that practical reason can perform its multiple tasks of dialoguing with culture, contesting and transcending its weaknesses, so as to refine and bring conscience to maturity. It proposes a vision that would yield fruit for both Church and civil society by opening them to their authentic fulfillment, the eternal destiny promised them by God (no. 154).

NOTES


LESS THAN TEN years ago there was in our world one power that seemed to reign supreme, the super-super-power. For more than half a century it looked that way. Once this power was minded to intervene decisively in the Second World War, it was sort of obvious how the war would end up. And the end, effectively, was the ultimate show of physical power the world has yet known, the obliteration of cities with atomic bombs: a precedent for the later doctrine of The Preemptive Strike. Since then lesser powers, such as Great Britain and Australia, have felt safest hiding under the shadow of her wings, under the protection of that world power, the United States of America.

That world power became more inclined to throw its weight around, to intervene in other people’s wars; and for many it seemed safest to go along with Big Brother, or at the least to offer what is called ‘moral support’. Some of us are old enough to remember an Aussie catch-cry from the illustrious reign of Lyndon Baines Johnson: ‘All the way with LBJ!’ Even then, that world power had bought into one conflict it found it simply could not win; but still it seemed safest to go along with whatever their emperor—sorry President—decided.

We live in a different world, where first the almighty power and then the almighty dollar have been humbled; and the rest of the world groans under the strain. The very earth itself refuses to lie down meekly and accept whatever muck is thrown up into the atmosphere. Nowhere seems immune to one or other of these three: drought, fire and flood; least of all our beloved Australia, so recently devastated in each of these modes. But we have also known a wonder of wonders: that once great power, the Super-power, has crowned an Emperor in new clothes: one who even dares flash before us his godly vision of a new earth stark naked of nuclear bombs.

It doth not yet appear what the Lord Obama shall be, and what his backers will bear with him doing. But he had a mighty entrance into the Jerusalem of the United States. Behold the conquering hero comes! Like others before him, this young Lord has still to go around riding not on a humble colt (as perhaps he would prefer), but enclosed by the biggest army known of protecting staff. There are, after all, precedents for assassinating a USA President who might seem too radical or big for his boots.

This New Age hero, unlike his mighty predecessor Franklin D Roosevelt, actually goes over to Macedonia, sorry Britain, to help. He goes to meet there the many powers great and small, more to listen, less to command. In advance there were rumours that he might be boycotted, told bluntly where he got off. But no, those angels the media tell us he has the crowds with him, that it is a good entry into that new-world Jerusalem where it is more important to be the servant of all than to be he who must be obeyed. Still, this is a canny young servant. He has done his theological homework: he knows that the male has no monopoly of the divine Image, for ‘male and female created S/he them’. And who can resist the beauty of his manhood conjoined to such a fair spouse? Why, even in France they are greeted with joyous embrace!

* * *

Where it will all end, God only knows. But on this day we remember another entrance into Jerusalem, one we may hope is more indelibly impressed on the heart of President Obama than on that of some of his less august predecessors. We call today Palm Sunday, in remembrance of how a Jewish rabbi and miracle-worker set his face to go up to Jerusalem, and the initial rapt enthusiasm of crowds that followed him. He knew this was a crisis. The
crisis of the Roman empire’s vision of authority—which could come down like a ton of bricks on anything that seemed to threaten it—and his own vision of authority as the servant of divine love, friend of all the oppressed.

As Jesus takes to the streets to go up to Jerusalem, the City of God, already he has exercised the ultimate authority in heaven and earth: first, ‘your sins are forgiven you’; and second, he has, in his own name, revised the law of God. But still the question remained, for them and for us:

Do we worship almighty power? Or do we worship the power of Love alone?

This Jesus, whom some are calling ‘Saviour’, has announced that the Reign of God is at hand, and asked his followers to pray for its coming. What is more, he has acted as if he had the authority of God: in his own name—he has forgiven sins, and revised the Law given to Moses. What has he not done, this young prince of men whom even the wind and the waves obeyed? He has not kept his hands clean, but has mixed with the most dubious company—and yet he has done nothing which seemed to soil his awful, unnerving purity.

Among his intimate friends, this Jesus has accepted that he could be called the Messiah, the liberator and king of the Jewish people. Yet what sort of a king is this?—he who so often seems to take sides against his own people. Remember that story he told where a Samaritan, a so-called heretic you wouldn’t mix with, comes out as the righteous one, the truly human one? Anyway, Jesus kept warning them that this would be a strange victory, so much so they would want to disown him.

And now his time has come. This Jesus has set his face towards Jerusalem, the City of God, there to enter into his kingdom. There he will receive his insignia, his royal robes, his crown, and he will be enthroned King of Glory. But just as he dared to say ‘I am meek and lowly of heart’, and none of us could contradict him, so now he comes, see, lowly and riding on a young donkey. O, blessed Jesus, you should have a royal highway made for you. We give you what we have:

we throw our cloaks down in your path, and palms from the side of the road. Oh, blessings on you, King Jesus, and praise be to heaven.

Praise and blessings indeed. But as we pause this day to remember the glory of that moment, we are to remember also what manner of king it is, that is even now ascending towards his throne. Palm Sunday is the beginning of what we call Holy Week, and that is how we must understand it. The authority of Jesus is too much of a threat for either the religious leaders or their Roman overlords to dare to take any risks. He must be silenced, he must be stopped once for all.

They think they are having their way, yet it is he, the one free person in that situation, carrying his burden and our burden calmly before him, who is having his way. He has sided with the transgressors—which is us all. He receives for his insignia the lacerations of his flesh as this rabbi is flogged like a slave. He receives his crown—a crown of thorns. For his robe he is robed in naked flesh; and for his throne he is lifted up onto a Roman cross of execution. Behold the man, behold the very truth of God. It is to him, who renounces all power except the power of Love, that is given all authority in heaven and earth. Then, indeed—as an ancient hymn invites:

Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand; ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand, Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand.

Beloved, let us sing his praises!

Geoff Nutting tssf, formerly a musicologist, retrained in 1988 to work as an Anglican lay chaplain and researcher in mental health. He is a doctoral student in ministry studies at the Melbourne College of Divinity.
I love the sound of your name, St. Anselm. I’m glad I can still know you, through your words and your prayers, even though they buried your body 900 years ago.

During your time as Abbot of the famous monastery of Bec, you loved the monks under your care very tenderly. You were also a man of great learning, and you held no distinction between your love of learning and your desire for God. In your work, the Prosligion, in which you set out your famous argument for the existence of God, you begin with a great prayer of desire and yearning:

I set out hungry to look for you... Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek you if you do not teach me how, nor find you unless you reveal yourself. Let me seek you in desiring you; let me desire you in seeking you; let me find you in loving you; let me love you in finding you.¹

This, St. Anselm, is your prayer. And I sense that you are not merely talking about God as a huge metaphysical concept or a complex theological object. The ‘You’ of your prayer could just as easily be whispered to a lover, ever so sweetly, in the chambers of human intimacy—‘let me desire you in seeking you, let me love you in finding you.’

It is in my very nature to want you and need you. It is in my nature to seek you out. It is my nature to desire you and love you. It is in my nature—not because of my self alone or my own self-seeking—but because of You.

Yet ‘who is it that I love when I love you?’ you ask. ‘O my flesh, what do I love, O my soul, what do I desire?’ And you go on to say that if beauty delights us, or wisdom, or music, or joy, or friendship, or peace, or goodness—‘there it is, there it is!’ you exclaim—in all these things that I love and desire, it is God’s love and goodness that fills my soul, ‘so that I may remember You, think of You, and love You’ (149-50).

You described your search for God as ‘faith seeking understanding’ (105). Caught up in this endless love for God, your love is driven to further understand this infinite love. This may sound like a circular argument, yet it is true of all the ways we love. It is like a musician who says, ‘only music can help me understand music,’ or an ecologist who says, ‘only the wetlands can help me understand the wetlands,’ or a lover who says, ‘only your love can help me understand the love I feel for you.’ Only the things we love, deeply and truly, can teach us. ‘For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe,’ you say, ‘but I believe so that I may understand’ (115). There is little we can understand, unless we first love and believe.

It is only at this point, St. Anselm, that you introduce your famous argument for the existence of God. ‘We believe that You are something which nothing greater can be thought’ (117). This little thesis of yours has been the subject of much philosophical debate for centuries, yet I don’t think you offered your argument in order to give philosophers a headache. Rather, you are reminding us that God is always greater than our concepts, that God is so plentiful, so really real, so expansive—that we must always respect the bountifulness and incomprehensibility of God.

You bear witness to God’s overflowing love. God is not so much the ‘Wholly Other’ that exists in some transcendent realm apart from our lives. Rather, transcendence is ‘exceedence’ or ‘surplus’ or ‘more than’—there is always more that I can know, more that I can love, more that I can cherish. We are al-
ways in relation with that which exceeds our lives. ‘Inquietum cor nostrum,’ St. Augustine says—our hearts are always restless. ‘Nothing suffices for the soul,’ St. Bonaventure says, ‘but that which exceeds its capacity’ (‘Nihil sufficit animae, nisi ejus capacitatem excedat’). This desire does not so much emerge from the negativity of a lack—a via negativa—but from a positive overflowing, a surplus, a via superlativa. When we read poetry, when we love, when we pray, we experience this ‘more than’ or this great surplus that continually overflow our lives, and we seek to summon this overflowing love into the world. Unlike the fool who says in his heart, ‘there is no God,’ the believer is overwhelmed by God’s great love, overcome by God’s overflowing fullness, dazzled by God, ‘dazzled by You’ (135).

Dear St. Anselm, you have taught me that I need to love in order to understand—that love will guide me and lead me. You have taught me that God’s love is in all things and that when I love, or am loved by others, it is You, O God, who stirs my soul and fills my heart.

Before I go, St. Anselm, I must turn to that other great question you pondered, ‘Why did God become human?’ (Cur Deus Homo). In this work, you reflect on one of the central tenets of Christian faith. Everything of God is ultimately concerned with everything of humanity. We cannot speak of God without speaking of humanity. We cannot speak of our relation to God without speaking of our relation to one another. We cannot love God unless we love our brother and sister (cf. John 4:20-21). God and humanity are inexorably bound.

Yet it is the answer you give to your own question that really stuns me. I doubt that I, or our own troubled world, will ever fully understand it. God became human, you say, to bear our sin, to suffer our sin in his body, to die at the hands of our inhumanity, to absorb all the hatred and violence that spills out in blood and tortured flesh, in the smell of death all through human history—then, and now—still now, still now. We still do not know, we still have not understood, what we are doing to each other (cf. Luke 23:34).

To suffer for you, because of you, because of your great fault—this is why God became human. To bear our sin. And if we live in Christ, then we too must bear the sins of others, we too must suffer the effects of human hatred, we too must take sin into our flesh—renouncing violence, renouncing hatred, renouncing all the ways that humanity deals in death.

Underlying your question, ‘Why did God become human?’ stands the whole gravity of love—a love that is not hateful or resentful, a love that takes no pleasure in other people’s sins; rather, a love that ‘bears all things’ (1 Cor. 13:7).

How to absorb sin? This is the religious question. How to take an arrow without defense? This is the religious question. How to bear with one another? How to refuse hatred and vengeance, arrogance and fear? This is the religious question. This is why Christ became human, and this is what he came to teach us. When we love each other, we must necessarily suffer each other’s fault and undergo each other’s sin, in forgiveness and forbearance, upholding rather than condemning each other in our shared humanity.

NOTE
BOOK REVIEW

Sue Richardson pbvm, and Brian Gallagher msc, 2009: Communal Wisdom: A practical guide for group discernment, Nelen Yubu Productions, Sydney, NSW.

On a warm New York City evening some thirty-something years ago, Fr Daniel Berrigan sj exhorted an exuberant crowd of more than 100,000 peace activists, ‘don’t just do something, sit there!’ Dan Berrigan would have appreciated and endorsed the insights and strategies offered in Communal Wisdom. And, indeed, there are already many in 2009 who also recognise and welcome the value and usefulness of this small but impressive book. Even in the short time since its publication, Communal Wisdom is proving to be very popular with readers.

In its compilation and presentation the authors of Communal Wisdom set a fine example of what they propose for their readers. From the Foreword by Denis Edwards at its opening to the Recommended Reading at its close, and through careful drawing on insights of ‘wise people’ throughout the book, Sue Richardson and Brian Gallagher offer communal wisdom to support and enhance their case for reflective and spirit-filled discernment as the key for truly effective group work.

We are, of course, in our Western, democratic, way, accustomed to forums, symposiums, seminars and the like, where it is expected that everyone may have their voice heard. Shared input through dialogue, discussion, debate, dispute... this is taken for granted in most organisations and their sub-groups. Such a process is seen as (most) effective for determining what is the ‘will of the group’ and in the best interests of—at least—the majority. Such a process proves itself successful where the aim of groups is to discover what is the best thing to do, or the best way to achieve results; that process is appropriate when looking for a recipe for outcomes following a thorough sifting, distilling, weighing or whatever of ideas to achieve consensus or closure relating to the issues on the group’s agenda. That is decision-making based on collective wisdom, derived from the sum of the individual contributions.

All that is significantly different, however, from the discernment brokered through the process of coming to appreciate communal wisdom as proposed and developed in the book under review. The special insight to be gained from Communal Wisdom is richer and deeper - though more challenging and perhaps more elusive to start with.

When people come together to discern the will of God for the group, they come not as individuals or factions to convince - or maybe coerce – the others to choose what they think valuable for all. A whole new dimension transforms the focus of the group; a catalyst transcending individual members of the group is needed. The insight is that, under the guidance of the Spirit, the group—as group—may develop its own connections, cohesion, and collaboration, thereby achieving a new (communal) wisdom, and so come to its own awareness of possibilities.

The authors, reflecting on the experience of group discernment, as distinct from discussion, are then able to propose appropriate strategies for allowing this to happen. Far from the energy evoked through the maelstrom of the ‘think-tank’, the counter strategy is to be quiet, reflective, take time, allow the Spirit a chance to work with us... for discernment is not about dealing effectively with the known, but awaiting, allowing, the emergence of the unknown, maybe the unexpected. While group discussion might reasonably allow for everyone to have a say, group discernment is more designed so that everyone might have a listen! While the key to success in group discussion might be the triumph of the head, group dis-
cernment rather promotes the engagement of the heart. While the outcome for group discussion is a sense of achievement, those engaged in group discernment look for inspiration to guide them to success.

A reading of *Communal Wisdom* also encourages reflection on Scriptural bases for this type of discernment: for example, the gathered disciples, with Mary, awaiting the coming of the Spirit, in *Acts* 1, the imaging of community as body— with its many parts as gift to the others, all working in harmony—in *1 Corinthians* 12 and *Ephesians* 4, and the community as building in *Ephesians* 2. Jesus himself on a number of occasions urges ‘those who have ears to hear, let them listen’, evoking the distinction between simply hearing words and the art of listening to the message.

*Communal Wisdom* is not a manual, a ‘how to’ book—though strategies and processes are proposed for consideration. *Communal Wisdom* is an inspirational book in the very best sense. *Communal Wisdom* is a book well worth reading—but just as importantly, a book for listening!

—Philip Malone MSC
Catholic Institute, Rome. On returning to Australia he lectured in biblical studies for 18 years, and was elected Provincial Superior of the Missionaries of Sacred Heart in 1974. He was Assistant General in Rome 1981-93 and now lives in India.

New Era of Pastoral Leadership: Consolidation and challenge; Martin Dixon; John Garratt Publishing; PB $24.95 [9781920721763]; 50pp; 235x155mm; 2008

Volume 1, Number 4 in the Voices: Quarterly Essays in Religion in Australia series. Overview of the Imagining Pastoral Leadership (IPL) Project, which had its origins in October 2003 when, on the initiative and at the invitation of the National Council of Priests of Australia (NCP), representatives of the Commission for Australian Catholic Women, the Bishops’ Committee for Laity, and Australian Catholic Leaders of Religious Institutes, met with the author (representing the NCP) in Canberra to begin a conversation on ways of being church in Australia at this point in history. The essay presents a theology of both God and Church as communion, and examines current realities such as the decline in priest numbers and increased education of laity, before discussing new leadership challenges, and the author’s reflections on the future. References list. Author is parish priest of St Simon’s, Rowville (Melbourne) and is Coordinator of the IPL Project.


Official publication by the World Youth Day 2008 (WYD08) organisers that is a large-format commemorative volume of WYD08 and account of Pope Benedict XVI’s visit to Sydney, which took place July 2008. Illustrated throughout with full-colour photographs. In addition to the photos, captions and introductions to each day’s events, it presents the full texts of all the key addresses and homilies, including those of the Pope as well as other religious and community leaders. Preface by Cardinal George Pell; introduction by Bishop Anthony Fisher, WYD08 Coordinator.

Social Justice and the Australian Catholic Bishops; Michael Costigan; John Garratt Publishing; PB $24.95 [9781920721893]; 60pp; 235x155mm; 2009

Volume 2, Number 1 in the Voices: Quarterly Essays in Religion in Australia series. Account of the (Australian) Bishops Committee for Justice, Development, Ecology and Peace (BCJDEP) during its existence from 1987 to 2005, by its Executive Secretary. Provides a brief introductory overview of the pre-BCJDEP efforts of the Australian bishops regarding social justice, including the annual Social Justice Sunday statements from 1940 to 1960 and those of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) from 1973 to 1987. Deals with the controversial closure of the CCJP and its replacement with the Bishops Committee. A theme of the essay is that the replacement organisations - the BCJDEP and the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) - in fact relied on lay cooperation, support and expertise. In addition of the annual Social Justice Statements from 1987 to 2008, Costigan devotes a chapter to each of the major projects the BCJDEP undertook: the Wealth Inquiry (1988-1992), Consultation on Young People and the Future (1994-1998), and Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia (1993-2000), as well as its focus in its final years on ecology. Endnotes; bibliography. Author is now an Adjunct Professor at the Australian Catholic University.

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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

July to October 2009

From the Fourteenth to the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 5 to October 25)

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the readings of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed for Sundays of Year B, between July and October, 2009, from the Fourteenth to the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (July 5 to October 25). Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The readings over this period are exceptional. They move us through the Ordinary Time of the year without interruption. There are a few things to note from each of the readings.

1. The First Readings encompass a broad range of literary styles and genres from the Old Testament. In the opening Sundays of July, the prophets—those stalwart and faithful Israelites who seek to remind their people of their commitment to the Torah—dominate. Their reminder occurs not without its resistance from the prophet’s audience, an observation clear from Amos 7 on July 12 and echoed in Isaiah for OT 23 and 24 (September 6 and 13).

Our selection of first readings also allows us to hear from the genre of wisdom literature, writings that seek to offer insights into day-to-day living, but which also reveal something of the inner depth of God’s life reflected among people open to God (OT 25, September 20).

Of particular significance is the wonderful Genesis reading of OT 27 (October 24). The poetic magic of this reading invites us to consider that goodness of creation and the divine plan infused into the human person through God’s creative activity. While the connection of this reading with the gospel of the day (Mk 10:2-6) could lead the preacher into a meditation on the value of community life, this theme is first established in the Genesis story.

2. The Second Reading draws from the letter tradition of the Second Testament. These semi-continuous readings in this time of the year are first drawn from the Letter to the Ephesians. While the letter has been attributed to Paul it is now generally accepted that it was authored by a disciple of Paul writing in Paul’s name. The selection that we read over Ordinary Time (Eph 1-5) accentuates the role of Jesus in God’s plan and our call for union that comes through baptism. The cosmic portrait of Jesus and his relationship to the church community are especially emphatic.

James is a second letter that we will hear (OT 22 to OT 26). This is probably a very early writing in the NT, some scholars suggest the earliest, addressed to Jewish followers of Je-
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sus, perhaps in the 40s. It encourages practical religious practice and response to the poorer members of the community. Hebrews is a second letter tradition addressed to Jewish followers of Jesus and completes our selection of second readings over October. Hebrews borrows from familiar Jewish worship practices and customs to reveal the importance of Jesus’ ministry and his connection to the Israelite traditions with which the letter’s readers would have been familiar.

3. The Gospel: We continue with our reading of Mark’s Gospel (chapters 6 to 10). It is interesting to note how the narrative flow of Mark is interrupted by the introduction of Jn 6 over OT 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 (July 26-August 23). Jn 6 reflects on the centrality of Jesus to the human quest for wisdom, guidance and nourishment. He is truly God’s ‘bread from heaven.’

There are three points from Mark that are worthy of further comment.

• First, the two gospels for September 6 (OT 23-Mk 7:31-37) and October 25 (OT 30-Mk 10:46-52) have blindness and healing as their themes. These two stories form a frame around the intervening section in Mark’s narrative outline concerned about discipleship. The ability to see is an issue in Mark’s community, symbolised through the disciples, as it is with us today. We, like the disciples, need healing to deeply see what is going on around us and how Jesus invites us to accompany him through what befalls us.

• Second, the gospel of September 13 (Mk 8:27-35) raises the central question that links the whole of Mk. This is the question addressed to the disciples and every subsequent generation of Jesus followers: ‘Who do you say I am?’ How we respond to this question today in our respective faith communities and from the context of our lives determines how we are Jesus’ disciples.

• Third, the gospel selection for October 4 (Mk 10:2-16) needs to be carefully interpreted. Our contemporary understanding and experience of divorce was not the experience of the ancient world or of Mark. Rather than being an indictment on those who divorce, the gospel encourages reflection on those who bring about divorce and upon those who are victims of the Roman divorce process. These would be the ‘little ones’ of Mark’s Jesus household. They, like the children whom Jesus takes into his arms and blesses, need special pastoral care.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

July 5—Ordinary Time 14: Ez 2:2-5. God declares to the exiled people that God is sending a prophet to them. 2 Cor 12:7-10. Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh,’ the image of his weakness, becomes the means for his commitment to God. Mk 6:1-6. Jesus is portrayed as God’s prophet rejected by his hometown. Theme—The Prophetic tradition. The role and importance of the prophet has always been acknowledged in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The prophet, exemplified in Mark’s portrait of Jesus, is one who speaks the truth, reveals God’s activity in human history and community, and experiences rejection. Who might such prophets be for us today?

July 12—Ordinary Time 15: Amos 7:12-15. Amos is the untrained and reluctant prophet urged to do God’s bidding, despite attack from Israel’s religious leaders. Eph 1:3-14. This is a wonderful hymn summarizing Jesus’ role in creation and God’s intention to bring us into communion, to ‘adopt’ us. Mk 6:7-13. The disciples are sent on mission to preach the Gospel. Resistance to the message will be expected. Theme—Being a prophet. Continuing the theme from last week, the readings offer an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of baptism, as a call to be a prophetic witness to God’s action in our world. Resistance, even rejection, is expected. The readings offer an encouraging word in our struggle to faithful discipleship.
**PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD**

**July 19—Ordinary Time 16: Jer 23:1-6.** God promises the people new and faithful shepherds, and especially a future shepherd king who will reign with wisdom. Eph 2:13-18. Jesus is celebrated as the source of social, political and religious unity. Mk 6:30-34. Jesus shows concern for his disciples and compassion on the crowds who seemed shepherd less. Theme—God shepherding us. The image of a shepherding God who looks after us, no matter what, is rich and relevant. What are the implications of believing in the active presence of such a God?

**July 26—Ordinary Time 17: 2 Kings 4:42-44.** The prophet Elijah brings a few loaves, gives them to his servant, to satisfy the hunger of a large number of people. Eph 4:1-6. The writer reflects on the implications of baptism: unity and hope. God’s Spirit is the source of this unity. Jn 6:1-15. Jesus feeds the hungry crowd. Theme—God feeds our hungers. God desires to feed us in our life’s journey. What are the struggles and difficulties that we face that invite us to open ourselves to this God who seeks to address our deepest needs?

**August 2—Ordinary Time 18. Ex 16:2-4, 12-15, 31.** God feeds the hungry Israelites in the Sinai desert. Eph 4:17, 20-24. We are encouraged to live clothed in Jesus, filled with holiness. Jn 6:24-35. Jesus is God’s authentic (‘true’) food from heaven for humanity’s nourishment. Theme—Our hungers: What we desire and hunger for, God seeks to address. What are our hungers? How would we like God to respond? What are the deepest desires of those you know? How are these revealed? How are they a sign of God’s presence?

**August 9—Ordinary Time 19: 1 King 19:4-8.** The exhausted prophet awaits death, but God revives him with food and drink to journey to Horeb. Eph 4:30-5:2. We are exhorted to open ourselves to God’s Spirit, live with kindness and forgiveness, and to imitate God. Jn 6:41-51. Jesus is God’s sustenance for our journey. He is the living bread from heaven. Theme—Our sustaining God: Themes of the first reading and gospel underscore God’s desire to sustain us in our spiritual journey. Examples of exhaustion abound; the desire for ‘living bread’ is planted deep within our being. How can our communities identify this desire, and the expression of God’s sustaining presence?

**August 16—Ordinary Time 20: Prov 9:1-6.** The quest for true spiritual wisdom is ancient; wisdom (‘Sophia’) invites us to ‘lay aside immaturity and walk in the way of insight.’ Eph 5:15-20. We are encouraged to live by wisdom with an awareness of God. Jn 6:51-58. Jesus is the true source of Wisdom offered through communion with his flesh and blood. Theme—True Wisdom: A way of life filled with wisdom is essential. We look for wisdom in diverse ways (technology; study; economics etc). Jesus seeks to offer us true wisdom; he is from God; eucharistic communion with him promises life forever.

**August 23—Ordinary Time 21: Josh 24:1-2, 15-17, 18.** Before entering into Canaan, Joshua challenges the people to commit themselves to their ancestral God. Eph 4:32-5:2, 21-32. The writer offers advice on how to live religiously as God’s true household. The preacher must be aware not to reinforce female submission and to appreciate the cultural and social conditioning behind this text! Jn 6:53, 60-69. Faced with the implications of the realistic language of eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood, some of his disciples turn away. The Twelve remain faithful. Theme—Centrality of God and Jesus. The statement of the disciples in Jn 6:68 (‘Lord, to whom can we go?’) captures the essence of the Christian journey: our focus on Jesus, the heart and meaning of true life, who reveals loving care of us, especially in times of struggle.

**August 30—Ordinary Time 22: Dt 4:1-2, 6-8.** Moses encourages the Israelites to live faithfully to God’s commandments and thus display wisdom and discernment to the peoples. James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27. A fine summary of essential truths for authentic living: generosity, openness to God’s word which needs to be acted upon, which concludes with a radical definition of ‘religion.’ Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23. Mk’s Jesus defines true religious living, one that is centered in the heart. Theme—Authentic Religious Living. Whether people show up at church or not, everyone wants to be authentic in themselves and live in harmony with others. Today’s readings offer a wealth of insights for reflecting on authentic religious living. What resides in our hearts, and our relationship with Jesus are essential (Mk). These are expressed in the ways we are with others (James).

**September 6—Ordinary Time 23: Is 35:4-7.** The prophet envisages a God of liberty who frees and releases. God’s presence changes all perceptions; streams appear in the desert. James 2:1-5. Our response to the poor of the world is the touchstone of true religious living. Mk 7:31-37. Jesus heals one who is deaf; the ability to deeply hear and to proclaim the gospel is at the heart of discipleship.
Theme—Being released. The God of liberty (Is) and the Jesus of healing (Mk) are with us in our attempts to creative concerned faith communities in which people are invited to minister. The future of our churches rests upon an engaged and motivated ministry of the baptized.

September 13—Ordinary Time 24: Is 50:4-9. A song of God’s servant, faithful yet persecuted, who seeks justice against his persecutors. James 2:14-18. Faith implies loving and caring actions towards others. Mk 8:27-35. This is the centre of Mk’s gospel: Who is Jesus for us? He is God’s anointed one who will suffer, be persecuted and die. Theme—Suffering. Those close to God (the servant in Is; Jesus in Mk) suffer. Fidelity to God is not without its struggles. How are members of this community examples of faithful living in the midst of suffering?

September 20—Ordinary Time 25: Wis 2:12-20. The kind, virtuous person will often be targeted and victimized James 3:16-4:3. The writer calls for communal and personal peace. The task of peacemaking is essential Mk 9:30-37. The disciples miss the point of Jesus’ teaching—the little ones are the models of true discipleship, not those who seek social importance. Theme—Hospitality: Openness to the most insignificant in our world, church and daily lives lays the ground for a profound openness to God. Local examples might help to solidify how this could be an attainable discipleship quality.

September 27—Ordinary Time 26: Num 11:16-29. God’s spirit of prophecy rests on the most unexpected. Moses affirms this. James 5:1-6. The writer criticizes the use of wealth and the way the wealthy disregard the poor. Mk 9:38-48. Jesus acknowledges those who are unexpected disciples. Discipleship takes unusual commitment. Theme—God’s Action: The praise of Moses and Jesus for those who follow (God or Jesus) in the most unexpected ways confirms that God can act outside the usual and expected ways. How does such unexpected discipleship reveal itself in our world or local faith community?

October 4—Ordinary Time 27: Gen 2: 7, 8, 18-24. The creation of the ‘earthling’ (‘Adam’) leads to the creation of the human community—ultimately God’s act. Heb 2:9-11. Jesus is exalted by God and in solidarity with us. Mk 10:2-16. Jesus’ teaching on those who have been excluded through divorce. Jesus protects these and ‘little children’. Theme—Community: God’s vision for inclusivity and unity, especially between men and women becomes the basis for Christian community life. How is this divine vision expressed in our church local parish community?

October 11—Ordinary Time 28: Wis 7:7-11. The search for true wisdom is the focus of prayer. Wisdom is a rich, life sustaining gift. Heb 4:12-13. God’s Word is powerful, acts, reveals and is affective. Mk 10:17-30. Jesus teaches the heart of true religious life—not to be confused with wealth. Freedom from wealth is a gift. Theme—Wisdom: The attachment to wealth and power today is revealed in many stories of business and politics. Jesus’ call, bound up with the search for Wisdom, is for a freedom not earned, bought or manipulated. Freedom is ultimately God’s gift.

October 18—Ordinary Time 29: Isaiah 53:4, 10-11. Song of God’s servant. From his anguish and suffering comes life and light. Heb 4:14-16. Jesus can sympathize with us in our suffering and weakness. Mk 10:35-45. Discipleship is based on service, not power or prestige—a dilemma even for today’s leaders. Theme—Service: Servant leadership may be difficult to define but it is very active in the community around us. There are many examples in our communities of selfless service, not often noticed or celebrated.

October 25—Ordinary Time 30: Jer 31:7-9. God promises to console, heal, liberate and look after the disconsolate people. Heb 5:1-6. Jesus was appointed as High Priest by God. He knows us and loves us in our weakness. Mk 10:46-52. A wonderful story of liberation of one seeking discipleship. The power of the community exercises freedom. Theme—Community Power: The story of Bartimeus reveals the power of community to encourage or block liberation and discipleship. Through its action God heals and frees. How is that happening among us?

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