ANY OF THE articles in this issue of Compass examine the future of the Church in Australia. This is a weighty topic indeed, often given over to multilayered analysis—some of which is proved in this volume.

My thinking on this topic crystallized with an experience some years ago when I was conducting an in-service weekend for senior teachers and administrators who were either in, or poised to take on, leadership roles in Catholic schools. As you get more senior in the academy—which I suppose is just a polite way of acknowledging you are getting older—you can tell stories and hopefully have them heard not as tangential, indulgent anecdotes but as narratives which open up complex and hard to explain issues. Be warned though there is more of this type of narrative discourse in one of my articles in this volume!

I was at Mass at a lovely seaside chapel when it suddenly occurred to me that in ten to twenty years everyone in the church that Saturday evening, with the exception of my wife and I, would, in all likelihood, be dead. A morbid thought but one very germane to our discussion on the future of the Church. One question that suddenly popped into my mind, was what happens to an institution when it loses members who are highly committed to it, not on their own terms but in ways that the institution sees as important?

The reason we were attending Mass that night was that earlier in the day, in the course of my presentations, I had proposed to the group, in a very matter of fact way, that we start our Sunday session a little later as this would give us all the chance to go to Mass together at a church very near the seminar venue. I sensed some disquiet in the group but pressed on.

Over lunch, a delegation approached me and pointed out that it was a little presumptuous to assume that they all went to Mass on Sunday and that in any case their attendance at this weekend seminar more than fulfilled their Sunday obligation. I should also point out a certain moral flavour accompanied these protestations. One of my interlocutors expressed surprise that I was still so unconsciously wedded to a mindset—committed Catholics go to Mass on Sunday—that had now been superseded. Let me repeat this was not a random group of people. Rather, it was a subsection, sponsored by the local diocese, and earmarked for leadership roles in Catholic schools.

When, subsequently, I mentioned this experience to the educational leadership of the diocese they proposed, as had many in the delegation, that we were now dealing with a variety of senses of ‘being Church’ and that the worshiping community model was in eclipse being replaced by other models that did not privilege Sunday worship.

This idea is well supported in the wider literature. A figure that I keep an eye on, largely in American research, is on self described indicators of Catholic identity. It is now clear that a majority of American Catholics, but especially those under forty, do not regard attendance at Sunday Mass as a critical part of Catholic identity. My suspicion is that this figure would be even higher amongst Australians as we tend to lag well behind Americans on measures of religiosity. Does this mean we now need to develop and accept ‘new ways of being Church’ or has something seriously gone wrong with our institutional priorities?

A critical question becomes on what basis does the Church plan its pastoral responses? What template is being used in engaging both the world and the members of the faith community? To be sure, these questions have a
clear practical or pastoral dimension.

The more substantial issue is, however, conceptual—a verification of the principle that there is nothing more practical than a good theory! The key ideological issue that will shape the immediate future of Catholicism, not just in Australia but all over the world, is how are the teachings of the Second Vatican Council best appropriated? This is a debate around what well may become the leitmotif of Benedict XVI’s papacy, that is, seeing the Council within a hermeneutic of continuity and harmony.

I have selected in this editorial one, albeit foundational, manifestation of this principle, namely what value do we place on Mass attendance? Many other issues could also be cited and discussed which bring up similar arguments. I would maintain that a cogent interpretation of the Council is impossible if we do not place at the heart of our analysis the centrality of the Eucharist. If I am mistaken on this I am prepared for an epitaph on my tombstone to read something like, ‘Here lies Richard Rymarz—he did some good things but he totally overemphasized the significance of the Eucharist in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council!’

If the teachings of the Council were intended to make the Eucharist an even more important part of the life of the Church a paradox emerges. Now several decades later, to borrow a term from the practical theologians, despite heightened theological underpinning, participation in the Eucharist is not part of the lived reality of many Catholics.

How do we respond to this? In the first instance one could argue that this is a misreading of the Council and that its key teachings lay elsewhere. In this case then, an interpretation of the Council will guide pastoral planning in a particular direction. In a similar vein, it could be argued that although the Council did address the centrality of Eucharist in Catholic life, the resolute decline in sacramental participation since the Council will somehow correct itself and no direct response is needed.

If we, however, concede that the Council did indeed intend to highlight and reemphasize the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life and called for action to achieve this vision then a number of different pastoral responses suggest themselves. These would be a need to acknowledge the real and discomforting challenges that in many ways are easier and safer to ignore.

If, for instance, many prospective educational leaders of Catholic institutions do not see Sunday worship as an irreplaceable part of religious identity and of their own spiritual life then what should be done? There is no easy answer here but at least some progress is being made if we acknowledge this problem and others closely related to it.

—Richard Rymarz, Guest Editor

...the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavour is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord’s Supper:

JESUS, AFTER receiving John’s baptism, experienced being driven by the Spirit into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). The time in the wilderness became an extraordinary preparation for ministry. He experienced the variety of temptations (power, wealth, security), and through it all, particularly during his times of greatest trial, received the grace and blessings and care of the angels who looked after him (Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:12). Jesus came out of the wilderness, ‘filled with the power of the Holy Spirit’ (Luke 4:14), fired up to preach and witness to the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). Jesus dedicated his whole life to this message. He felt it was critically important for his disciples to understand it. However, Jesus’ message and witness to kingdom of God power is so alien to human understanding of power that the disciples struggled to grasp his meaning. And the Church down through the ages has likewise struggled to understand—even remember—the primary position of the kingdom of God in its life.

This paper serves to highlight possible ecclesiological developments for the Church if it takes such a missional, kingdom of God-centred (regnocentric) identity to heart. The paper is divided into two parts. Part One provides a brief outline of what is understood by kingdom of God, and the relationship of the kingdom of God to the Church. Part Two provides some indicators of what a kingdom of God-centred Church may look like in today’s globalised world.

PART ONE: THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CHURCH
Remember to ‘strive first for the kingdom of God’ (Matthew 6:33). Jesus’ experience of his Father as Abba, the closest translation being ‘daddy’, which captures the intimacy and affection of his relationship with the Father, and his vision and experience of the kingdom of God, are the two key aspects that capture his life (Fullenbach 2002, 6ff). The experience of God as Abba captures our human longing to rest in God’s love (Augustine), our desire to feel the fullness of our living, moving and being in God. The kingdom of God is both of this world and of the world there-after. The kingdom of God is a world of peace, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, where all humanity and creation are given dignity and respect, and are embraced in love and with joy. Some have described this as a ‘dream of God’ captured in the vision of shalom (Fullenbach 2002, 9). Shalom means much more than the absence of war, as Fullenbach describes:

It means well-being in a comprehensive sense. It includes freedom from…oppression, anxiety, and fear, as well as the presence of…health, prosperity, and security. Shalom thus includes a social vision: the dream of a world in which such well-being belongs to everybody.

Fullenbach (2002, 9) declares, ‘It is the most grandiose vision that the world has ever known’ and it is this vision for which Jesus ‘lived, labored, suffered, and died’ and which we, his disciples, are sent to live and proclaim (John 20:21).

It is critically important that we never forget that the kingdom of God lies at the heart of Jesus’ proclamation and life. It was what ignited his mission, and what led to his death. Right at the beginning of his public life, returning from his time in the wilderness Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, summarised his mission by drawing from the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he
has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus kept pointing to clues of where the Kingdom was breaking through into the here and now. As such, we must take our current world seriously, as the Lord’s prayer says, ‘may your Kingdom come on earth’ (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2). And there is also another sense that the Kingdom lies beyond ourselves—that it exists, and its fullness will come in God’s own time on earth. We give ourselves humbly to the values of the Kingdom, but we know that its ultimate realisation comes as pure gift from God.

The text from Isaiah captures the heart of Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God. And we, through Baptism, are called to continue to witness to and meaningfully proclaim this same message in today’s world. In order to do this meaningfully, we must listen attentively to perceive the Spirit’s continuing presence in the world. As Vatican II stated in the introduction to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World n.4, ‘the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times’ and ‘must respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit’ and try to ‘discern in the events, the needs, and the longings which it shares with all [people] of our time, what may be genuine signs of the presence and purpose of God’ (n.11).

Of course, this is no simple matter. Jesus appears to be forever challenging people to listen. He warns us to ‘pay attention to how you listen’ (Luke 8:18; cf. Luke 8:8). He wants his disciples to remember his stories and their meanings so as to help them to better understand God’s presence in the world.

I was jolted recently when talking with my teenage daughter about Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God. My daughter was struggling to remember what the idea of the kingdom of God was, and was surprised to learn that it was the central message of Jesus’ mission. There may be many reasons for this, including that the language of ‘Kingdom’ is quite out-dated in today’s postmodern world. However, I suspect that my daughter’s lack of recall may not be uncommon and may point to a fundamental failure in family and parish (including school) catechisis on focusing on the kingdom of God as the heart of Jesus’ challenge for us today.

It could also be symptomatic of a greater malaise in the Church, namely, a limited understanding of mission and the role of the Holy Spirit as ‘the principal agent of mission’ (Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio n.30). What may seem a simplistic question, ‘Does the Church have a mission?’ or rather, ‘Does God’s Mission have a Church?’ cuts to the heart of the matter. It is very easy for well-intentioned people to not even understand the fundamental difference in the questions, and so Church mission is seen as manageable, containable, doable, and dare we say, safe. We develop pastoral plans, allocate resources, and aim for improved outcomes. This is all good and not to be diminished. However, when we imagine things in terms of missio Dei or kingdom of God terms, the Holy Spirit can often stretch our thinking, move us to unfamiliar ideas and concerns, and lead us into places of vulnerability where we may not be safe and things may well be uncertain, and fill us with power to witness beyond our imaginings.

The Church is made up of countless numbers of stories of women and men who allowed themselves to embody a vision that knew no limits. Australia is soon to celebrate the sainthood of Mary MacKillop, an extraordinary woman who knew that the call of Jesus was
The Relationship of the Church to the Kingdom of God

Vatican II announced very clearly that the Church exists to be a servant of the kingdom of God (cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n.5). Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World states: ‘the Church has but one sole purpose—that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the whole world be accomplished.’

Pope Paul VI stated even more strongly in his apostolic exhortation, Evangelisation in the Modern World (n.8): ‘Only the kingdom therefore is absolute and it makes everything else relative.’ Vatican II moved away from presenting the Church as identical with the kingdom of God. Karl Rahner (1975: I, 348) captures this movement:

The Church is not identified with the Kingdom of God. It is a sacrament of the Kingdom of God in the eschatological phase of sacred history which began with Christ, the phase which brings about the Kingdom of God. As long as history lasts, the Church will not be identical with the Kingdom of God, for the latter is only definitely present when history ends with the coming of Christ and the last judgement.

This thought was developed further by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical Redemptoris Missio (1990: n.15, n.17, n.20) and in the joint statement of the Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Dialogue and Proclamation. Dominus Iesus (2000), drawing from these documents puts it most clearly:

To state the inseparable relationship between Christ and the kingdom is not to overlook the fact that the kingdom of God—even if considered in its historical phase—is not identified with the church in her visible and social reality. In fact, ‘the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the church’s visible boundaries’ must not be excluded. Therefore, one must also bear in mind that ‘the kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society and the world.’ (par. 19)

Vatican II and the subsequent Church teaching, has heralded a remarkable change in self-understanding of the Church. It opens up new ways of relating to others and indeed all of creation and provides fresh opportunities for the Church to make an ever more meaningful, relevant and humble contribution to the community. It can now serve as a better signpost for the world to the values and hope of the kingdom of God.

PART TWO: SIGNS OF A KINGDOM OF GOD-CENTRED CHURCH

What does this change in self-understanding, that the Church exists to serve and point towards the kingdom of God mean for us? I believe it means everything. If we took seriously that our duty is to be caught up in firstly discerning and then responding to the Holy Spirit’s leadership role in God’s mission our Church would be marked by great humility and courage, and an extraordinary level of vulnerability. The kingdom of God requires costly discipleship (Bonhoeffer); in short, we are challenged to put everything on the line, take up our cross and follow Christ.

For over 70% of our Church who struggle to survive in the poorest conditions of our world (the so-called Third World) this kind of discipleship comes naturally. Their concerns are for survival, security, clean water, basic
food and shelter, and perhaps then a hope of education and that unjust socio-economic and political systems that oppress them will be taken away and replaced with life-giving freedom and resources. We need to be reminded of what was boldly declared at the 1971 World Synod of Catholic Bishops that:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel or, in other words, of the church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation (Justice in the World n.6).

What does costly discipleship mean for us, particularly for those of us of relatively considerable wealth? There is no doubt that Jesus made great demands on his disciples (cf. Luke 9:57-62). Some took up the invitation earnestly. Consider Peter who said ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you’ (Mark 10:28); and then consider the rich young man, who even though Jesus loved him and invited him into his company, could not do this because he was weighed down with great wealth (Luke 18:18-23). Some that Jesus cured were allowed to journey with him and be his disciples (Mark 10:46-52), and others he asked to go back into their communities and witness there (Mark 5:19). So on individual levels we see that Jesus places different demands on each person, understanding their particular context and time.

What does costly discipleship mean for a wealthy Western Church and how should it witness to these fundamental kingdom of God values named above? What does this mean to us in the West belonging to a globalised world, when our abilities to experience community and relatedness have never been greater, our world has never been more divided with greater wealth belonging to fewer, and extreme poverty being experienced by increasing numbers of people? This reality jars our senses.

Those in the wealthy West with any sensitivity want to make a contribution to alleviating the suffering of others. They want to share their wealth. We see this in donations after natural disasters (Indonesia, Haiti). We notice ever-increasing numbers of people doing short-term voluntary work with agencies in the Third World, and we note that many of these volunteers come from non-Church backgrounds, and many of them are young. We think back on the witness of heroic men and women who saw suffering and injustice and decided to dedicate their whole life to prayer and service of the poorest of the poor (consider Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day).

There is a growing sense that many desire to have demands placed on them, and they will willingly respond, particularly if this draws them into authentic relationship and meaning for life. As such, the Church has an important role in providing clear and accurate information on what is happening in the world, and encouraging people to contribute to alleviating such unnecessary suffering.

But words are not enough. As Pope Paul VI put it so well, people ‘more willingly listen to witnesses than to teachers, and if they listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses’ (Evangelii Nuntiandi n. 41). While the role of proclamation is not diminished it has far more power within a context of authentic witness (cf. Bevans and Schroeder 2004, 352ff). So what does this mean for our Church and its future? We have argued strongly that the Church must be animated by its commitment to serving the kingdom of God, a kingdom characterised by values of justice, peace, non-violence, table-fellowship and celebration, friendship with the stranger, fearless denunciation of unjust practices and systems, and care for the poor and oppressed.

If this is what we are called to be and do, what are signs and ways of authentic witness in today’s Church? How do we use our time and resources (financial, human and material) to serve the kingdom of God? I am often struck by the fact that in our busy world, time sometimes, even more than money, is what we are reluctant to ‘give away.’ The time to talk with or acknowledge the stranger, or even time to
be with our friends, family members and work colleagues, seems to becoming harder for increasing numbers of people. Unjust work practices of twelve-hour working shifts, or low salaries requiring long hours of work, all combine to make such time difficult to come by. However, there is also an assault on our time by a culture that is increasingly bombarding people with distractions (radio, television, computers, iPods, to name a few) and consumer ‘needs’ that can eventually alienate people from each other, and certainly do not satisfy the spiritual hunger in our hearts.

Closely connected to time as a precious resource are our financial and human resources (staff and volunteers). How are kingdom of God values of care for the poor, lonely and marginalised, actions for social justice and reconciliation, love of all of God’s creation, celebration of our liturgical and social life, lifelong education in the richness of our faith Tradition and the religious traditions of others, reflected in our financial and human resource planning? The following are some trends of what a Church committed to serving the kingdom of God may look like.

A reflective and discerning Church

The Church is called to witness to Jesus’ demand that we ‘listen’ to and for God’s movement in our world and life. Frequently, commencing with his initial forty days in the wilderness, Jesus went to quiet and remote places for rest, prayer and communion with his Abba/Father (Mark 1:35, 6:31, Luke 4:42). Our Church, with its long tradition of retreats and quiet reflection (including adoration) is well-positioned to be able to mentor and nurture such practices in families and individuals, and in the vast array of sodalities and ministry groups that come together for the mission of God.

Living out the call of baptism: lifelong faith education and formation

Through baptism each member of the Church is called to fully enter into the life of discipleship. It is not acceptable that there be passive members of a Church, simply attending the sacraments as if it is a private affair. Our Church needs to be marked by dynamic preaching from its clergy, and ongoing adult faith education and pastoral formation for all to enable each person to better understand their baptismal responsibilities so as to witness with increased power to God’s love for and concern for the world. The Church will be marked by an educated and dynamic laity working side by side with the clergy, where power is shared and individual and communal gifts are nurtured and encouraged.

Sharing of resources with the poor and action with the poor

A kingdom of God focused Church has its eyes on the poorest of the poor in the local and wider community. All are to be swept up in this ministry, each giving financially what they can, and each giving of their time to activities that work not only to alleviate material suffering, but also to develop relationships and friendships through all strata of society. St Paul painted a picture of there being total equality between men and women, Jew and Gentile, etc (Galatians 3:28). We are called to break down such barriers. Our Church is called to become more and more a light among the nations by being a prophet of hope and to fearlessly proclaim the need for justice, peace and reconciliation.

Dialogue and listening—deeply ecumenical

As noted earlier, Vatican II was a watershed in the Church’s understanding of salvation. We now understand that salvation is indeed possible outside the Church (cf. Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church n.16, Nostra Aetate, Declaration on the Relations of the Church to non-Christian Religions n. 2), and that we have much to appreciate about God’s movement within the lives and traditions of others. Focusing on the kingdom of God means that we are called to work with all people of good will to alleviate suffering in the world. This will challenge us
to learn from others, through dialogue—and this requires deep listening, to share with oth-
ners our faith, and to enter into the vulnerable
place of the Spirit leading us all into new life
and understanding. As Richard McBrien
(2008, 368) affirms: ‘Ecclesiology has begun
to assume an interfaith as well as an ecumeni-
cal character.’

Hospitality to all

Welcome to the stranger is a key motif in
the gospels. This is hard work for us and
stretches us beyond our comfort zones. We can
take comfort that there were times in the gos-
pels where it appears Jesus was challenged on
this as well (cf. the story of the Syrophoenician
woman Mark 7:25-30; Matthew 15:21-28).
The Church is called to establish sociologi-
cally and culturally appropriate structures that
enable the stranger to be seen and heard and
become known, not to be an alien within a large
body that can easily be hidden—or worse—
ignored.

Inculturation: celebrating life and
mission—Eucharist

Our liturgical life needs to reflect the ‘com-
ing in’ and ‘going out’ movement of Mission.
It is important that the Church emphasises that
Eucharist is not an end in itself; that we never
lose sight that Eucharist serves Mission. We
bring to our liturgies, particularly in the Eucha-
rist, the cares and concerns of the world. We
seek forgiveness and healing and reconcilia-
tion for our failures in being true to God’s de-
mands. And through the Eucharist we are nour-
ished and given courage and hope to go back
into the world to continue our commitment to
God’s mission in the world (cf. Schroeder
2008, 115). To be sure, the Eucharist will al-
ways be the centrepiece of our liturgical and
community life, but it is the centrepiece only
because it feeds us for God’s mission.

As Eucharist is the one activity in which
the local Church gathers it is essential that it
be celebrated in a culturally meaningful way.
We now refer to this as inculturation, also re-
ferred to as contextualisation. Inculturation
captures the ‘dynamic interaction between the
gospel and Church tradition on the one hand,
and the changing social and cultural context
on the other’ (Shroeder 2008, 122). The
Church has long understood the importance
of this. Bevans and Schroeder (2004, 192)
highlight that in 1659 the Sacred Congrega-
tion for the Propagation of the Faith alerted
missionaries going into foreign lands:

Do not regard it as your task, and do not bring
any pressure to bear on the peoples, to change
their manners, customs, and uses, unless they
are evidently contrary to religious and sound
morals. What could be more absurd than to
transport France, Spain, Italy, or some other Eu-
ropean country to China? Do not introduce all
that to them, but only the faith, which does not
destroy the manners and customs of any peo-
ple… but rather wishes to see them preserved
and unharmed…Do not draw invidious contrast
between the customs of the peoples and those
of Europe; do your utmost to adapt yourselves
to them.

Vatican II recognised the critical impor-
tance of people’s culture and identity. The
Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity,
Ad Gentes, highlighted that the Church ‘must
implant itself…in the same way that Christ by
his incarnation committed himself to the par-
ticular social and cultural circumstances of the
[people] among who he lived’ (n.10). And in
n.11 the Council taught that all Christians
‘should be familiar with their national and re-
ligious traditions and uncover with gladness
and respect those seeds of the Word which lie
hidden among them.’ Following on from the
Council, Pope Paul VI in 1969 proclaimed in
Uganda that, ‘you may, and you must, have an
African Christianity’ (Bevans and Schroeder
2004, 386). Pope John Paul II continued to
develop this thinking and demanded that in-
digenous cultures be respected and that the
Church willingly and joyfully receive such
contribution to the life of the Church (cf. Ad-
dress to Aborigines and Torres Strait Island-
ers, Alice Springs, Australia, n.12-13).

Inculturation of the liturgy is critical if the
Eucharist is to be meaningfully celebrated in the diverse cultures and contexts of our world Church, and the celebration of the Eucharist in particular goes to the heart of our ecclesiological identity, because it is ‘expressive of the nature, mission, ministerial life, and structural operations of the Church’ (McBrien 2008, 371). This is why the issue of inculturation of the liturgy is currently a very hot topic (cf. McBrien 2008, 166ff).

We know that inculturation is never easy, as Pope John Paul II cautioned, the process of inculturation is indeed a ‘lengthy,’ ‘difficult and delicate task.’ Nevertheless, a kingdom of God-centred Church will be one which recognises and esteems human culture, drawing it into the heart of her liturgical life, and enabling the gospel to make even deeper roots in the cultures of the world.

* * *

All these signposts point to a Church that is fully committed to living out its call into the missio Dei. It will be drawing from the deep riches of the Tradition, being Eucharistic centred, and a Church deeply rooted in the Word of God. It will also be radically centred on the call of Baptism that all equally share in this mission, and together all are called to proclaim and witness to the values of the kingdom of God. The Church will be marked by humility, forgiveness and reconciliation, heroic and mundane daily acts, and a community life of extraordinary hospitality where people come together and go out together on mission full of love for the Lord, the poor, and all of creation.

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The Church is not identified with the Kingdom of God. It is a sacrament of the Kingdom of God in the eschatological phase of sacred history which began with Christ, the phase which brings about the Kingdom of God. As long as history lasts, the Church will not be identical with the Kingdom of God, for the latter is only definitely present when history ends with the coming of Christ and the last judgement.

—Karl Rahner (1975: I, 348)
THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Some Thoughts on the Immediate Future

RICHARD RYMARZ

I WOULD LIKE to approach the question of the immediate future of the Church in Australia primarily through two personal narratives. These try to give both a sense of historical perspective and an entree into some of the complex issue at stake here. I would propose that the discussion about the future of the Church needs to enter a new phase, one that recognizes that the challenges facing the Church today are different from those of the immediate postconciliar period.

Let me begin with a recollection of an exchange between a close friend and myself nearly thirty years ago. At the time we were university students, heavily involved with the Catholic student group, the Newman Society, at both a local and national level. In conversation he unexpectedly asked, ‘What would we do if a person came to us interested in Catholicism, wanting to find out how he could learn more with a view to becoming a Catholic?’ It was, and still is, a good question. The Catholicism that we lived in the early 1980’s was not geared to evangelization. We were much happier talking about our faith in abstract or intellectual terms—or better still arguing about it. The idea that we could bring others into the Church rarely crossed our minds. As we tussled with the question we were soon aware that what our hypothetical enquirer wanted was not a lecture or a book or readings. More important was personal witness and an encounter with a vibrant community of faith—a place to see the Holy Spirit alive and at work.

I thought to myself we needed something like the fellowship evident in the university Evangelical union. Here were people who seemed to be alive with the love of Christ—a little effusive—but nonetheless sincere. The Evangelicals were also very keen to bring others into a deeper relationship with Christ or, as we termed it then, to ‘recruit’. My friend and I just could not think of any Catholic equivalent to this and had to reassure ourselves that in all likelihood no one would ever ask us about becoming a Catholic. The question has, nonetheless, stayed with me.

At about the same time as this conversation John Paul II was beginning to enunciate a concept, the so-called ‘new evangelization’, which was aimed primarily at those who had lost an active sense of the faith but who have not, in many cases, abandoned any type of religious allegiance or sensibility. It is not classical evangelization which is directed Ad Gentes—to the nations—or to those who have not yet heard the gospel. Neither is it catechesis to those who already have a strong and vital faith.

The unstated assumption in our conversation was that the questioner was not a Catholic and never had been. Strictly speaking this distinguishes him or her from the principal target group of the new evangelization. If my friend and I, nonetheless, had been more reflective in our callow youth then we would have realized that there was another important dimension to our discussion about welcoming people into the Church. Some elementary calculations would have made a telling point. The university we were attending was one of the largest in Australia. At the time it had well over 20,000 students. There was no reason to believe that the Catholic proportion of the university was anything less than the roughly 25% of the general population. This meant that, at least in theory, 5,000 students or so were Catholic. Our Catholic student club...
had no more than thirty active members. We could have easily asked ourselves at least two additional questions. Firstly, why were so few Catholics joining, assuming that wanting to join a student group is a sign of wanting to deepen religious commitment? Secondly, and a development of our actual discussion, if an ‘inactive’ Catholic came to us and wanted to reanimate his or her faith what would we suggest?

The reason we did not ask ourselves these supplementary questions tells us something about the era. We were aware of the large number of Catholics who were ‘on the books’ but not actively involved, but this was not seen as a pressing issue. Many at the time regarded this loose affiliation as a positive sign; that people not having completely severed their links to the faith community was a sign of intrinsic and residual strength. A common corollary of this view, what Argyle and Beit Hallahmi call the ‘traditional theory’, was that this lack of fervour would correct itself and after a period of searching, many would remerge at some time in the future as engaged and committed Catholics.1 This was, after all, the era where the Church was itself emerging from the turmoil of the postconciliar era and was in many ways reorientating itself. In this atmosphere evangelization was not something that was at the forefront of Catholic consciousness. In Dulles’ terms, it was an era where, ‘religious dialogue replace[d] missionary proclamation.’2

Let me move this reminiscence on to the third millennium. In 2003 I was approached to lead a research project looking at the needs, concerns and aspirations of Catholic university students. Funding for the project was not extravagant. Our methodology depended on being able to access participants who were members of functioning groups. We did not have the resources to identify students ourselves so we planned to make contact with the university Catholic student group and ask them to assist us in contacting suitable participants. The project was never undertaken. It was very hard to find extant university Catholic student groups. Even at my alma mater which now had a student enrolment of close to 35,000 the Newman group had been defunct for many years. An interesting aside was that many of the universities we contacted had what appeared to be vibrant and well subscribed groups catering for overseas Catholic students, but that is another story.

In the intervening decades the vitality of Catholic university fellowship had not seemed to have improved. From any number of perspectives this is not a reassuring or isolated situation. The lack of an active university presence at many universities could be a significant portent of the future. It seems safe to assume that many students at university or other tertiary institutions if asked on a survey or something similar would identify themselves as Catholic. They are, however, not prepared to take this affiliation further, to seek to strengthen it and to make it a more transformative element in their lives. What seems to be lacking here is a sense of strong commitment and personal conversion in many Catholics today, especially younger ones. This does not equate, in most cases, to hostility towards religion, rather a sense that religious belief does not have a significant impact on how life is lived or on major life-shaping choices. Many Catholics lack an identity that makes them different or distinctive from others in the general culture. ‘Different’ here does not have a moral connotation. It does not mean better but it does refer to a clear and obvious way of living and of believing that sets apart the be-
liever from the rest. One way of marking this difference is by being prepared to make significant life decisions on the basis of deeply held religious convictions. This is sometimes referred to as being part of a high cost religion—one that makes demands on members. Many Catholics, on the other hand seem more content to minimize the demands that being a Catholic may place on them.

Malloy provides an interesting anecdote to illustrate this point, he asks his first year university students to imagine that they have applied for a position with a prestigious law firm. He then asks if they would ‘take Catholic off’ your resume if the law firm...subtly communicated to you that you should tone down the fact you attend Mass every Sunday and teach CCD’. Eighty percent of the students say they would drop the mention of Catholicism from their resume.3

For many decades there has been a sense in the Catholic community that this situation will, in time, right itself. Instead of looking at the gradual increase in loosely affiliated Catholics in urgent terms another perspective is to argue that ‘the glass is not half empty it is half full’, that is, many Catholics, especially younger ones, still identify with the tradition and at some time in the future will reconnect in a more substantial way. A variation of this argument is that traditional markers of Catholic identity such as reception of the sacraments have been superseded by other ways of ‘staying connected’ such as participation in Catholic schools.

It is enough to flag here some of the consequences of this view. It can lead to a certain complacency, as if those involved in leadership and planning do not need to take action as what is being played out is almost a natural life history culminating in stronger religious affiliation later in life or reemerge in new ways. In this mindset what needs to be avoided is alarmist overreaction which does not recognize the natural lifecycle of faith development.

Hopefully the mentality that surrounds discussion of pastoral issues has changed. Forty years on the argument that the Church still needs to proceed cautiously until those teachings of the Second Vatican Council are more clearly and readily understood is not as compelling or as universally accepted as it was in my undergraduate days. It is time to discuss responses, both pastoral and conceptual which are bolder, more confident and less inward looking—ones which recognize that to admit serious challenges facing the Church is not a capitulation to an unfounded pessimism but an acknowledgment of the present reality and the Church’s ability to be able to respond.

The challenge facing the Church today, and in the immediate future, in countries such as Australia is one of human capital. To be concise, who is going to do the work of religious organizations? This dilemma can be seen in a range of Catholic agencies. An important illustration is provided by Catholic educational institutions, which in many countries are a critical public face of Catholicism. In their study of Catholic higher education Morey and Piderit pointed out:

The vibrancy of organizational culture requires knowledge about content, its beliefs, and its shared assumptions and norms. Cultural knowledge alone, however, it is not enough to sustain the vitality of organizational culture beyond the present generation. Cultural inheritability in a group or organization requires significant levels of commitment from the community of cultural catalysts and citizens in order for there to be any chance it will appeal to the future generations required to sustain it. Commitment connects what a person wants to do with what he or she is supposed to do.4

Any group which cannot point to a more than insignificant number of members who are highly committed to it faces a problematic future. To illustrate, consider the case of Sandra, an emblem of the ‘Boomer’ Catholic—those born in the immediate post war period. Although this instance is from Catholic education it could apply to any agency that operates under the Catholic umbrella. Schools are, however, the most tangible Catholic contribution
to wider Australian culture. Sandra is married with adult children. She started teaching in Catholic secondary schools decades ago. She has been: a Year Level Head, a Religious Education Coordinator, a Deputy Principal, has sat on numerous School Boards and mentored generations of new teachers. Over the years Sandra has had a long involvement in her parish. On a deeper level she gives embodiment to the beliefs and values that the school proclaims.

The list of her accomplishments could be extended even further but there are at least two points to note here and these bear directly on the immediate future of the Church in Australia.

Firstly, Sandra has been at the forefront of providing leadership and embodying the religious dimensions of Catholic schools. If you were to look closely at the contribution that she makes much of it has an overtly religious tone—teaching and coordinating religious education, organizing liturgies, researching and applying the charism of the founder of the order that established the school, liaising with parishes over sacramental programs and many other duties.

The second point is that Sandra and many others like her will retire very soon or already have done so. The central question is, who is going to replace them? At issue here is not simply a question of personnel—there are many individuals prepared to work in Catholic institutions such as schools and, to use the ubiquitous expression, to ‘support its ethos’. Many of these people have a range of strong human qualities and can bring a professional competence to their working lives. They may accurately describe themselves as spiritual but this is not characterized by strong religious commitment. Rather, spirituality here is understood as an idiosyncratic and private set of beliefs that bears little relationship to what Smith and Denton (2005, 171) call traditional Christianity.

The language and therefore experience of trinity, holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification, church, Eucharist, and heaven and hell appear, among most Christian teenagers in the United States at the very least, to be supplanted by the language of happiness, niceness and an earned heavenly reward. It is not so much that U.S. Christianity is being secularized. Rather more subtly, Christianity is either degenerating into a pathetic version of itself or, more significantly, Christianity is actively being colonized and displaced by a quite different religious faith.

Whatever its theological merit or its sociological accuracy this ‘colonized’ Christianity does not lead to transformative action such as taking an active, ongoing role in strengthening the Catholic identity of the institution based on one’s own personal conviction and life choices. Or to put it another way, the critical issue has become: how many people now working in Catholic agencies are prepared to create and animate the ethos of the institution rather than passively support it? In terms of the work that Sandra does, who is going to teach religious education with passion and conviction, who is going to prepare the opening of the school year Mass, who is going to help mentor new teachers and introduce them to the school’s Catholic ethos?

I have used schools here but this argument could be extended to a range of Catholic agencies. One often hears, for example, of the shortage of priests and religious, which is a real issue. It is, however, a manifestation of a much larger problem. We can take priests, seminarians and religious as exemplars of religious commitment. The difficulty in recruiting people to these ministries is part of the much wider problem of finding highly committed individuals for all aspects of the Church’s mission. If this issue is not addressed with some urgency then the short-term consequences are relatively minor. The status quo that has emerged in the forty or so years since the Council remains intact. But even in a decade consequences of inaction will be simply unavoidable.

Without a strong, contemporary and future human expression through the witness and
action of its members, there is the decided danger that Christianity will, in some places, become a lifeless, historical curio. Of course Catholic institutions do not need to be made up exclusively of people of strong personal commitment, and, indeed, it is not essential that a majority of people show this dedicated service. However, there is a point below which the work of the Church is imperilled if it does not have a sufficient number of highly committed individuals to carry this work forward. This highly committed group is not in opposition to the more loosely affiliated individuals, but they are distinct from them because they are prepared to live out their deepest religious convictions. One important consequence of this living witness is that Catholic identity and culture come to life not as an abstraction but as a concrete reality.

The deeper question that I think is paradigmatic of the new pastoral discourse is how does the Church shape and nurture not just loose connection but deep active faith, or what I have called here strong commitment, in a changed cultural context. This culture is not overtly anti-religious and is in many ways conducive to disengaged religious affiliation. It is, however, a cultural context which calls for a new set of priorities and a new pastoral mentality.

NOTES


The Bishops spoke...of a gradual lessening of the natural religious sense which has led to disorientation in people’s moral life and conscience. A large part of Oceania, particularly Australia and New Zealand, has entered upon an era marked by increasing secularization...Religious convictions and the insights of faith are at times denied their due role in forming people’s consciences...In presenting Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Church must respond in new and effective ways to these moral and social questions without ever allowing her voice to be silenced or her witness to be marginalized.

THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
An Awakening of Faith!

PAUL CASHEN MSC

THE DECLINE IN Sunday Mass, the shortage of clergy and religious and sexual scandals raise concerns around the dinner tables of committed and/or disappointed Catholics as they gather in their friendship groups. As the discussion deepens, however, their concern develops into questions of faith: not their faith in God, that is made clear, but how faith affects their relationship with the Church. Many express disaffection with the Church for the matters above, but more deeply they feel excluded by priests and bishops in participating in the life of the Church. They are not recognised for their own areas of expertise or their advice sought and acted upon in significant areas of parish and church life, particularly those that impact on daily life.

Morris West, a noted Catholic author when interviewed on ABC TV by Geraldine Doogue as long ago as 1998, restated his love for the Church, but noted his opposition to the ‘arbitrary nature and disrespect shown by Roman authorities to those they have been called to serve’. He expressed his frustration, also in his book A View from the Ridge, (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1996).

The disaffection among laity, and also among religious and priests, has been deemed a ‘crisis of faith’ brought on by the advance of ‘secular’ attitudes. The logic for this follows the line that particular issues of faith will be resolved when those who doubt put their trust in the guidance of those who are privy to the ‘true faith’. It is to be noted that the traditional exercise of leadership in a society where education has been the privilege of the few took a similar stand with the ‘less endowed’. The ordinary people needed the guidance of those who knew better, particularly in the face of changing circumstances of life and society. The general population therefore was to rely on those of superior education to make the decisions for them.

The current ‘MySchool’ debate in Australia is an example of the tension and frustration that arises in society when change is presented. In this case, one wonders if the politics of the media or the parliament give any credence to the wisdom of parents who ultimately have to make decisions for their children. Despite its limitations MySchool has been promoted so that parents have the data to assess the development of their children’s education. In this scenario they are given the opportunity to become more closely connected to the task they have of rearing their children in the world of education where there are many, many choices. Being ‘sent off to school’ no longer provides a sufficient education for a child to achieve the knowledge that will bring maturity and stability to their lives; the style of discipline, the social environment, the course choices are factors that have to be considered.

This exemplifies the broad response to changes in today’s world. The model of earlier generations, typified by the gentry or ‘ruling classes with superior knowledge’, is inadequate to engage the people involved in the complex social or educational issues of the moment.

In the 1960s John XXIII challenged the Church to engage the world in the significant changes happening across all levels of human endeavour and experience. He called the church to identify and take heed of the ‘signs of the times’. In establishing the Second Vatican Council, the task he set for all members of the church and people of good will was to open themselves to the Spirit of God to be found in the changes of social, national and international importance. (Alberigo History I, 18f.) This required the followers of Christ both per-
personally and communally to enter a process of renewal that would reach into their everyday lives. It was a task to reflect and discern the way forward as families, communities, nations face the disruption and difference that an engagement with the world involved.

The challenges to life and faith presented in ‘the signs of the times’ for John XXIII are similar to those that arise in the wider society as it absorbs change and adapts to new situations and circumstances. As people around the dinner table discuss their concerns about the issues in the Church they use the same processes of debate and reflection and decision making that they use to address in daily challenges. The ‘authorities’ they choose to listen to, be they persons or institutions, begin the search for more information that will help in decision making. The process of sharing their reflections with others is an environment of ‘shared wisdom’ and often leads to decisions that have meaning for them. As the media and politicians are the ‘authorities’ that provide information in social, commercial and educational matters, so the magisterium of the Church provides information for its members to consider in the realms of faith and morals.

The magisterium of the Church is concerned with the handing on the traditions of the Church and guiding decisions in the human expression of faith and morals. Its task is to assist ‘the faithful’ to live a life of faith and shared moral values together. Although the definitions of magisterium originate in earlier eras, Vatican II pointed to a change in exercise of magisterial authority: it called for personal renewal of faith and morals in each of its members, as well as in the liturgical and administrative structures of the church (Gaudium et Spes n.12). John XXIII expressed the ‘predominantly pastoral character’ of the role of the magisterium:

The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a Magisterium...
church: ‘in decision making one has to take into account the communal dimension; that is one has to listen to the witness of the faithful and their sensus fidei’. (Kasper, 2003, p 13)

The engagement of the ‘faithful’ in discussion, reflection and discernment on their journey through life is prayerful experience. This means for those involved they begin with the inspiration of the gospel ‘where two or three are gathered in my name I am there’, rather than respond to the imposition of wordy prayers and rituals. Catholics have a long heritage that expresses and confirms the presence of Christ as they gather in prayer. It is the basis of their ‘spirituality’ and their method of reflecting, sharing and praying together: this is a heritage to guide them. John XXIII reminded Catholics of the importance of the spiritual dimension in his personal life, before and during his time as pope. He was a leader who went out of his way to engage with others as the motivation of his ministry. He showed this in the close relationship he had and has with the people of Rome; the courage and openness he displayed in the face of the disputes and debates of the Council (see Flynn 2003 p. 59f); his welcome to all people of good will. Similarly, an effective pastoral response will acknowledge others, address their disaffection and enter into a dialogue with them.

Instead of addressing a ‘crisis of faith’, John XXIII engaged in a dialogue that saw an opportunity to awaken the faith in people’s lives, or the desire to express the presence of God more meaningfully in their daily life. As with John XXIII, this is not without risk for the individuals and church structures, rules and regulations today. It calls for a process of discernment that is based on respect for the presence of the Spirit in the commitment of the other, rather than a judgement of their efforts or doubts.

The disaffection of many of the ‘faithful’ confronts the Church because it has its roots in the ineffectiveness of the pastoral responses to the renewals of the Council. The Church was called to acknowledge the influence of the changed circumstances in which people live and to interpret the teaching and practice of the Church accordingly. However, those at dinner express their disaffection because this has not happened. For them it is not a ‘crisis of faith’ because of their deep relationship with God, their prayer and their desire to share their reflections. Rather it is a deep hurt because what was promised through the experience of Vatican II has not engaged them and their daily experiences in the life of the Church. The resolution of this dilemma requires a response by the magisterium that acknowledges and respects the lived faith of the people. It requires that the magisterium be open to the transformation that Vatican II called for by all involved and to offer a choice of two goods both of which offer fulfilment and happiness.

The task ahead will acknowledge the faith of those committed to Christ and awaken in them a sense of mission to reach out to bring God’s love to the world in which they live. The teaching church enlightens, rather than imposes faith. The people around the dinner table seek respect, understanding, engagement and inspiration to live lives that are valued and engage in the life of the Church.

REFERENCES


THE FUTURE OF YOUTH MINISTRY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

KAREN LUNNEY

MY AREA OF EXPERIENCE is in youth ministry, having been a diocesan youth ministry co-ordinator since 1998, and a leader and participant in youth and young adult ministry since the mid 1980’s. Having been asked to reflect on the future of the Catholic Church in Australia, I can best do so from the viewpoint of an adult involved in ministry with young people, and watching the trends and influences in the field known as ‘youth ministry’, from a leadership rather than a young person’s perspective.

No-one has a magic mirror in which we can definitively say that ‘This is what the future will be’. In looking to predict the future then, we can look to recent trends, and also to the experience of youth ministry leaders. There are positive signs and warning signs. This article will explore three major areas: the publication of Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry¹, the impact of World Youth Day in Sydney in 2008 and the potential impact of academic offerings in the field of youth ministry.

In approaching the topic from the viewpoint of youth ministry, I have two caveats: Firstly, all the baptised, as members of the Body of Christ, are called to be in relationship with others who are members of the Body of Christ, including young people. Thus, we are all youth ministers, although some have responded to this call through dedicating their working hours to professional ministry. The second clarification is one that I am often called to make, and a soapbox that I regularly stand upon. Young People are not the future of the Catholic Church. Hopefully when they are adults they will remain a part of the community; however, to suggest that they are only the future is selling young people short. Even though they may not be seen to be present regularly in Eucharistic gatherings they are still part of the present reality of the church in Australia. If they are only referred to as the future, no matter how glowing or positive the reference, what is being implied is that they will only be full and useful members when they are no longer young. To suggest that young people are only ‘the future’ denies them the right and opportunity to share with the intergenerational community their God-given gifts and talents, their passion for exploring and living their faith, and their openness to making a positive difference in the world. Indeed in Ecclesia in Oceania, the Catholic bishops ‘wished them to know that they are a vital part of the Church today, and that Church leaders are keen to find ways to involve young people more fully in the Church’s life and mission.’²

If the average young person were asked if they wanted to be ‘more involved in the church’s life and mission’ the answer would most likely be in the negative. Perhaps this is a matter of language rather than a true reflection of attitude, and a question of young people actually understanding the life and mission of the church. At a recent retreat day with year eleven students in regional Victoria, one of the warm-up activities was a ‘yes/no’ continuum. Students were asked to move to either end of the room, or a point along the middle to vote ‘with their feet’ as to their stance
THE FUTURE OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Karen has been diocesan youth ministry coordinator in Perth, Broken Bay and Sandhurst. She holds a Master of Divinity (Pastoral Theology and Youth Ministry). She led the project to publish Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry.

focused on social justice, where the group would become aware of social justice issues, but often did not have an action response based on their learning, or reference to the gospel in doing so. Young Christian Students want to be seen by the wider church as a movement that can and does make a positive, gospel based difference on the world.

‘Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry’

On the 17th of July 2009, the anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI’s arrival in Sydney, Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry was launched by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. This document had been the product of a long consultation process, and was built on the scaffolding of ‘Renewing the Vision’, the document of the US conference of Catholic Bishops, published in 1997. Australia is not the only country that has followed the lead of the USA in producing a vision document. New Zealand published Standing Tall: Tu Kahikatea in 2006 and the Irish bishops have recently produced Called Together: Making the Difference.

What hope for the future can a vision document hold? The answer can only lie in how and where it is being used. If the document were to remain unopened on dusty shelves, then there is no chance of change. However, since its July publication there have already been shifts in the way youth ministry is envisioned. The document has already been used

on a number of issues. In being asked ‘I want to be involved in Social Justice’ a mixed reaction occurred, with those voting ‘no’ generally not understanding the language used. The next question was more revealing: ‘I want to be involved in helping others.’ Almost the whole group moved to indicate the affirmative.

When Jesus stood to give an image for his life’s work in the Synagogue, he read: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’ (Luke 4:18-19) Perhaps it is too simplistic an interpretation, but surely this can be seen as part of the ‘life and mission of the church today’ and similarly classed as ‘helping others’. In Ecclesia in Oceania we read that ‘It is essential that Church leaders study the culture and language of youth’. We don’t need to dumb down our language to communicate, rather make an attempt to understand what young people are hungering for, instead of assuming that because they do not express themselves in the way of adults that they do not hold similar desires. Although young people may not use the same language, their passion has been noted: ‘The Bishops were quick to applaud young people for their acute sense of justice, personal integrity and respect for human dignity, for their care for the needy and their concern for the environment’.

One of the goals set by the Young Christian Students movement in their 2008 National Gathering is that by 2020 the YCS are ‘... taken seriously as an action based movement, rather than just a youth group.’ In casual questioning at the national YCS conference in 2010, high school students were asked about the distinction between an ‘action based movement’ and a ‘youth group.’ Those who replied wanted to make the distinction between youth groups that they had attended where the experience was mostly social, or groups at school who...
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to shape job descriptions and strategic plans for youth ministry, and is an integral part of academic studies in youth ministry, both for high school students participating in the ‘Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia’ program as well as adults involved in academic study at under graduate and post graduate level.

As a country, Australia has a diversity of expressions of youth ministry, from the many groups and ecclesial movements, to the influence of religious congregations. These, as well as parishes, dioceses and schools have been engaging in ministry with young people for many years. However, to quote a phrase from Dr Robert McCarty, Director of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry in the USA, we are ‘Experience rich and language poor’7. Anointed and Sent gives adults in youth ministry the language to theoretically discuss their perspectives and programs for young people. It provides three goals and eight focus areas, and states that they hold equal importance. This gives an organisation the ability to say ‘We have a major emphasis on Prayer and worship, Evangelisation and Leadership Development’ and another to say ‘We have a focus on Justice and Service and Catechesis’ and, rather than arguing about which is more relevant for young people today, they can see where their ministry fits in as a part of the whole picture.

Whilst many organisations such as the Australian Network of Diocesan Youth Ministry Co-ordinators (ANDYMC) and the St Vincent de Paul Society have held meetings for interstate collaboration in the past, opportunities for dialogue between leaders across organisations are becoming more available. The inaugural Youth Leaders Gathering, held at Rosehill in November 2008 gathered over 300 adults and youth leaders from schools, dioceses and parishes and movements. The follow-on Australian Catholic Youth Ministers Convention scheduled for October 2010 will do the same. Such opportunities for networking amongst professionals in the field of youth ministry, with the background of Anointed and Sent as a language for discussing their charism, will hopefully go a long way towards creating a greater sense of unity in the youth ministry community. This can only benefit young people who are searching for their niche, and can be directed towards the various ways they feel called to explore and express their faith.


World Youth Day certainly turned the spotlight on young people and their experience of faith, in both the eyes of the church and the secular media. The week in Sydney provided young people with the chance to explore their faith, and change their lives. The event was also a catalyst for change in the field of youth ministry.

Apart from the increase noted locally in youth masses and young adult groups, WYD has generated a greater awareness of youth ministry in the eyes of the general community and in the eyes of the Bishops of Australia. To respond to this, and put in place structures to continue to support the development of youth ministry in Australia, the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, under the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, have established the Australian Catholic Youth Council and employed Mr Malcolm Hart as Senior Youth Ministry Projects Officer for a period of three years. A youth leaders gathering was held in November 2008, and from it the document Moving Forward with Jesus8 was created, outlining strategies for the next three years to build on the graces of WYD08. This strategic planning, at a national level, involving parishes, dioceses, groups and movements provides a positive outlook for the future of youth ministry in Australia.

At a local level leading up to WYD, the Journey of the Cross, Icon and Message Stick, as well as the Days in the Diocese program, had a great impact in the life of the church. In
larger centres, there was a great deal of money raised and sponsorships given that allowed youth ministry to operate on a much more ‘professional’ level than was previously possible. The production of polished advertising, employment of many additional staff and liaison with government added a gloss to projects and programs that many underfunded youth ministries could usually only dream about. In smaller centres, resources were provided to subsidise local activities, from money for community meals with young people and international visitors to practical ideas and scripts for hosting a local ‘Stations of the cross.’ Unfortunately, now that the ‘event’ has gone, so has much of the funding, leaving the community and young people with an expectation of a certain level of pizzazz around projects and youth ministry offices without the ability to produce at World Youth Day levels. Whilst young people are looking for follow up to WYD, and the youth ministry office may have the dream of creating an amazing reflection tool, with booklets, videos and podcasts aimed at encouraging young people to explore their faith in a post WYD setting, the money for professional design and recording is generally not available. Thus a resource that may have great content will be less likely to attract the attention of those it was intended to engage, as it lacks the professional level of presentation that has come to be expected through the WYD culture.

In many smaller rural areas, there was a slightly different focus to that of the larger cities for the Journey of the Cross, Icon and Message Stick and Days in the Diocese. Adults learnt that they can provide an atmosphere where young people are engaged and welcomed in the Catholic community. It also provided a unique opportunity for young people to share with adults their experience of faith. Having such a focal point, a deadline, and the potential for attention from secular media and the wider church, many communities gave their best to the project. People came out of the woodwork to make something happen for and with young people, and generated a wider community awareness of young people in the local area. In some areas, a greater collaboration between parish and school, or diocese and movement was generated, leading to a more harmonious working relationship.

That’s not to say that the follow up has been perfect or has borne fruit in every area that hosted visitors or was visited by the Cross, Icon and Message Stick. Rather, it suggests that when people have a goal for their ministry with young people that is articulated and known by all, action happens. It is easier to see results when there is a concrete project in hand, rather than a nebulous ‘We should do something...’ If there is to be progress in ministry with young people in the future, collaborative projects may be the answer. That is not to say that creating programs and projects is the goal for youth ministry, but rather the vehicle that is used to create positive relationships between adults who are passionate about sharing faith experiences with young people, and creating opportunities for young people to gather and form relationships with each other and the adults who care for them. Knowing that there will be a regular youth mass in the parish, supported by the students in the school, creates a focal point for action, collaboration and the building of positive relationships. It also provides young people a chance to share their gifts and talents and to participate in prayer and worship with the wider community.

World Youth Day also encouraged dioceses and movements to employ coordinators where previously there was no specific office for youth ministry. In some cases this position has continued post WYD. However, in a number of cases it has involved a change in staff. Over the past twelve years a trend has been noted at the annual meeting of ANDYMC which is that World Youth Day as a project is often the catalyst for a youth ministry coordinator to leave the role. This was even more evident at the 2009 ANDYMC membership meeting, where over two thirds of the group were new to their...
roles, generally having replaced a diocesan co-ordinator who had left post WYD. Whilst it can be read as a positive sign for the future of youth ministry as a profession that people are willing to step into roles such as that of a diocesan youth ministry co-ordinator, I believe it is also a sad reflection that no matter how great the positive effect that World Youth Day has in the lives of young people, many co-ordinators become burnt-out and disillusioned with their work after co-ordinating a World Youth Day experience. The experience and wisdom of such people in many cases has been lost. When looking towards the future, the next World Youth Day involves planning for pilgrimage to Madrid in 2011. Co-ordination of an overseas pilgrimage is a different beast to that of a local event. In the current staffing of the twenty eight geographical dioceses and the five non-geographical dioceses in Australia, there are around twenty dioceses with employed youth ministry staff. Whilst some have WYD leadership experience in other arenas, only two of these have previously been the central co-ordinator for a diocesan pilgrimage to an overseas World Youth Day.

World Youth Day is an amazing event that makes a significant impact on people. For all the blood, sweat and tears of those involved in the co-ordination of pilgrimage and the legacy that it leaves, the consequences for the faith development and life of individual young people are what really matters.

*Academic Offerings in Youth Ministry Studies.*

Another sign of hope for the future in youth ministry is the introduction of academic studies in youth ministry. In years gone by, ministry with young people was almost the sole domain of the curate or the younger nun, whose foremost qualification was their age, rather than education in specific youth ministry skills.

As vocations declined and the ready population decreased of this group, young people were left without ‘church appointed’ people who would be specifically mindful of them within the community. This gap has often been filled with enthusiastic volunteers, or lowly paid youth workers, young and old, who seek to make a difference. Whilst their efforts cannot and should not be discounted, lack of training and education has in many cases set them up for failure. A school would never employ teachers simply because they were willing and able. Education Departments insist on a suitable academic qualification before young people are given into their care. Similarly, an aged care facility would not employ nursing or occupational therapy staff simply because they were of a similar age to the clients and were passionate about helping their peers. Unfortunately at present, age and willingness seem to be the main qualifications expected from those in the Catholic Church employing people to work with youth. It is unfair to then compare the outcomes of Catholic youth programs with other Christian denominations with successful youth ministries, without looking at the background education and formation required of their paid, parish based youth ministry co-ordinator.

The landscape is starting to change. The Broken Bay Institute (BBI) has offered four academic units in youth ministry since 2004, as part of either undergraduate or post graduate studies. Coupled with introductory units in theology and biblical studies, a ‘Certificate in youth ministry’ has been available that gives credit towards higher degrees. With their recent alignment with the University of Newcastle, these units have been reviewed and BBI now offer a specifically targeted, university accredited ‘Graduate Certificate in Theology – Youth and Campus Ministry’, and ‘BBI Certificate in Youth and Campus Ministry’. Australian Catholic University now offer a Diploma in Youth Ministry, which articulates into a Bachelor of Theology, and has previously had youth studies as part of its curriculum. Other dioceses and institutions offer coursework in theology and youth ministry related studies that can be cross credited to
BBI or ACU, or aimed towards employment in youth ministry.

The Institute of Faith Education in Brisbane has offered a Certificate IV level course that includes electives in youth ministry for a number of years, and many other dioceses offer non-accredited studies in the field.

‘Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia’ is a Canberra based organisation that has been introducing a youth ministry program for high school age students. This mixes an academic understanding of youth ministry theory using Anointed and Sent (and in previous years, the US document Renewing the Vision) and studies in youth spirituality with a practical experience of organising and participating in liturgies, music and drama to express faith, as well as exploring each of Anointed and Sent’s focus areas.

Academic studies provide participants with an introduction to key documents and resources, a respect for professional and analytical application of theory to practice, an understanding of research into young people and spirituality as well as a network of others who are co-workers in the vineyard.

Whilst it cannot be a fail-safe against burnout, those who supplement their practical work in youth ministry with academic study in the field are more likely to envision their ministry as a legitimate career, rather than a stopgap between ‘real’ jobs.

The challenge for the Catholic Church in the future is to insist on academic qualifications in the employment process, or make them a condition of continued employment. In establishing this standard, it is also important to create employment packages that include clearly defined working conditions with remuneration structures that adequately reflect experience and education. These guidelines need to be nationally implemented and appropriate to all levels of youth ministry, from those starting out in a part time parish based position to full time diocesan work.

So, where to for the future of youth ministry in the Catholic Church? There are many signs of hope and many areas that require further development. Structures are needed to foster sustainability in youth ministry; Anointed and Sent and the experience of World Youth Day provide a framework around which effective youth ministry can be built. The increase in academic offerings for those in youth ministry leadership provides a background and theological underpinning for youth ministry efforts. Ultimately however, being in youth ministry is about building relationships. For some it is direct relationships with young people, for others it is to serve those who work directly with youth. It is in following and cherishing these relationships throughout the years that we see the fruits of our efforts in youth ministry, and great signs of hope for the future.

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THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

A LEITMOTIF in the pontificate of Pope John Paul II was the concept of the new evangelization. How this idea is appropriated in the wider Church will have a decisive influence on the shape of pastoral practice in many Western countries. Preliminary to any discussion of its impact and value is some discussion of the contours of the new evangelization. For Pope John Paul II, the new current phase of evangelization was not new in the sense of being an innovation that moved beyond the Church’s traditional mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all nations. Rather, a new sense of evangelization emerged from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and in the social reality of many countries such as Australia. Pope John Paul II in Redemptoris Missio (RM) identified three elements in the Church’s commitment to evangelization. The first was the essential missionary focus of the Church on proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to those who have not heard it. This remains the proper, or classical, sense of the term. The second element focused on those with strong Christian affiliation who were ‘fervent in their faith and Christian living.’ (RM 33.2). However, there was a third, intermediary element, and it is from here that the new evangelization takes its meaning.

Particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel…in this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelization’ or a ‘re-evangelization. (Redemptoris Missio, 33.3)

The New Evangelization and Synodal Conferences

While the phrase ‘the new evangelization’ can be described with specific reference to John Paul II’s major writings and addresses, this paper will concentrate on its growing range of reference in wider contemporary Catholic discourse.

In Tertio Millennio Adveniente, (TMA) John Paul proposed a special assembly of the synod of bishops for each of the five continents to prepare for the new millennium. At these synods, ‘the theme underlying them all is evangelization or rather the new evangelization.’ (TMA 21). These synods were convoked in Europe, America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. A brief comment on three of these documents will give a sense of the centrality of the new evangelization as an analytical tool in a number of cultural contexts.

In many ways, the preeminent audience for the new evangelization is Europe, especially Western Europe. Dziwisz, John Paul’s secretary for over forty years, on page 159 of his account of working with the pontiff, A Life with Karol: My Forty-Year Friendship with the Man Who Became Pope, remarked on the origins of the new evangelization in John Paul’s thought: ‘The idea came to him when he noticed—especially during trips—that there was an urgent need to reinvigorate Churches in old Christian countries. He thought this was particularly true of Europe.’ In Ecclesia in Europa, (EE), written after the European Bishops’ Synod in 1999, John Paul II identified that ‘Jesus Christ is our hope’, (EE, 6). This again underlined the indivisibility with which
Christ and evangelization are spoken of. The situation of the Church in Europe was described in terms that are widely used in European sociology of religion, namely, loss of memory:

I would like to mention in a particular way the loss of Europe’s Christian memory and heritage, accompanied by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots and somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history. (EE 7)

This is the context into which the new evangelization must enter.

The consequences of this loss of memory are manifold. Some of these are described as: fear of the future, existential fragmentation, a feeling of loneliness, increased weakening of interpersonal solidarity, and perhaps most significantly, an attempt to promote a vision of man apart from God and apart from Christ. The answer to these problems is a return to Christ, ‘our hope.’ This should be expressed in a variety of ways, notably through his presence in strong Christian communities and through the witness of holy men and women.

The document also identified the intimate connection between Christ and the Church. Jesus Christ was described as being alive in his Church. This point was made strongly to counteract the view that the Church is an unnecessary mediator between God and man. Although this point was made, in different forms, at the Reformation, in the modern European context the view that the Church is an unnecessary mediator between God and man is seen as arising out of a heightened personalism that feeds off the fragmentation of culture in many European countries.

In Ecclesia in America, (EA), John Paul II recognizes the religious ambience of the Americas, which can be contrasted with the old world of Europe:

A distinctive feature of America is an intense popular piety, deeply rooted in the various nations. It is found at all levels and in all sectors of society, and it has special importance as a place of encounter with Christ for all those who in poverty of spirit and humility of heart are sincerely searching for God. (EA 16)

Evangelization was, nonetheless, also proposed as the fundamental framework for understanding the role of the Church in America. John Paul II reiterated the task of the new evangelization, to transform not just individuals but whole cultures: ‘[new evangelization involves a] clearly conceived, serious and well-organized effort to evangelize the culture’, (EA 70).

This evangelization of culture, however, has at its root a transformative encounter with Christ, which then leads to an ‘impulse’ to communicate this to others:

An encounter with the Lord brings about a profound transformation in all who do not close themselves off from him. The first impulse coming from this transformation is to communicate to others the richness discovered in the experience of the encounter. (EA 68)

Ecclesia in Oceania (EO) was a significant document, an Apostolic Exhortation, which specifically addressed the Church in Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, and surrounding regions. The concept of new evangelization was prominent in the document, and was first raised in the following terms:

When Christians live the life of Christ with deeper faith, their hope grows stronger and their charity more radiant. That was the goal of the Synod, and it is the goal of the new evangelization to which the Spirit is summoning the whole Church. (EO 8)

The goals of the Synod and those of the new evangelization are seen as identical. The imperatives of the new evangelization have increasingly moved to the centre of Catholic discourse. For instance, Ecclesia in Oceania clearly acknowledged that the missionary efforts of the Church in the past were largely the domain of missionary priests and religious.

While these efforts are appreciated, what is needed now is a new kind of evangelization: ‘The call to mission is addressed to every member of the Church. The whole Church is missionary, for her missionary activity ... is an essential part of her vocation’, (EO 13).

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION
is no distinction made between who is to conduct this missionary work. Indeed, this work is seen as the responsibility of all the faithful in the light of the new situations affecting the life of the Church.

In countries such as Australia, the challenges facing the Church are especially acute. These ‘are experienced by all the local Churches in Oceania, but with particular force by those in societies most powerfully affected by secularization, individualism and consumerism’, (EO 18). In these environments, however, the Church needs to be mindful of its primary evangelical focus—to proclaim Christ.

**General Directory of Catechesis**

Moving now to some other documents which address the new evangelization, The General Directory for Catechesis (GDC) was produced by the Congregation for the Clergy in 1997 as a revision of the 1971 General Catechetical Directory. The 1997 General Directory sought to balance the contextualization of catechesis in evangelization as envisaged by Evangelii Nuntiandi and the appropriation of the content of the faith as presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It appealed to writings of Pope John Paul II in its content. As a ‘general’ directory, it contained within its scope not only the formation of new generations of Christians, but also the activity of the Church in every region in which it had an institutional presence. In this regard, it recognized that the Church’s mission needed to adapt to different cultural settings if it is to be effective. The new evangelization is integral to the process of catechesis, as John Paul II had repeatedly emphasized. The new evangelization takes on a special urgency especially in countries under a strong secular influence:

These concrete situations of the Christian faith call urgently on the sower to develop a new evangelization especially in those Churches of long-standing Christian tradition where secularism has made greater inroads. In this new context of evangelization, missionary proclamation and catechesis, especially of the young and of adults, is an evident priority. (GDC 26)

The General Directory recognized the universal call to evangelize, but it laid particular emphasis on the role of lay catechists. They do not replace priests or religious, but they do have an indispensable role as agents of the new evangelization. Given the complexity of missionary activity, clear distinctions related to precise roles are not always possible. Nonetheless, the General Directory restated the threefold distinction used in Redemptoris Missio to identify the targets of missionary activity. The goal of new evangelization remains, however, a profound experience of conversion and not just exterior conformity. Thus, ‘primary proclamation and basic catechesis are priorities’, (GDC 58).

**The New Evangelization and Pope Benedict XVI**

Pope Benedict XVI, both before and after his election as the successor of John Paul II, has referred to the new evangelization in a manner which indicates his familiarity with and support of his predecessor’s teaching on this point. The most substantial treatment of new evangelization in the writings of Cardinal Ratzinger was in an address given in 2000 on the occasion of the Jubilee of Catechists. He began by stressing the difficulties inherent in the new evangelization aimed as it is at highly secular cultures that have, in many instances, lost all reference to the divine and transcendent in life. Such an acknowledgment makes the proclamation of the Gospel a struggle, given the indifference and ignorance of many in regard to the Christian message. Agents of the new evangelization cannot expect that their labors will yield a substantial harvest at the beginning. Ratzinger quoted an old proverb, ‘Success is not one of the names of God.’ This idea is repeated in Spe Salvi where Benedict, in his second Encyclical, proposed that the Christian virtue of hope does not equate to human progress or an unfounded optimism. Hope is not to be measured by worldly suc-
cess but needs to be seen in a more eschatological sense. The course of the new evangelization, according to Ratzinger, derives from the close connection of the evangelist to the person of Christ, through frequent prayer and a rich sacramental life. Only on this basis can the evangelist move to proclaim the Gospel as a personal witness.

Bearing in mind that the pontificate of Benedict XVI is still, relatively speaking, in its early stages, the number of substantial documents (such as Apostolic Exhortations or Encyclicals) that have been written has been comparatively small. Nevertheless, Benedict referred to the ‘new evangelization’ in his address for World Youth Day 2008, where he reiterated the point made in *Ecclesia in Oceania*:

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Oceania is preparing for a new evangelization of peoples who today are hungering for Christ... A new evangelization is the first priority for the Church in Oceania. (6)

In an address to the Diocese of Rome, Benedict expressed his conviction in the following words: ‘If faith is truly the joy of having discovered truth and love, we inevitably feel the desire to transmit it, to communicate it to others. The new evangelization to which our beloved Pope John Paul II called us passes mainly through this process.’

Benedict likewise endorsed other dimensions of the new evangelization as enunciated by John Paul II. In answer to a question about how to bring about the new evangelization, Benedict’s response was twofold: first, by proclaiming Christ clearly and unambiguously, and second, by living in an evangelical fashion. In a 2006 address to diocesan clergy of Albano, Benedict recognized the three-fold distinction found in *Redemptoris Missio*, and so spoke of new evangelization as aimed at those with ‘reduced’ faith as opposed to the continuous evangelization of those associated with parishes.

**Concluding Comments**

The new evangelization was a central theme of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. It seems likely to remain a critical part of Catholic discourse in the future. In John Paul II’s thinking, the new evangelization is one of the clear fruits of the Council, a path that can be traced from *Ad Gentes* to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* to his own writings.

The new evangelization recognizes that the missionary outreach of the Church takes places in a variety of contexts. Some of the newest and most challenging of these are cultures with a Christian heritage in which many baptized Catholics have either a loose connection with the faith community or have moved away completely. In addressing the practical challenges of the new evangelization there must be openness to new methods and processes to engage the changed societal circumstances in many countries.

The new evangelization as envisaged by John Paul II is a demanding task. It sets as its goal much more than a passive and loose identification with Christ or with the Church. One way of refining these points is to conceive of the new evangelization as revolving around two fundamental points. The first is an emphasis on an ever deepening, personal relationship with Christ; the second is a desire to bring others into communion with Christ.

**FURTHER READING**


THE NEW CREATION AND DOING THE TRUTH

Christianity as More than a Religion

HENRY L NOVELLO

IN THE PREFACE to Volume One of his *Systematic Theology*, Paul Tillich tells us that the purpose of his work is essentially apologetic (1953, ix-x). An apologetic theology is one that moves back and forth between two poles, namely, ‘the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received’ (1953, 3). A formal criterion that Tillich applies to his system is that only those statements are theological that deal with ‘what concerns us ultimately’ (1953, 15), and a second formal criterion is that only those propositions are theological which deal with their object insofar as ‘it can become a matter of being or not-being for us’ (1953, 17). Only that which has the power of threatening or saving our being is of ultimate concern to human existence. These two criteria express Tillich’s existentialist approach to theology, and the character of this approach determines his understanding of the method of theology, which is the ‘method of correlation’. That is to say, the starting-point of his theology is the existential analysis of the temporal situation which raises fundamental questions to which the Christian message provides answers. The method of correlation is an attempt to unite the Christian message and the temporal situation in such a way that ‘neither of them is obliterated’ (1953, 8).

The purpose of this essay is not to discuss the merits and/or weaknesses in Tillich’s method of correlation, but to review his understanding of Jesus Christ as the One in whom has appeared the New Being, and to examine Tillich’s conception of Christian truth as ‘saving truth,’ from which it will become apparent in what manner it can be said that Christianity is to be regarded as more than a religion. The first part of this essay will examine Tillich’s understanding of Christ as the New Being, the second part will discuss the meaning of doing the truth, and the conclusion will highlight two fundamental pitfalls to be avoided in respect of Christianity’s relation to contemporary culture. In particular, the intention will be to caution against an overly ‘integralist’ portrayal of Christian faith, which is a perennial tendency in Roman Catholicism. In the presentation of Tillich’s thought the essay will draw from his two works *The Shaking of the Foundations* and *The New Being*, which belong together as one piece.

Christ, The New Being

Tillich, following the writings of Paul, sums up the Christian message in two words: it is the message of a ‘New Creation’ (1956, 15). The Messiah is the one who brings the new state of things to humans who all live in the old state of ontological estrangement from self, from others, and from God. What is ultimately important, what should be our ultimate concern, is to be ‘in union with Him in whom the New Reality is present’ (Tillich, 1956, 16). While we all live in the old state of things because we are all fallen and corrupted creatures, ‘we also participate in the new state of things’ (Tillich, 1956, 15). The New Being is not, as often thought by many who have examined Tillich’s theology, simply a replacement of the
Old Being, for Tillich explicitly talks about a renewal of the Old. ‘Salvation does not destroy creation; but it transforms the Old Creation into a New one. Therefore we can speak of the New in terms of a re-newal: the threefold ‘re,’ namely, re-conciliation, re-union, re-surrection’ (Tillich, 1956, 20). Salvation in Christ has this threefold character in the work of Tillich.

The first mark of the New Reality is being reconciled to God. Paul makes clear in his writings that we sinners are reconciled to God, not vice versa (God does not need to be reconciled because God is not hostile towards us). To be reconciled to God in Christ is to cease to be hostile to God (Tillich, 1956, 20). If we seek to reconcile God by showing our good deeds (i.e. by rites and sacraments, prayers and services, moral behaviour and works of charity), we will fail and our hostility toward God will grow. ‘Everybody carries a hostility toward the existence into which he has been thrown, toward the hidden powers which determine his life and that of the universe, toward that which makes him guilty and that threatens him with destruction because he has become guilty’ (Tillich, 1956, 20-21). We all feel hostile, says Tillich, toward that which we feel has rejected us, and by trying to appease it and in failing, we become even more hostile. This hostility manifests itself on two levels: hostility toward ourselves (divided-self, self-rejection, disgust) and hostility toward others (as we try to make ourselves more acceptable to our own judgment, and fail, we grow more hostile toward others). To be reconciled to God, then, entails at one and the same time being reconciled to ourselves and to others. ‘A new reality has appeared in which you are reconciled. To enter the New Being we do not need to show anything. We must only be open to be grasped by it, although we have nothing to show’ (Tillich, 1956, 22). God’s act of reconciling us to the Ground of Being is a purely gratuitous act that reveals God’s unbounded love for us sinners.

The second mark of the New Reality is re-

union. Reconciliation makes reunion possible. To be in union with the New Being means that we are reunited with the ground and meaning of our existence so that we experience being reunited with our self in a deep self-acceptance. We accept our self as something which is eternally accepted and eternally important because eternally loved (Tillich, 1956, 22). This real healing, as participation in the New Creation, involves being reunited with the whole: our whole being, our whole personality, is united with itself, and creates reunion with others. The separation that characterized the Old Being now gives way to the reunion of the New Being, so that the Church of Christ is the place where the reunion of human to human is confessed and realized. The Church of Christ, however, is continuously betrayed by the Christian churches where only fragments of this New Reality are discernible and visible. The Church of Christ, like its members, relapses from the New into the Old Being, hence the New state of things is not fully visible in the Church but remains hidden.

The third mark of the New Reality is resurrection. Tillich does not conceive of resurrection in terms of a future raising of the body out of the grave, but rather stresses that resurrection happens now as ‘the power of the New Being to create life out of death...out of disintegration and death is born something of eternal significance’ (Tillich, 1956, 24). Resurrection and New Being are interchangeable terms, so that wherever there is New Being, there is resurrection; that is, the entering into eternity out of time. The valid point that Tillich makes
here, against those who place too much emphasis on resurrection as a future event reserved for the righteous, is that the Christian lives from the ultimate power of the New Being already present in the here-and-now, in the Spirit, so that to participate in the New Being is already to participate in eternal life. To be reconciled to God and to enjoy blessed reunion with God is to participate in the power of resurrection life that is much greater than the powers of death (non-being) in the present world. Of course to conceive of resurrection life purely in terms of the Eternal Now does raise critical questions, but these need not concern us because they will take us too far afield from the stated aim and intention of this essay.

On the basis of the appearance of the New Being in history, faith in God’s providence means for Tillich that ‘nothing can prevent us from fulfilling the ultimate meaning of our existence...the daemonic and destructive forces within ourselves and our world can never have an unbreakable grasp upon us, and that the bond which connects us with the fulfilling love can never be disrupted’ (Tillich, 1949, 111). Providence should not be conceived as a divine plan in which everything is predetermined, but the courage to say yes to one’s life in spite of everything, the courage to accept life in the power of God’s love for us made manifest in Christ. Tillich’s view of divine providence is informed by Paul’s utterance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:31-39), and he goes on to highlight what is peculiar about the Christian view of truth as embodied in the person of Christ who brings salvation to the Old Creation.

The Meaning of ‘Doing the Truth’

One of the key biblical passages upon which Tillich reflects is John 3:16-21 where the evangelist says that ‘he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God’ (v. 21). At first sight this statement may seem strange insofar as truth is generally something that is known, not done, although it could be interpreted as meaning that one acts on the basis of some knowledge of truth. The latter interpretation, however, is not compatible with other statements in the Fourth Gospel, such as ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life’ (14:6), ‘...the truth will make you free’ (8:32), and the description of the Word become flesh as ‘full of grace and truth’ (1:14, 17). What these utterances make clear is that Jesus Christ should not be seen as a teacher of truth among other teachers of truth, for the truth is inseparable from his person and mission as the Word of God become flesh (Tillich, 1949, 121). By saying ‘I am the truth,’ Jesus indicates that the ultimate reality, God, is present in his person. ‘Jesus is not the truth because His teachings are true. But His teachings are true because they express the truth which He Himself is. He is more than his words, and he is more than any word said about him’ (Tillich, 1956, 69-70).

Once this is fully appreciated, we will be quick to acknowledge that no teaching of Jesus, or Church doctrine about him, is ‘the truth’ that makes us free. Tillich points out that most people like to be told what to think, thus they are prepared to live by the teachings of Jesus (the giver of a new law) and the doctrines of the Church, which are taken as infallible prescriptions for life. The problem with this is that both the teachings of Jesus and the doctrines of the Church are verbal and therefore temporal expressions of the truth that Jesus himself is, which is to say that they point to the truth but are not the truth that liberates (Tillich, 1956, 70). In the Christian perspective, then, truth can be done only by following the person of Christ who brings the new state of things in history; truth is always truth that is done because it is ‘saving truth’ that sets estranged humanity free by virtue of participation in the New Being (the threefold divine action of reconciling, uniting, and resurrecting).
Tillich explains that the Fourth Gospel accepts the Greek understanding of truth as making manifest the hidden, so that truth is not naturally possessed by humans but must be discovered in the depth, beneath the surface. At the same time, however, the concept of truth is transformed in the light of the Christ-event: truth is 'something which is done by God in history,' it is 'something which happens,' it is the 'new creation realizing itself in history' (Tillich, 1949, 120). To be in a state of sin is to be in a state of estrangement from oneself, from others, and from the Ground of Being, and this three-fold separation is the 'fate' of every human life. We know that we are estranged from something to which we really belong, and we experience ourselves as powerless to transform our existential predicament, yet it is precisely in the midst of this concrete human predicament that grace makes its definitive appearance. 'Grace is the reunion of life with life, the reconciliation of the self with itself. Grace is the acceptance of that which is rejected. Grace transforms fate into meaningful destiny; it changes guilt into confidence and courage' (Tillich, 1949, 158). Truth and God's grace manifested in Christ are two sides of the same theological coin in Tillich's theology.

Those who submit to the teachings of Jesus and Church doctrines as the truth of Christianity, believing their lives are 'safe' by doing so, will probably never experience the spiritual freedom of which the Fourth Gospel speaks. For according to John, spiritual freedom comes by way of participating in the being of the Christ—when we participate in the New Being we are in the truth that matters ultimately. To reach the truth, then, we must do the truth, which is identical with true discipleship. Doing the truth must not be interpreted as obedience to divine commandments and authoritative Church doctrines, but 'living out of the reality which is He who is the truth, making His being the being of ourselves and of our world' (Tillich, 1956, 71). True discipleship is participation in the being of Christ who is 'full of grace and truth,' who is one with the Ground of Being and the New Creation in person.

In spite of the abounding of sin, guilt, and anxiety in our lives, Tillich is keen to emphasize that grace abounds 'much more' (Rom 5:15, 17), which is to say that we are accepted by that which is beyond and greater than us. To simply accept the truth that we humans are unconditionally accepted by God in Christ means that the burden of religion is taken from us (Tillich, 1949, 101). That is, the yoke of the religious law, imposed by the Scribes and Pharisees, is removed from us and Jesus promises that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (cf. Mt 11:30). Those who are joined to Christ and belong to him no longer sigh under the yoke of the religious law (i.e. the attempt of the human to overcome its anxiety and restlessness, to close the gap within itself, and to reach immortality and perfection) because the Messiah gives them a 'new being' that is above religion (Tillich, 1949, 102). The yoke of Jesus is not a new demand or new morals, but rather 'a new power of transforming life. He calls it a yoke, He means that it comes from above and grasps us with saving force; if He calls it easy, He means that it is not a matter of our acting and striving, but rather that it is given before anything we can do' (Tillich, 1949, 105). To participate in the New Being is to overcome the anxiety and despair, the fear and restlessness of our existence, because we now abide in the truth (in spite of our ignorance about ourselves and our world) and in the good (in spite of our weakness and evil), so that our souls have rest by virtue of being in touch with eternity (Ground of Being).

A final point that Tillich has to say about truth is that the truth which liberates is the power of love, for God is love (1 Jn 4:8, 16). God and love are not two realities but one, for 'God's infinite power of Being is the infinite power of love' (Tillich, 1956, 26). Wherever God is freely present, abiding in the human soul, there is manifested the power of love as the power of New Being. Love liberates us from our false
and guilty self, and unveils our original self as grounded in true reality. Only when love has taken hold of us and has started to liberate us from our false self can we say with certainty that we are in the truth. Any claim to truth that is not united with love is therefore to be distrusted and viewed with suspicion. The thought of John carries through the thought of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 where he claims that only love is eternal, thus we should make love the aim of the Christian life. In this scriptural passage, Paul compares the fragmentary knowledge of the present human situation (‘we see in a mirror dimly’) with the fullness of knowledge to come (‘face to face’). Did Paul forget that he had just spoken of love alone as eternal? No, says Tillich, he did not forget (1949, 114). There is only one way to know a personality, namely, to become united with that personality through love, to participate and abide in the other. ‘Because the love which is perfect and lasting lies not within us, perfect knowledge is denied us’ (Tillich, 1949, 115). The standard of knowledge in the New Testament is the standard of love, and since we do not love perfectly in this life our knowledge is always fragmentary—things appear to us as ‘enigmas and riddles’ (Tillich, 1949, 115).

It is highly significant that Paul, a staunch Pharisee who converted to ‘the Way’ (Acts 22:4), experienced the breakdown of a system of religious life which he believed to be a whole, a perfect truth without riddles or gaps. Yet Paul never tried again to build up a new religious system out of the pieces. Instead, Paul dwelt with the pieces, in the understanding that the unity to which they belong lies beyond them, and he was able to endure the Christian life because ‘the fragments bore a new meaning to him’ (Tillich, 1949, 117). The new meaning derived from the ultimate power of God’s love present in Christ, the New Creation, which transformed the tormenting riddles and enigmas of life into symbols of truth, and the tragic fragments of existence into symbols of the whole. The Christian grasps the whole in the here-and-now not through perfect knowledge of all-that-is, but rather through living hope that anticipates the ‘face to face’ encounter with God who is the ultimate power of love and Ground of Being.

**Conclusion**

Tillich’s portrayal of the New Being as love, freedom, and fulfilment of the human existent, together with his well developed understanding of doing the truth by participating in the New Being, serves to effectively caution us against reducing Christianity to a religion (a set of dogmas, moral commandments, and ritual practices). The understanding that Christianity is above religion derives not only from the assertion that Christ himself *is* the saving truth that transforms the Old Creation into the New, but also from the perspective that Christ was crucified by the religious law, yet triumphed over it, hence he is ‘the victor over religion’ (Tillich, 1949, 107). The Messiah is not the creator of another religion, but the One who takes from us the burden of religion that tends to exasperate the anxiety, restlessness, and despair hidden in every human life that labours to attain self-fulfilment and to secure immortality. Piety, as a professor at the Gregorian University in Rome once exclaimed, might get us everywhere, but not necessarily closer to the truth!

The assertion that Christ takes from us the burden of religion does not, however, amount to a denial of the ethical dimension of Christian life. On the contrary, doing the truth by participating or sharing in the New Being implies that the moral life is intrinsic to the saving truth that Christ himself is. The important thing to appreciate here is that the ‘new action,’ the better and stronger action that characterises a disciple of Christ, is action that follows new being (Tillich, 1949, 108), not action prescribed by a set of moral-religious laws imposed on practicing believers. The doctrines of the Church seek to give expression to the content of Christian faith and life, but they must not be confused or identified...
with the event ‘Jesus as the Christ’ who is ‘he Alpha and the Omega’ (Rev 1:8), the absolute ground of being and what concerns us ultimately. Only Christ himself can give ‘rest’ to our tormented and fragmented souls, so that the new action that follows the new being is more creative action because it arises out of the profoundest depth of our life as eternally accepted by the power of God’s ineffable love for us sinners.

When Christianity is treated as an authoritatively revealed religion, it runs the risk of confusing the structures of faith (teaching-creed, life-conduct, worship-cult), which are temporal expressions of truth, for eternal truth. The result is a reductive interpretation of Christianity. ‘The reduction occurs when the faith is pared down to its manifest, prominent features and then tightened up into a closed system’ (van Beeck, 1989, 57). The Roman Catholic variant of this reduction, which usually happens in the interest of control, is known as ‘integralism’. By asserting that Christianity is more than a religion, Tillich reminds us that the Christian faith is a fundamentally open system (this is part of what ‘catholic’ means), for the manifest structures are associated with the hidden mystery of the living Christ who offers New Being in the midst of the Old. In this way the manifest structures ‘convey their reference to the mystery of God in the very act of opening themselves to the surrounding culture’ (van Beeck, 1989, 61).

Of course, the opposite error is also always with us, namely, the Christian message is translated without remainder into the convictions of the secular culture in the interest of relevance to the contemporary situation. This pitfall, which is known as ‘modernism’, is characteristic of Liberal Protestantism, and it too fails to effectively proclaim the Gospel of Christ. The thought of Tillich has enduring significance in highlighting that it is necessary to seek a theological method that correlates contemporary situation and Christian message in such a way that neither of them is obliterated. We must always strive for a ‘synthesis’ where the Christian message is presented as the answer to the questions implied in every human situation.

REFERENCES


Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

—2 Corinthians 5:17
CORRECTION

*In the last issue* (Compass 2010/1, Autumn) *several hundred words went missing on p.38 from Henry Novello’s article ‘Participating in the New Creation: A Theological Appreciation of Work’. Compass apologises for this omission and we restore the missing text in the following passage. The entire article can now be found on our website: www.compassreview.org.

A problem arises, however, in connection with work as self-actualisation and the view that work not only ‘expresses’ the dignity of the human but also ‘increases’ it (*LE* 9). If the moral meaning of work lies in that it establishes the value and dignity of the person, what becomes of the lives of those (e.g. children, the elderly, the disabled, the chronically sick) who are not able to effectively work? (*Volf*, 1984, 73). Are their lives less valuable and less dignified than those of productive and able workers? On theological grounds, moreover, must we not assert that personal worth and value are derived not from our capacity to work but from God alone who graciously confers upon humanity a dignity beyond compare by elevating it to the glory of beholding God? On John Paul II’s own reckoning, does not the fact that each and every human is ontologically joined to the Incarnate One underscore the understanding that human worth and dignity is received from God? It seems that it would be better to speak of ‘self-expression’ in work instead of ‘self-actualisation’ through work, for the latter suggests the human is ‘constituted’ through work while the former views the human as ‘developing’ through work (*Volf*, 2001, 132-33).

The basic point that we do not give birth to ourselves through work, but rather find ourselves by cooperating with God and enjoying communion with God, is reinforced by Volf’s portrayal of work in the Spirit. In Pauline theology, the gifts of the Spirit (*charismata*) are imparted to all Christians (not just an elite group) who form the Body of Christ, and these gifts are related to the specific tasks or functions to which God calls each Christian, which go beyond the needs of the Church to include constructive engagement with the world (*Volf*, 2001, 110-12). As work in the Spirit, Christian mundane work must be understood as cooperation with God (cf. Gal 2:20), and since the indwelling Spirit is a ‘guarantee’ (2 Cor 1:22) of the coming new creation, such cooperation is to be seen as active anticipation of God’s eschatological *transformatio mundi* (*Volf*, 2001, 115).

The notion of work in the Spirit of the new creation is able to overcome the deficiencies of Luther’s vocational model of work, for the emphasis falls not upon the origin of work (call of God) and purpose of work (service to others), but the inherent quality of work as cooperation with God in the anticipated *transformatio mundi*. Indifference to alienation in work and dehumanizing work is therefore not an acceptable Christian position or attitude. In light of the Easter and Pentecost events, God’s eschatological action must be situated not only *at the end* of history (kingdom-expectation) but also *in* history (kingdom-participation), so that work in the Spirit contributes, however limited and imperfect the contribution, to the final consummation of God’s plan for creation (*Volf*, 2001, 100).
MYSTICISM AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

REG NAULTY

‘The sole meaning of human life lies in serving the world by promoting the establishment of the Kingdom of God.’ —Tolstoy.

This paper shows how mysticism can contribute to the Kingdom of God, and that it has already done so. The examples are from contemporary economics and politics.

The kingdom of God has had a more robust innings in Russia than in the Christian West. Dostoevsky has Fr. Zossima say in The Brothers Karamazov that the brotherhood of man would come to pass when the period of extreme individuality was over. Tolstoy went to much greater lengths on the subject. Tolstoy wrote an entire book about it: The Kingdom of God Is Within You. Though the kingdom may begin within you, the whole point of the book is to make it a social reality. Writing in 1893, Tolstoy asserted that ‘a time is already coming when the Christian principles of equality [the brotherhood of man, the community of property, and non resistance to evil by violence] will appear just as natural and simple as the principles of ... national life do now.’

Well, he was partly right, though the form the first two of these took in the Soviet Union would have appalled him. One can imagine the theologians, ‘those masters of circuitous evasion’ as Tolstoy called them, saying ‘I told you so.’ In the West, aspirations like ‘thy kingdom come’ in the Lord’s prayer and injunctions such as ‘seek ye first the kingdom of God’, were construed to be about the next life. After all, Jesus said at his trial ‘my kingdom is not of this world.’

However, it is not that simple. St. Paul wrote ‘it is not eating and drinking that made the Kingdom of God, but the saving justice, the peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 14:17) which seems to be about life here. As a result, there is a difference of opinion among theologians. After a survey of the literature, Professor Michael P. Hornsby Smith, a sociologist, comes down on the ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ position. That is, the kingdom of God is partially, but not completely, present. ‘So a purpose of [his] book is to seek a kingdom of truth, life, justice, love and peace.’ He asks ‘How can the emergence of these ‘kingdom values’ be encouraged?’

In Hornsby Smith’s book, the kingdom of God is put at the centre of a Church’s social teaching. It is not a criticism of his account that he omits any mention of mysticism as a source of some of his ‘kingdom values’. Mysticism does not feature in the social teaching of most churches, as it does not feature in social thought generally. Indeed, Max Weber roundly declared that ‘mystical experiences lead away from everyday life and all expedient conduct.’ Pace Weber, mysticism has the merit of supporting the kingdom of God.

We may find some encouragement for this in the father of all social thought, Plato. In The Republic, the forthcoming rulers are led to an awareness of Goodness Itself, which has the effect of making them love goodness, and motivates them to give it appropriate expression in the governance of the state. Sir Desmond Lee, in his translator’s introduction to The Republic, writes ‘the vision of the good is not entirely dissimilar to what others have called the vision of God.’

Then why not take something that straightforwardly is a theistic mystical experience and see what social ramifications there are? That is the procedure here. The experience selected is from St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) the reason being that his experience is typical of Christian mystics. There is, to be sure, within Christianity, a neo-Platonic tradition whose ex-
experience may well derive from meditation, like Buddhism, but here we are dealing with the prayerful tradition. Here, then, is the experience:

His whole being somehow changed into a movement of divine love...He is filled with God. But God is love, and the deeper one's union with God, the more one is filled with God.8

St Bernard goes on to point out the social consequence:

It will not now be hard to fulfill the commandment in regard to loving his neighbor. For he truly loves God and in this way also loves the things which are God's.7

The experiencer was filled with God's love, and turns that love onto other human beings. The result is what Hornsby Smith calls solidarity, or what Dostoyevsky calls brotherhood. The intent is towards community. The mystic pursues community and opposes whatever is destructive of it. That is mysticism's social and political agenda.

St Bernard puts the point succinctly: 'This heart is filled with a love that embraces everybody.8 So it wishes them peace, which is essential to the preservation of the community. St Bernard makes a strong statement about the implication to peace:

Instead of shutting off your affections from your enemies, you will do good to those who hate you, you will pray for those who persecute and slander you, you will strive to be peaceful even with those who hate peace.8

Community and peace are the orientations provided by the experience. There will be other sources of a person's social and political agenda, and they may be good, such as experience and reason. And one of the great lessons of experience is that society benefits from freedom as well as community, so it is desirable to have both. A mystic is capable of learning from experience like everyone else, so will pursue community in ways compatible with freedom. Thus one of the great mystics of the twentieth century, Toyohiko Kagawa[1888-1960] an economic reformer in the 1930's, writing in the shadow of the Great Depression when capitalism seemed to be finished, sought unity in co-operatives rather than communism.

However, the greatest doubt about the mystic's social vision comes from its utopian character. Utopian visions and social reality don’t mix, it will be said. When has the brotherhood of man ever come to pass? It may not have come to pass everywhere at all times. but in some places at some times it has done well. In what follows, I shall cite two instances in the twentieth century in which the social orientation provided by mystical experience has made a social difference.

The first is Toyohiko Kagawa. He felt that God... 'was inside me ...I felt great ecstasy and joy.'10 Thinking about it later, he wrote:

The purpose of our having mystical experience is not that we may achieve our own personal satisfaction, but that we may succor the poor, help those in trouble, and educate the masses.11 And educate them, he did. He threw himself into labour unions, women’s rights, farm organizations, and health clinics.

The great problem of his time was unemployment. Kagawa had no doubt about what should have been happening: the workers should have had increased ownership and control of the means of production, but through a co-operativized form of ownership which allowed a form of community control. Kagawa viewed capitalism as a form of industrial autocracy. He had no objection to small shops, farms, lawyers’, doctors’ and dentists’ practices being owned by individuals, since the work was performed primarily by one person with a few assistants. But when the firm began to grow, and the wealth which brought about the expansion of capitalism seemed to be finished, sought unity in co-operatives rather than communism.
was co-operatively raised, the resulting firm should be co-operatively owned. The resulting co-operatives should then federate and buy out other businesses and co-operatize them.

Co-operatives did economic justice: they returned the wealth to the people who had generated it. In Kagawa’s world there would be no armed revolution, but no Rupert Murdochs either. In his book Brotherhood Economics, whose title exhibits the tendency to social solidarity typical of love mystics, Kagawa attempted to assimilate economics into love consciousness, culminating in his description of the co-operative state.

Kagawa’s work was noticed in Australia. In 1936, an Australian clothing manufacturer, Fletcher Jones, went to Japan to see how Kagawa’s ideas were working out. As a result, he turned his business, which was to have 3,000 employees, into a staff co-operative. The title of Jones’ autobiography, Not By Myself,12 explains why.

Kagawa, was not afraid to borrow. In 1921 he founded something like a religious order, The Friends of Jesus Group, which became the centre of his religious and charitable work. As his biographer Schildgen observes, it combined the discipline of the Jesuits, the methodism of John Wesley’s spiritual circle, and the hands on activism of the Salvation Army.

My second witness is Anwar El- Sadat, formerly President of Egypt. During an eight month stay in prison in the last days of the colonial period in Egypt Sadat, a military officer, underwent a religious conversion. He felt that he established ‘communion with the Lord of all Being…the mystics I read in prison appealed to me tremendously…’13 He continues ‘I came to experience friendship with God,’ and he was fully conscious of the political consequences: ‘My friendship with God changed me a great deal. Only in defence of a just cause would I take up arms...’14 It made that much difference to him: war would have to be shown to be just.

Sadat’s political orientation brought about by his communion with God existed alongside others deriving from his military background. In view of these, Sadat launched a war against Israel. It took another man of similar mind to bring the political effects of his conversion to the fore. That man was President Jimmy Carter. It was a case of Sufi recognising Sufi. Sadat described Carter as a man ‘impelled by the power of religious faith and lofty values’15 Carter brokered the Camp David Accords which took Egypt out of the firing line against Israel. In his historic speech to the Knesset in 1977, Sadat quoted from Proverbs ‘...to the counsellors of peace is joy.’16 He was shot dead by extremists soon after.

I conclude that mystical experience can support the The Kingdom of God, notably in the areas of solidarity and peace, since it has already done so.

NOTES

2. Ibid. P.135.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid. P.86.
15. Ibid. P.359. 16. Ibid. P. 401.
THE GERASENE DEMONIAC

A Disability Support Worker’s Commentary

TIMOTHY SMITH

My initial reaction to reading the passage in Mark’s Gospel on Jesus’ cure of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk. 5:1-20) is how is it that another person, family or community could treat someone in such a manner? The man deserves compassion, not to be chained up on the outskirts of town in a cave like an animal!

Yet this is my reaction to the man from the vantage of my armchair at the start of the twenty first century. There is a larger story here of what brought this man to this point where Jesus meets and heals him. It is this larger story which this commentary is about which will be pieced together using my own experience as a support worker for people with disabilities.

In attempting to do this commentary it has been noted over the years that this is a passage about a man with a mental illness being healed by Jesus. However, I would like to put forward the proposition that the condition treated by Jesus on this occasion is autism. I would also like to put forward the hypothesis that this passage is about an actual incident in the ministry of Jesus and should not just be read in terms of the imagery portrayed (although the evangelist has greatly embellished the story for dramatic effect). This is a hypothesis I would now like to expand upon more fully.

An Autistic Man

Mark relates that the man lived among the tombs, wore shackles and would often wander at night howling. The questions I would like to ask are why is the man living amongst the tombs? Why is he shackled? Why does he howl like an animal? Whilst it could be argued as mentioned above that Mark is using some vivid imagery to show that the man is spiritually dead, I would like to argue that in this passage Mark the Evangelist could actually be portraying an actual event from the ministry of Jesus. This is potentially about Jesus’ ministry to a man who is autistic.

So firstly, why is the man living in a tomb? We do know that in the time of Jesus we know that tombs, including Jesus’ own, were often caves in which the body of the deceased lay after they died. Apart from sheltering the body of the deceased from animals, a cave can also provide good shelter for a person who could not live at home for various reasons. Even today we hear of homeless people living in some of the mausoleums of places like Waverley and Botany cemeteries in Sydney. They do it simply as a means of providing shelter for themselves from the elements. For a family who is living in borderline poverty and wanting to provide shelter for a loved one that could not live at home due to their behaviour, this is an effective means for sheltering the man from the elements.

Secondly, as a worker who has worked with people with various disabilities, including autism, a person who is severely disabled by the condition can be extremely frightening. If the person has the capacity to make sounds, the only sounds he/she may make may sound like animal noises at times. There may be no speech but simply a series of grunts which need to be interpreted as speech for that person. This at times can be quite loud and at night time, in the stillness of the night, this sound can carry.

The person is also frightening to others if he/she exhibits challenging or violent behaviour. This could show itself in attacking another person or even self-injurious behaviour such as banging one’s head against a wall. In an ancient era in which modern antipsychotics such as Risperidone, Zyprexia and Neulactil are not yet known, it is no wonder that the...
Gerasene demoniac has been chained to a wall, a practice that continued in psychiatric hospitals up until the start of the twentieth century. Given also the great strength exhibited when angry by any person and the fatigue of metal due to the elements, it is no wonder that the bonds have been broken frequently and the man wandered by day and night howling and bruising himself with stones. (Mk. 5: 5)

A Good Pastoral Response

In the ancient world, illnesses such as schizophrenia, epilepsy, stuttering, bi-polar disorder, etc. were seen as being the result of demonic possession and the manner in which the illness was treated was through an exorcism. So using the healing technique of the period, Jesus performs an exorcism upon this man who was crying out for help. Like a good therapist, not wanting to create dependency, Jesus then sends him on his way. This intervention results in the man not only being restored to sanity but also to being in relationship with others as he could now live and associate with other people. Also note that Jesus was not afraid of the man but is able to listen to what the man is asking for and is able deliver the outcome which is requested.

This intervention of Jesus now gives us a model of what is a good pastoral response in working with people with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviour. Firstly, we should not be afraid of the person although at times we may be wary of some of the person’s behaviours. Secondly, we should use what is considered best practice for working with the person. Thirdly, any intervention should not create any dependency upon the worker by the person we are working with. Fourthly, any intervention should lead to liberation and allow the person to be able to live freely amongst family, friends and one’s community. Finally, and most importantly, the man asked for Jesus’ help. The man gave his consent for the process to occur and was a willing partner in it. In the event that a person is unable to give consent (e.g. due to an inability to understand), this consent needs to be given by another person who knows their wishes or can evaluate what is in the person’s best interests.

In the twenty first century this does not necessitate that if we find a person with a severe intellectual disability we call the local parish priest to perform an exorcism. Rather, wherever possible, we now use whatever educational techniques, adaptive technology, and positive behaviour shaping, etc. that is at our disposal to help develop a better life for those with whom we work. This may mean that to help another to be able to live their life more effectively we need to modify the world around them. This includes not only the use of rails, adaptive technology, etc. in the person’s home, but also ourselves. This includes not only our own behaviour, but our values and prejudices as well.

Restrictive Practices

Whilst chaining a person to a wall in a cave and leaving him or her on the outskirts of the town may seem quite extreme, practices such as these still continue in our society in much subtler forms. So the chaining of a person to a wall may seem barbaric, yet many people who have disabilities in Australia still do not have the basic rights which many people take for granted. Examples of these include being able to go for a walk down the road without a support person in attendance, at times being locked in their own room for periods of time (seclusion), being locked in their own homes (containment), being doped to the eyeballs with major psychotropic medications such as Zyprexia and Risperidone (chemical restraint). These people are the modern Gerasene Demoniacs who have been cast onto the fringes...
of human society and forgotten about.

It can at times be argued that such practices are required for the benefit of the person and those around them and strong arguments can be mounted for continued use of such practices. However, whilst they may be required in the short term, their use must be continually reviewed as to if it is in the person’s and society’s best interests. This is why such practices are reviewed by tribunals such as Guardianship Boards to ensure that best practices are being used and the rights of the person with a disability are being held.

Currently, in Australia most services operate from a human rights model which endeavours to protect the rights of people with disabilities in our community, a service which endeavours to ensure such restrictive practices are constantly reviewed by appropriate professionals (e.g. psychiatrists, psychologists, occupational therapists): rights which many of us take for granted, rights such as being able to go to the shop to buy a soft drink—simple pleasures in life which many people take for granted yet which are denied to many people with disabilities.

As a disability support worker it is my role to help people regain their place in society. Sometimes I am leading that person to a place they do not want to go and the steps we take are small. Quite often it is necessary to educate members of the public as to the humanity of the person who is beside me, for them to see not the demoniac but the person, and to help others to confront their fears. At times part of the journey is my own in confronting my own fears for this person so that the person who is journeying with me may grow. Often this process is an educative process for both myself, the person with a disability and the wider community. Unlike the miraculous cure of Jesus, many of the miracles for the people with whom I work are small miracles achieved over many years of hard work—a miracle such as crossing the street, being able to catch the bus by themselves or independently being able to communicate through the use of sign language. These are miracles of everyday life which cannot be achieved through ostracising those with disabilities from society, keeping them behind closed doors and drugging them to keep their voices quiet.

Unfortunately, such work is very expensive, time consuming and at times appears to show very little rewards. However, if we remember some of the words of the song, Woman of the Sacred Heart, ‘in our delight, in our despair, through the smallest choices of each day, through the cost to us, hope filled yes, the courage lived, shows us the way.’ For Mary, many or the miracles she witnessed in Jesus’ life as he grew up were not big, yet they were very important milestones for a mother. Similarly, many of the milestones I witness in the lives of those with whom I work are not big, but for them are giant steps. It is these small educative steps which become big steps in time and lead to freedom.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1 Connell, Understanding Human Behaviour, p.10
2 Challenging behaviour refers to any behaviour which restricts a person’s wellbeing, the wellbeing of others or the ability to relate to others. Examples of this can include, hitting one’s head against a wall (self-injurious behaviour), hitting or punching other people, refusing to eat or drink or even something as simple as refusing to shower.

Some of these examples may not seem to require intervention, for example the person who refuses to shower for over a week would develop a strong body odour and would be offensive to the people around them thereby preventing the person from interacting with other people.

3 James Maher. (2002), ‘Woman of the Sacred Heart’ in the Heartvoice Album

40
NEW RELIGIOUS BOOKS BY AUSTRALASIAN AUTHORS
KEVIN MARK

Acting on Conscience: How can we responsibly mix law, religion and politics?; Frank Brennan; University of Queensland Press; PB $23.95 [9780702236747]; 275pp; 200x130mm; 2007
Study by a Jesuit priest and human-rights lawyer of whether there is a place for personal beliefs in public life, and of the complexities of the interaction of law, politics and religion in Australia. Author critically examines examples from Australia and the United States (as an alternative example of a western, democratic nation). Topics include the war in Iraq; late-term abortion; politics and the judiciary; and same-sex marriage and parenting. Author argues for the primary of the individual’s conscience as the basis for engagement in a pluralist democracy. Reissue in smaller paperback format of a work first published earlier in 2007. Endnotes; index. Author is Professor of Law at the Australian Catholic University, Professor of Human Rights and Social Justice at the University of Notre Dame, Australia, and former Director of the Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre, Sydney. Previous books include One Land, One Nation (1995) and Tampering with Asylum (2004).

 Beds and Blessings in Italy: A guide to religious hospitality; Federica Polegri (translator); St Pauls; PB $29.95 [9781921032059]; 424pp; 230x120mm; 2010
Guide to monasteries, convents and religious houses in Italy that offer accommodation to pilgrims, tourists and student groups. First English-language adaptation of the annual Italian guide produced by the Centro Italiano Sociale Turismo. The 1400 entries are grouped according to the 20 regions of Italy, and each entry provides address, phone and fax numbers, email and website addresses, and a brief description. Most also record the management or affiliation, activities available, what guests are accepted, details of the accommodation, other features, and tariff details. Symbols indicate whether, for example, the location caters for spiritual activities; conferences and seminars; and has facilities for the elderly and people with disabilities. Colour photos of most venues; colour map of Italy; locality index.

Caritas in Veritate: Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth; An encyclical letter; Benedict XVI; Peter Byrne (reader); St Pauls; Audio 4-CDs $32.95 [9781921472381]; Audio 4-CDs + PB $39.95 [9781921472398]; 2009
Unabridged reading of Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth, 2009), the third encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI. Read by Peter Byrne, a freelance Catholic broadcaster in Melbourne, who also recorded an unabridged edition of the Pontiff’s first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est (God is Love, 2005). Presented on a set of four CDs. Each section of the text begins on a new audio track, allowing ease of access. Also available in a pack that includes a printed edition of the encyclical. The printed edition is also available separately (ISBN 9781921472336, $9.95).

Does God Live in the Suburbs? What ordinary people believe; Myer Bloom; Indra Publishing, dist. by Australian Book Group; PB $34.95 [9781920787165]; 360pp; 210x140mm; 2007
Presentation of religions and other spiritual beliefs in Australia by means of interviews with their adherents. Author interviewed a practising member of each religious group (they are generally ‘laypersons’, rather than experts, introduced to the author by officials of the groups). Each group has a chapter is which the individual explains her or his religious beliefs and practices, reflecting on how these effect their daily lives, and speak of how they perceive Australian society and their place in it. 23 groups are represented, including all major Christian churches. The
Catholic interviewee is a laywoman who has been a primary school teacher for over 20 years. Also includes a separate chapter with Vicki Walker about Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (the only Aboriginal contribution). Notes; index. Author lives in Melbourne, and researches in the sociology of religion.

**Good Night and God Bless:** A guide to convent and monastery accommodation in Europe: Volume Two: France, United Kingdom, Ireland; Trish Clark; Paulist Press (HiddenSpring), USA, www.goodnightandgodbless.com, dist. by Rainbow Book Agencies; PB $32.95 [9781587680571]; 360pp; 210x135mm; 2010

Guide for tourists, travellers and pilgrims wishing to make use of accommodation options in convents, monasteries and abbeys in Europe. This second volume of a planned trilogy focuses on France, United Kingdom, and Ireland. Provides details both of places available simply for accommodation and those that offer spiritual retreats. Detailed information is provided on the principal recommended sites, including places of interest and food and drink suggestions. Also includes pilgrimage suggestions. Basic details are also provided on other religious accommodation options. Some colour photos; maps; index. The first volume (published 2008) covered Austria, the Czech Republic, and Italy. Third volume will cover Germany, Spain and Eastern Europe. Queensland-based author is the owner of a travel marketing business. Part of the proceeds of the sale of the book go to the Mary MacKillop Foundation.

**The Grand Experiment: Two boys, two cultures; Anouk Ride; Hachette Australia:** PB $25 [9780734409201]; 236pp; 210x135mm; 2007

In 1848, Spanish missionary Fr Salvado Rosendo, founder of New Norcia Monastery in Western Australia, decided to prove that Aboriginal people could be educated and ‘civilised’ by taking two local Nungar boys to be schooled in Europe. This account covers the journey, during a time of turbulent history, of Salvado, Conaci (aged seven) and Dirimera (aged ten) by sea via South Africa, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and France, before the boys finally entered a monastery in Naples. Also covers the aftermath of Salvado’s ‘grand experiment’ and woven into the story is the author’s account of how she researched it. Photos; guide to further information; endnotes; bibliography. Melbourne author has worked as a journalist and editor, contributing to magazines, including New Internationalist.

**Julian Tenison Woods: A life; Mother Mary of the Cross MacKillop; Margaret Press RSJ (editor); St Pauls; PB $29.95 [9781921472442]; 262pp; 220x150mm; 2010**

Biography of Fr Woods (1832-89), best known as the controversial co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph. Written by the other co-founder, Mary MacKillop (1842-1909, beatified 1995), it was completed in 1903 but permission to publish was withheld by Cardinal Moran. It was first published in book form in 1997, with the editor contributing an introduction as well as marginal comments throughout MacKillop’s text, providing additional information on the people and events mentioned and noting differences in the various typescripts. This edition has been released to coincide with MacKillop’s canonisation in 2010, and includes a revised introduction by the editor. Foreword by Cardinal Clancy to 1997 edition; chronology; further reading list; copy of Moran’s 1903 letter. Editor is the author of the biography Julian Tenison Woods (1979, 1994) and a Josephite sister whose other publications include a two-volume history of South Australian Catholics, From Our Broken Soil (1986) and Colour and Shadow (1991).

**Mary MacKillop: A spiritual model for all; E. J. Cuskelley MSC; St Pauls; PB $4.95 [9781921472626]; 48pp; 150x105mm; 2010**

Essay presenting Mary MacKillop (1842-1909) as a spiritual model for all: She lived in God’s presence,
brought the Good News to the poor, walked the way of God’s will, went the way of the cross, walked the way of love and forgiveness, and loved her enemies. Originally published as the final chapter in the author’s *Walking the Way of Jesus* (1999). Includes brief biography of MacKillop; photo; endnotes; guide to further reading. Author (1924-1999) was a Missionary of the Sacred Heart, former professor at Sacred Heart Theological College, Croydon, Victoria, and St Paul’s National Seminary, Kensington, NSW. Superior General of his order, and an auxiliary bishop of the Brisbane Archdiocese. Other works include *The Kindness of God* (1965) and *No Cowards in the Kingdom* (1969).

**Mary MacKillop on Mission: To her last breath; Sheila McCreanor RSJ (editor); Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, PO Box 1508, North Sydney 2059, www.sosj.org.au; PB $37.95 [9780646522890]; 421pp; 225x155mm; 2009**

Third collection of correspondence from and to Mary MacKillop (1842-1909). This volume covers the last 20 years of her life, with a particular focus on the foundation of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Aotearoa New Zealand, and covering MacKillop’s final years after her stroke in 1902. The other published volumes of correspondence are *Mary and Flora: Correspondence between Mary MacKillop and her mother* (2004) and *Mary MacKillop in Challenging Times: 1883-1899* (2006); all are arranged and edited by Sheila McCreanor. Foreword by Katrina Brill, Congregational Leader, Sisters of St Joseph, 2002-2008. Photos; editor’s footnotes; references and further reading. Author is a Josephite sister. Previous books include *Sainthood in Australia: Mary MacKillop and the print media* (2001).

**Poems to the Creator; Shelagh Goonewardene; Devinda Theo Goonewardene (photographer); Typeforce, 40 McCubbin St, Burwood 3125; PB $15 [9780980549102]; 100pp; 175x150mm; 2008**

Collection of original poems written by the author between December 2006 and April 2008, when she was undergoing treatment for, and recovering from, cancer. The 36 poems are grouped into three sections: Love & Friendship; Reflection & Celebration; Worship and Praise. Book was named ‘My Book of Christian Significance for 2008’ by Fr Gerard Dowling OAM. Colour photographs by the author’s son are included throughout. Foreword by Marie Berise Nash SM; introduction by author. Author was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1935, emigrated to Australia in 1986, and worked as an actor for 40 years.

**Test Everything: Hold fast to what is good; Cardinal George Pell; Tess Livingstone (editor); Connor Court, www.connorcourt.com; HB (signed) $49.95 [9781921421389]; PB $34.95 [9781921421372]; 382pp; 210x150mm; 2010**

Collection of 80 texts by Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney; primarily homilies but also talks and pastoral letters, ranging from 1984 to 2009 and delivered in venues overseas as well as Australian. The texts are arranged in eight sections: Test Everything; Forerunners; The One True God; Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer; The Body of Christ; Jesus’ Call to Follow; St Paul, Missionary Trailblazer; Hold Fast to What is Good. Each section begins with an illustration by Brett Lethbridge, and each text ends with a note of the date, occasion and location when it was first presented. Simultaneously released in paperback and limited edition hardcover editions (the later signed by the author). Foreword by James Francis Cardinal Stafford; introductory note by editor; 12 colour photos; index. Editor previous wrote the biography *George Pell* (2002) and edited an earlier collection of Cardinal Pell’s texts, *Be Not Afraid* (2004). She is a senior journalist and leader writer for *The Australian* and *The Weekend Australian*.

**Why the Rites of Reconciliation Matter; Gerard Moore; St Pauls; PB $14.95**
Presentation for the general reader of the Catholic approach to forgiveness and reconciliation. The first four chapters provide a historical study from biblical times until the present day. Chapters 5 and 6 are an overview of the current rites and devotions, especially the Rite of Penance. Concluding chapter reflects on Christian wisdom regarding reconciliation and the contribution this can make to the wider community. Glossary; guide to further reading. Author is Director of Research for the Sydney College of Divinity, and has a doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of America, Washington DC. Other publications include Eucharist and Justice (2000) and Why the Mass Matters: A guide to praying the Mass (2004).

With Grateful Hearts! Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph in Queensland, 1870-1970; Margaret M. McKenna RSJ; Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, PO Box 1508, North Sydney 2059, www.sosj.org.au; PB $35 [9780646529455]; 215x140mm; 2008

Detailed history of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Queensland from 1870 to 1970. Documents the contribution Mary MacKillop and the sisters of her congregation made to Catholic education in Queensland. Includes an account of the struggle between MacKillop and Queensland’s first bishop, James Quinn, which culminated in the Josephites being asked to leave the State in 1879. Also describes the fractioning of Mary’s relationship with her friend and co-founder of the congregation, Fr Julian Tenison Woods. Foreword by Sr Anne Derwin, Congregational Leader, Sisters of St Joseph. Photos; footnotes; bibliography; appendices; index. Author is a Josephite sister.

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PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

July — October 2010

For the Sundays of Ordinary Time 14 to Ordinary Time 31 in Year C

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

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

1. The First readings have been collated with the theme of the Gospel in mind. While this might lock these readings into a particular interpretation, the power of these important readings should not be forgotten, especially as the Christian community and its homilist draws on their unique, ancient insights always needing to be celebrated. Two themes from these readings over this period concern wisdom and wealth.

- During this time of the year (August—October), several readings are drawn from that body of Old Testament literature called ‘Wisdom.’ These are found in our readings from Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom, and Sirach—also called ‘Ecclesiasticus.’ Wisdom was a central gift for the Israelite people, and reflected God’s wisdom and presence among them. These readings focus on several features of God’s wisdom reflected in creation and among human beings: The gift of wisdom itself (OT 18), communion with God (OT 19), the need for discernment (OT 22), interiority (OT 23), God’s concern for the poor (OT 30), and the all-pervading nature of God’s Spirit (OT 31).

- A second insight comes from the prophetic literature (beginning in the 8th cent BCE with Amos, OT 19 & 26) and invites us to consider the use of wealth and the exploitation of the poor. This theme dovetails with appropriate passages from Luke’s Gospel.

2. The Second Reading is drawn from the letters of the New (Second) Testament. Only two are from Paul himself. Philemon (OT 23) was written by Paul in the mid 50s to a Christian slave owner to welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus. Though Paul presumes the institution of slavery, his letter invites a way of relating based more on the Gospel and spirit of Jesus than social convention. Several other selections for the second reading give us a feast of passages drawn from letters written after Paul’s death and called ‘post-Pauline.’ These early letters from households of Jesus disciples, though conventionally attributed to Paul, were written by one of his disciples: Colossians dated in the late 60s or early 70s (OT 18), reflects on the nature of Jesus and what he offers the Christian community. There are selections from two other post-Pauline letters. These are more explicitly about pastoral issues concerning Christian leaders and their communities: 1 Timothy (OT 25-26) and 2 Timothy (OT 27-30) are written to address concerns about correct teaching, fidelity to the tradition about Jesus and ministry stability. These letters written towards the end of the first century CE indicate that the Christian community was entering a new era in its development and was passionate about engaging Paul’s Gospel for a new time unforeseen by Paul himself.

3. The Gospel readings during August-Octo-
ber are taken from Luke’s Gospel, and the section of the gospel dealing with Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9-19). Luke’s gospel presumes an urban audience of c. 85 CE. The writer is keen that Greco-Roman Christians are able to live authentically in their world while deepening their union with Jesus. The journey narrative of the gospel (Lk 9-19) provides the evangelist with an opportunity to explore the main attitudes which disciples need in their following of Jesus in the journey of daily living. These attitudes are about possessions and wealth (OT 18, 23, 25, 26, 30) sensitivity to God’s presence (OT 19), membership in Jesus’ community (OT 28), hospitality (OT 22, 31), mercy and forgiveness (OT 24), faith (OT 27), and confident prayerfulness (OT 29). All these discipleship themes provide a contemporary Christian community with ways of reflecting on the vitality of its own life, and celebrating various local expressions of discipleship. They continue to be relevant for Australian followers of Jesus.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

July 4—Ordinary Time 14: Is 66:10-14. God’s desire to comfort the disconsolate is tangibly and powerfully expressed in this beautiful hymn. Gal 6:14-18. Paul’s desire of his total union with Jesus, even in suffering. Lk 10:1-12, 17-20. Jesus sends his disciples on a difficult and, at times, unappreciated mission. Theme—Union with Jesus. Paul exemplifies the meaning of Christian living—union with Jesus that permeates his whole life to the point that it becomes a reflection of Jesus’ own life. There are many examples of those who live this kind of life today. These might be celebrated.

July 11—Ordinary Time 15: Dt 30:10-14. Moses reminds the people that God’s Word (‘Law’), is accessible, personal and interior. Col 1:15-20. A powerful hymn to Jesus, God’s expression of Sophia (‘Wisdom’), celebrating his cosmic authority to reconcile all. Lk 10:25-37. A parable that subverts the traditional and expected patterns of preferential behavior. Theme—Our World: From Colossians, Jesus’ presence imbuess the whole universe. Therefore the world is good. This challenges the conventional commercial and industrial treatment of our world. It also invites us to embrace a spirit of reconciliation.

July 18—Ordinary Time 16: Gen 18:1-10. Abraham offers hospitality to unexpected and unrecognised angelic visitors, and is blessed. Col 1:24-28. The writer encourages a disposition to make God’s Word fully known, to teach through Jesus in all wisdom and bring others to genuine maturity. Lk 10:38-42. Luke offers us a snapshot of ministerial tension, to get all the work done or focus on Jesus. The encouragement is to focus on Jesus in the midst of life’s concerns. Theme—Hospitality. A life of busyness and time of upheaval can leave us diving for self-survival. The readings (First Reading and Gospel) encourage a disposition of hospitality practically open to others and essentially focussed on God.

July 25—Ordinary Time 17: Gen 18:20-32. God is revealed as compassionate, forgiving and conversational. Col 2:6-14. The writer celebrates the communion that the baptised Christian shares with Jesus. Lk 11:1-13. This is Luke’s insight into Jesus’ teaching on prayer. Theme—Communion with God. Two readings (First Reading and Gospel) invite reflection on the centrality of prayer in our lives, as conversation with a God who is open. In a NT highpoint, Colossians presents Jesus as God’s tangible expression in bodily form. Both themes are important and complementary. They invite us into communion with God through Jesus.

August 1—Ordinary Time 18: Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23. The ancient wisdom-poet asks: What is true Wisdom after all our labouring? Col 3:1-5, 9-11. The writer encourages our focus to be on Jesus. This brings about renewal. Lk 12:13-21. Jesus warns against a greed that forgets about what is most important, true life. Theme—Wisdom: We celebrate the gift of wisdom which God offers us, through this community and our union with Jesus. Wisdom is a gift necessary at a time when we seem con-
cerned with other issues of justice, peace and well-being. What is the wisdom that this community needs today?

**August 8—Ordinary Time 19:** *Wisdom* 18:6-9. God invites the holy people of God to be blessed by divine wisdom. *Heb* 11:1-2, 8-19. A beautiful and powerful narrative of the faith as lived by Israel’s ancestors. *Lk* 12:32-48. Disciples are encouraged to be alert to God’s coming. **Theme—Being Blessed.** We are blessed by God, who walks with us in faith as we journey through life. We are alert to God’s presence around us which is revealed in this community and its elders.

**August 15—Assumption:** : *Rv* 11: 19a; 12: 1-6a. 10ab. This is a tricky reading. Conventionally, it has been taken as referring literally to Mary (the ‘woman adorned with the sun’). Rather, through theological poetry and apocalyptic imagery, the seer John (not the John of the Gospel) presents us with an image of God’s people faithful, resolute, protected and flourishing, in the image of the woman. ‘She was pregnant and in labour’. 1 Cor 15: 20-27. Jesus is the first fruit of all who believe. Mary is also the fruit of faith, liturgically celebrated today in her assumption. *Lk* 1: 39-56. Mary, Luke’s first and foundational disciple for Jesus’ household of disciples, greets Elizabeth who is also pregnant, and then sums up in her song a theology of God’s liberation. **Theme—Liberation.** The Assumption is a celebration of Mary’s fidelity to Jesus. As Jesus’ pre-eminent and foundational disciple, she too shares in the fruits of his resurrection. As disciple, she reveals what awaits us. Can we identify now signs of this liberation or ‘assumption’ into God’s life?

**August 22—Ordinary Time 21:** *Is* 66:18-21. God’s vision for community. *Heb* 12:5-7,11-13. The writer’s encouragement and reassurance to those who suffer. *Lk* 13:22-30. The unexpected and unpredictable membership in Jesus’ community of disciples **Theme—Community:** An important moment to reflect on the meaning of true religious community, to encourage inclusion and to identify those who might be excluded from our parish or community life.

**August 29—Ordinary Time 22:** *Sirach* 3:17-20, 28-29. An encouragement towards living humbly with our focus on God and others, rather than from arrogance. *Heb* 12:18-19,22-24. Acclamation of God’s nature and ourselves as ‘citizens’ of the ‘city of the living God. *Lk* 14:1-7-14. A story about honour and inclusive hospitality set in Lk’s Greco-Roman world of social etiquette and status. **Theme—Eucharistic hospitality.** The Gospel offers an opportunity to celebrate the way the local community is inclusive, and expresses this liturgically. Who are those touched by this Eucharist? How does this Eucharist touch the local community, the nation, the world and cosmos?

**September 5—Ordinary Time 23:** *Wis* 9:13-18. This song celebrates Wisdom, God’s gift is revealed in the world and known by human beings. *Philemon* 9-10.12-17. Paul encourages Philemon to welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus, as ‘a beloved brother.’ *Lk* 14:25-33. The disciple is focussed on Jesus and nothing compromises this relationship. **Theme—Riches and poverty.** Luke challenges a world that sees possessions as a sign of divine blessing or favour. The Gospel invites us to know a deeper wisdom celebrated in the first reading. Can we celebrate those local heroes, perhaps unnamed or unrecognised, who live by wisdom and from a sense of total commitment to God and God’s community?

**September 12—Ordinary Time 24:** *Ex* 32:7-11,13-14. Moses intercedes to God on behalf of the people. *1Tim* 1:12-17. Jesus reveals God’s mercy; we live out of and reflect this same mercy to others. *Lk* 15:1-32. Luke’s central parables about mercy and forgiveness. This is the heart of Luke’s Gospel. Though tempted, don’t shorten the reading. The elder brother’s conduct needs reflection. **Theme—Mercy.** Every Eucharist is a celebration of forgiveness and mercy. This gift, from God, is needed in our world today. Mercy and forgiveness rather than vindictiveness and enmity are encouraged.

**September 19—Ordinary Time 25:** *Amos* 8:4-7. The prophet names unjust practices that target the poor. *1Tim* 2:1-8. The writer urges
prayers for civic leaders and the centrality of Jesus in the act of intercession with God. *Lk* 16:1-13. The steward acts to ensure that he will always be welcomed into village life. Acting judiciously brings acclaim to his master and a new appraisal. **Theme—Acting Justly.** The weak, poor and marginalised are victims of exploitation in our nation. We are invited to name those victimised and be advocates of the exploited. This Eucharist joins us to Jesus and the wider community of the just; we are in communion with all who suffer.

**September 26—Ordinary Time 26: Amos 6:1a,4-7** The prophet targets those who benefit from the exploitation of the poor. *1Tim 6:11-16.* A late first century NT summary about Jesus’ ministry and exaltation. *Lk* 16:19-31. Jesus’ challenging parable about how wealth must be used to alleviate the needs of the poor. **Theme—Use of Wealth.** In Luke’s day, a wealthy person was a greedy person. The readings encourage us not to be possessed by our possessions but to use them for others.

**October 3—Ordinary Time 27: Hab 1:2-3; 2:2-4.** The prophet cries to God for deliverance from violence. God offers a vision of the possible. *2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14.* The leader is encouraged to be a person of integrity, reflection and trust. *Lk 17:5-10.* The disciple is encouraged to be a person of faith who acts authentically. **Theme—Acting in Faith.** In a world of violence, the disciple is encouraged to retain a perspective and trust centred on God. Local communities abound with living examples of such contemporary disciples.

**October 10—Ordinary Time 28: 2 Kings 5:14-17.** A Syrian (and foreign) army-officer obeys God’s prophet from Israel and is healed of leprosy. He seeks to offer the prophet a gift for his healing. *2 Tim 2:8-13.* A revered early Christian hymn about Jesus that encourages closeness to him. *Lk 17:11-19.* Jesus heals those who are excluded from community life because of their disease. **Theme—Exclusion:** The first reading and the Gospel invite a reflection on the power of exclusion which suffering and illness brings. How does the local Christian community seek to include those who are excluded into its life? Who are the true healers in our community?

**October 17—Ordinary Time 29. Ex 17:8-13.** Moses’ prayer for victory is effective. *2 Tim 3:14-4:2.* The minister is encouraged to be faithful to what has been taught, to Scripture, and to the task of courageous proclamation. *Lk 18:1-8.* An unnamed widow’s persistence gains justice and response from an elite judge. **Theme—Prayer:** The Eucharist is the local church’s moment of prayer for and union with all humanity and creation. What are the current situations and events that could be the focus of our Eucharist celebration and intercession today?

**October 24—Ordinary Time 30 Sirach 35:15-17,20-22.** According to the wisdom writer, God shows deference to the poor whose prayer ‘pierces’ the clouds. *2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18.* The writer affirms God’s fidelity in a time of suffering and trial. *Lk 18:9-14.* Jesus’ God subverts the socially expectation of favour and privilege. **Theme—God listens.** God responds to our cries in times of difficulty, loneliness and distress. God seeks to be with all who struggle. What makes us sad? What is difficult?

**October 31—Ordinary Time 31: Wis 11: 22 – 12: 2.** A song about God’s wisdom, patience, love and forgiveness for humanity. *2 Thes 1:11 – 2: 2.* The writer prays that his audience will be faithful to their call, reveal God to others and remain patient for God’s final coming. *Lk 19: 1-10.* Zacchaeus’ conversion is a symbol of the conversion needed in the potential disciple: open to change, ready for justice, and available to provide hospitality. **Theme—Openness.** The second reading readies us for the final weeks of the year as we turn our thoughts to the many ways that God comes into our lives. Zacchaeus in today’s Gospel expresses this openness in action. And it surprises everyone. Where are the surprising expressions of openness to God revealed to us by others in our faith or civic communities?

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