

THE MINISTRY OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES of Catholic Education have been settled long ago. Jesus established his Church to be ‘Mother and Teacher’ (*Mater et Magistra*). He commanded it to ‘Go and make disciples of all nations’ (Mth 28:19). The ministry of Catholic Education is one form of that teaching.

Catholic Education has been provided in a variety of ways down the centuries—as catechesis in the early centuries, as higher learning in the medieval Schools and Universities, as schooling at all levels from the time of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment.

Catholic Education has undergone its own self-corrections along the way. For instance, in the latter part of the twentieth century the R.E. component of Catholic Education was renewed to transcend the narrowly apologetical style it had adopted in reaction to rationalism.

Of recent years official and semi-official documents, such as the ‘Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops’ Conferences on Religious Education in Schools’ from the Congregation for Catholic Education, May 5th 2009, have been doing little more than express and describe a policy that is generally accepted in practice.

Pope Benedict has spoken a number of times on the subject. As always he is clear and to the point, concentrating on what is essential and on the contemporary challenges. He says what a theologian can be expected to say, which is understandable, given that Pope Benedict himself is one and the same person as Joseph Ratzinger, one of the most respected theologians of our time. But in so doing he invites us to ponder the subject at depth.

Catholic education, he affirms, is integral to the mission of the Church. It is more than communicating knowledge about the world, it is education in the faith, enabling students to come to know God, to meet Jesus and to enter into a personal relationship with him.

Students are to come to know that they are loved by God.

The teacher is called, then, to do more than impart information and develop skills. The teacher is to tell the Good News to the students, to convey to them the truth that God and God alone—not money, career, worldly success—can satisfy the deepest longings and needs of our hearts. The teacher’s role is to impart wisdom, true wisdom that includes knowing the Creator and looking for happiness in the right places. In doing so, teachers will guide their students to live life to the full.

A happy student is never a selfish student, concerned only with satisfaction of his/her immediate wishes. Pope Benedict developed this theme in various ways. In language for adults he cautioned:

When nothing beyond the individual is recognized as definitive, the ultimate criterion of judgment becomes the self and the satisfaction of the individual’s immediate wishes. The objectivity and perspective, which can only come through a recognition of the essential transcendent dimension of the human person, can be lost.

Speaking to children, he said:

You begin to see greed and selfishness and all the other sins for what they really are, destructive and dangerous tendencies that cause deep suffering and do great damage, and you want to avoid falling into that trap yourselves. You begin to feel compassion for people in difficulties and you are eager to do something to help them. You want to come to the aid of the poor and the hungry, you want to comfort the sorrowful, you want to be kind and generous.

The consequence for the school from all this is that the life of faith is ‘the driving force behind every activity in the school’.

Particularly striking is the pope’s description of the ministry of Catholic Education as ‘the pastoral care of intelligence’. Those who exercise this ministry do so not only for the

faithful, for believers, but for the whole of society—‘purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths...[the exercise of this ministry] helps to keep public debate rational, honest and accountable...Truth means more than knowledge: knowing the truth leads us to discover the good’. He waxes eloquent on this theme.

Pope Benedict reflected at length on how the Church’s effort to provide Catholic education is a contribution to society.

Historically it has always been a significant contribution. Pope Benedict recalls that often Catholic teachers, especially religious sisters, brothers and priests, were providing education in remote places and among neglected peoples long before the State assumed a responsibility for providing it.

In our time Catholic Education also contributes to society by presenting an alternative in a prevalingly secularist, relativist and materialist climate. The pope declared that Catholic scholarship and education, ‘founded on the unity of truth and in service of the person and the community’ provides a response to moral confusion and fragmentation of knowledge; Catholic Education offers hope to our world.

Corresponding to all this, Pope Benedict encouraged students to pursue worthwhile goals in their own lives and to resist narrow outlooks. Speaking to older students, he said:

As you move higher up the school, you have to make choices regarding the subjects you study, you begin to specialize with a view to what you are going to do later on in life. That is right and proper. But always remember that every subject you study is part of a bigger picture. Never allow yourselves to become narrow. The world needs good scientists, but a scientific outlook becomes dangerously narrow if it ignores the religious or ethical dimension of life, just as religion becomes narrow if it rejects the legiti-

mate contribution of science to our understanding of the world. We need good historians and philosophers and economists, but if the account they give of human life within their particular field is too narrowly focused, they can lead us seriously astray.

Catholic Education is a responsibility for the whole Christian community, while the family has the primary responsibility. Pope Benedict encouraged family participation in catechesis and in the entire process of Christian initiation of children and adolescents, which has produced ‘appreciable results’ and urged that it be adopted in every parish. He acknowledged that some families resist it or are indifferent to it—they do not seem to be interested in the Christian education of their own children; ‘but this is rare’.

The pope reflected on the pastoral care of adolescents, how it is a time of life in which young people strive for autonomy. The challenge then is to enable them to discover true freedom. He reflected on their readiness to be challenged, their need for credible witnesses, their need for authority, their readiness to commit, their call to be witnesses themselves—that is, to take their part in the mission of the Church.

The following passage might sum up Benedict’s main message on the subject of Catholic Education:

By educating in the faith, a very important task is entrusted to Catholic schools. Indeed, they must carry out their mission on the basis of an educational project which places the Gospel at the centre and keeps it as a decisive reference point for the person’s formation and for the entire cultural programme.

As we ponder all this we appreciate still more the contribution that Catholic Education makes in the Church’s response to the mission entrusted to it by Christ.

—**Barry Brundell MSC, Editor**

See the Vatican website (www.vatican.va): Pope Benedict’s ‘Address to the participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome’, 11th June, 2007; his address to Catholic Educators in the United States, 17th April 2008; the Congregation for Catholic Education’s ‘Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops’ Conferences on Religious Education in Schools’, May 5th 2009; Pope Benedict’s address in the UK, 17th September, 2010.

GROUNDING HOPE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Mission and Catholic Schools

TERESE D'ORSA and JIM D'ORSA

Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you... (1 Peter 3:15)

Foundational Ideas

Catholics share faith in a Trinitarian God, a God understood as a community of persons. Catholics also believe human beings are made in the image of God, created to be persons-in-community. To be a person-in-community is, however, to be a person-in-culture, since all human communities exist in cultures. It is also to participate in the dialogues which create and sustain cultures.

Created in the image and likeness of God, ideally Catholics seek to be committed to God's mission in the manner taught and witnessed within human history by Jesus. The dynamic of mission is the creation of communities-for-mission, communities which are, at the same time, embedded in culture and maintained through dialogue.

The Catholic Church world-wide is a communion of these communities-in-mission. The emerging vision of what these communities, both individually and linked together, can be in the service of the Kingdom of God, provides a basis for profound hope.

Mission Community and Culture

A Time of Disconnection and Uncertainty

Today's young people are, indisputably, growing into adulthood in uncertain times. If the times are uncertain for young people, they are scarcely less so for those responsible for their education. In the religious domain, for example, the extraordinary advances in Bibli-

cal scholarship in recent decades, whilst potentially very enriching for teachers of the faith and their students, also bring with them the added requirement that teachers access appropriate and ongoing study and formation in order to carry out their ministry of teaching. There may also be the necessity of a sometimes painful 'letting go' of what has been one's previous grasp of the scriptural foundations of faith.

Advances in Biblical scholarship have occurred at the very time when the salience of the Christian story continues to diminish for many people. There is, therefore, much work to be done with the help of these advances, in rebuilding Christianity as a contemporary meta-narrative so that our young people may not only be proud of it as a principal source and shaper of their own personal worldviews, but may contribute to its ongoing enrichment.

God's Mission in a Church 'Becoming'

Beyond the revolution in Biblical scholarship, it is also important to note other ecclesial factors. In terms of historical experience, students attending Catholic schools today do so in a unique ecclesial environment. They are one of the first generations to grow up in a Church which is becoming truly global, no longer a European Church with branch offices in other cultural regions of the world, as had been the case for many centuries. The potential of these communities, networked across the globe, to welcome and help form today's

young people as global citizens and as Christians, is enormous.

A feature of this new ecclesial environment is the emergence at the most official level, of a dramatic change in the understanding of the Church's mission. As an outcome of the work of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), God's mission is being re-situated at the centre of ecclesial self-understanding. The key insight on mission adopted by the Council is expressed in *Ad Gentes 2*: 'The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit'. Instead of focussing on the various goals of missionary engagement as had been expected, the Council switched focus onto the nature of the Church itself, and declared it to be fundamentally missional. Over time the implications of this shift in mission understanding are being worked through.

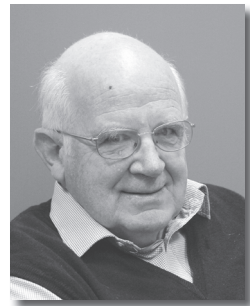
A cluster of associated insights has accompanied the major shift. If the whole Church is missionary by its very nature, then one of the most important corollaries is that each baptised member is called to embrace God's mission in some way. Jesus identified his mission as making present God's dream for humanity, which he called the Kingdom of God. Each one of the baptised is, therefore, similarly called to help God's Kingdom break into the milieus that form the matrix of human life. The issue for educators is: how can young people and their teachers make sense of this?

With this key insight of the Second Vatican Council mission has once again, as in the period prior to the first expansion of Europe into the Americas in the 16th century, taken on a Trinitarian character. The God of Jesus Christ is understood as a Trinity of persons whose essence is community. God's life is shared with others through creation which ushered in the beginning of history. Within history God's mission is carried forward in the making whole of all creation (cf Mark 16:15). The pursuit of this mission across time is carried forward in ways known fully only to God.



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In the years following the Second Vatican Council, the word which quickly became synonymous with the Church's mission was 'evangelization'. It is a broad term covering what the Church does in pursuing its mission. As the Gospels clearly show us, it implies both the speaking of good news (proclamation by word) and the living of good news (proclamation by witness). As the Gospels also show us such proclamation inevitably leads to dialogues as to the meaning of the proclamation. We see this very clearly, for example, in the dialogues which accompany Jesus' own proclamation in John's Gospel. In any era the shape of appropriate witness to the good news will vary with the circumstances impacting on people's lives. In our times, witness obviously must include work for justice, human liberation and reconciliation, and an imperative to care for God's creation.

Jesus' Mission and the Kingdom of God

When, as a metaphor for God's mission, Jesus used the phrase 'the Kingdom of God', he was employing words redolent with mean-

ing for his hearers (Fuellenbach, 1995). Jesus drew on these understandings but also gave them added, and sometimes different significance, particularly in his kingdom parables.

The community of disciples (the Church) is not only at the service of this Kingdom but, ideally, themselves constitute a social space where people can actively experience the Kingdom in the here and now. The invitation to young people to make a positive choice for the Church community must, therefore, be clearly accepted by them as an invitation to join a community whose goal is to create, both within and beyond itself, the Kingdom of God.

Discipleship means accepting the challenge to learn to create and maintain a religious and social space where people actually experience the Kingdom, as well as gain the formation and spiritual strength to increase its scope. This occurs in families, schools, parishes, dioceses, and the many other communities which are influenced by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus identified his own life and mission with the covenantal requirement of his own people when he gave his own 'mission statement':

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

Contrast Communities

The Hebrew tradition on which our Christian tradition stands, grows out of an experience of being called by God to be of significance in God's pursuit of wholeness for creation. This was expressed in the covenant as an agreement to be a 'contrast society' that is a society in which relationships with, and action on behalf of, the most marginalised were to mark the essential difference between God's people and surrounding peoples (Fuellenbach, 1995, 30). Through the mediums of narrative, law and liturgy Israel assembled over time an

oral and written tradition whose interpretation was central in establishing its identity as a contrast society.

The Christian tradition focuses on a second deliberate intervention by God in regard to the inauguration of a contrast community through the life and ministry of Jesus. The call to discipleship that lies at the heart of God's mission is a call to be co-creators of contrast communities. Contrast communities live within a culture and, in mission, challenge certain expressions of the culture when these do not align with the values of the Kingdom. The Christian conception of contrast community differs from the earlier Jewish conception of Israel's covenantal responsibilities. Whereas the Hebrew conception defines identity as separation from other societies, the Christian community lives within society, not separate from it.

Rebuilding the Catholic Sub-Culture for Mission

Sub-cultures, particularly major ones such as Australian Catholicism, are multi-dimensional constructs. If we are to rebuild our Australian Catholic sub-culture so as to be effectively missional, then the work needs to proceed at a number of levels.

Whatever model of culture one works from, it is widely recognized that it is the ideational area within culture which must be affected if in-depth change is to occur (c.f. Cote, 1996; Luzbetak, 1988; Tanner, 1997). This area is comprised of the beliefs, values, symbols and ideas which, coupled with the dynamic myths, lie at the heart of a people's culture. Change at this level is difficult to achieve, but once it does occur, it is pervasive in its effects.

Changes in the understanding of mission are undoubtedly among the most significant to occur in the ideational area of Catholicism worldwide in recent centuries. Such changes and their implications lie at the heart of the reconstruction of Australian Catholicism, affecting the way it construes its various ministries, including those to young people in schools.

As with other Catholic churches worldwide, our re-building takes place not only in our unique context, but also within the global context. The factors that impact on all societies and cultures, *viz* globalisation and the increased pluralisation in many facets of human life, are also affecting us. Western societies such as our own are also experiencing advanced secularisation (Rolheiser, 2006).

In dealing with the extreme pluralism within society, the challenge is to put in place processes of dialogue so that the many understandings and expressions of truth, beauty and goodness held among humans may be appropriately evaluated and shared, with the resulting insights brought to bear constructively on human living.

Communities Sustaining Persons for Mission

Insight into God as community of persons with a mission or purpose in regard to the whole of creation is implicit in the Christian scriptures. Coupled with this is the understanding, common to both Hebrew and Christian scriptures, of the human person as made in the image and likeness of God. The human person, then, is created as a person-in-community with a mission to make whole all of creation. It is a mission with personal and communal dimensions, since it is directed at persons, communities and cultures.

Since all communities exist within a broader culture, to be a person-in-community is to be a person in a culture. Christian communities carry a responsibility to be aware of the extent to which the seeds of the Word are present in their local culture and where the culture actually constrains the freedom to love as God wills, indicating an absence of the Word. As contrast communities members of Christian communities are also concerned with how the public culture impacts on the lives of other groups besides themselves. Contrast communities need to look outwards as well as inwards when it comes to building God's Kingdom. Their mission is to address local reali-

ties in terms that make sense within the parameters of the local culture.

Renewing the Sense of Mission

A renewed sense of mission is more likely to take life in our Catholic sub-culture if the community is involved in dialogical processes which engage the community's members. This dialogue needs to be carried on at three levels and involves asking very fundamental questions:

At the level of mission

- Is our school community's life an end in itself, or does it exist for a purpose beyond itself. If so, what?

At the level of culture

- In what ways does our Australian culture both liberate and constrain our freedom in understanding and pursuing the mission of our school community?

At the level of community life

- To what extent does our school community proclaim and witness to Jesus and his mission, in our particular context?

Because not everyone views community life and mission from the same perspective, dialogue is absolutely essential, even among those ostensibly committed to participation in mission. Dialogue is carried on not only in words, or formal processes, but also in the acts of living, acting, and reflecting. It is a dialogue embedded in the praxis of the community. Christian identity emerges from the sense of belonging which results from active engagement in this praxis.

Orientations within a Living Tradition

A Biblical Model for Dialogue

Walter Brueggemann, a highly respected Biblical scholar and commentator particularly on the Old Testament, explores the orientations which the Old Testament faith communities brought to bear on their religious experience, and which took shape in the canon of their Scriptures. His classic work, *The Creative Word* (1982), has exceptional relevance for

contemporary educators. Brueggemann's thesis is that the process of differentiation within the canon of the Hebrew Bible into Torah, Prophets and Writings is not a matter of chance but presents us with a model of dialogue which is fundamental to Israel's identity and to its living out of that identity as a contrast society.

In the Old Testament, the Torah combines both the central narrative of Israel and the Law which gives the community life and direction. It is the most sacred and fundamental part of the Jewish tradition, but not the final word on the whole of the tradition.

Within Israel's social structure, the Torah orientation characterised the leadership, whose responsibility it was to ensure that God's covenant with the people was honoured. It was a responsibility shared between the priests and the king. As history attests, the kings found it difficult to lead Israel as a 'contrast society', not surprisingly since there were few models to follow. The tendency was always to move towards cultural accommodation with surrounding peoples, with the result that the Torah orientation was often co-opted to serve the king's ends.

Moving the analysis onto a Biblical canvas encompassing both Old and New Testaments, we can say that people within the faith community with a 'Torah' orientation are those who see it as their essential responsibility to preserve the essence of God's disclosure to God's people. This is because such disclosure is fundamental to the faith of the community. It provides the ethos which underpins both identity and mission.

All faith communities, irrespective of the cultures in which they exist, need members who have a 'Torah' orientation, a sense of what is fundamental and non-negotiable in defining the identity and mission of the group. Obviously, difficulties arise when such people impose their own views of what is fundamental and non-negotiable in place of what God has disclosed, thus introducing distortion with consequent division, and the pursuit of self-interest.

In the life of Israel, the corrective to this form of distortion was the prophets. As Brueggemann expresses it, the perspective of the prophet was shaped by the gap identified between what God had promised and what the religious leaders and the king were delivering.

The ministry of the prophets proceeded on the twin bases of love of the tradition and critique of current practice. They spoke strongly against lack of justice for and exploitation of the most vulnerable members, incompetence and poor judgment of rulers, lack of vision including incapacity to frame an alternative vision to present practice, and liturgy which in consequence was problematic and dishonoured God. Prophets also denounced cultural accommodations that undermined Israel's covenantal relationship and subverted it as a contrast society.

The prophets recognised the power of symbolic action in communicating their message, and were adept at marshalling the symbols of their culture to enhance the impact of their message. Such action often generated a dialogue which shaped Israel's identity. Despite this, their role was not always appreciated. In addition, leaders sometimes recruited false prophets to justify courses of action, or to provide religious legitimisation to various forms of cultural accommodation which were inconsistent with God's covenant and with Israel's commitment to be a contrast society.

Whilst the dialogue which resulted from prophecy helped establish Israel's identity and mission, another 'voice' also participated in the shaping of this identity and mission, viz 'the Writings'. This sector of the Old Testament includes the Psalms and the Wisdom literature. It continued to shape Israel's narrative into the Hellenistic period.

By comparison with the two previous authoritative forms of knowing and their allied orientations held within the faith community, the Writings represent a more muted voice in the dialogue of identity. Within the Psalms and the Wisdom literature, the concern is not what God has done for Israel in the past, nor how

secular and religious leaders are delivering God's promise, but rather how God's presence is discovered and celebrated in ordinary human experience. How is God's presence experienced in the prayer life of our community? How does the wisdom of Israel compare with that of other communities? What has been learned about living as a contrast society? How do these understandings bear on day to day decisions? The concern in the Writings is less with God's disclosure in regard to mission and identity (Torah), or with critique (Prophets), but with what needs to be done in the here and now to keep community life purposeful and on an even keel. The Wisdom orientation is pragmatic, focussed on what works for the community within its cultural context.

Pluralism as a Strength in Community Life

Brueggemann's contention is that a healthy religious community recognises and encourages the development of all three 'voices' among its members. The Torah voice focuses on what is central and always essential. The Prophetic voice challenges in terms of the vision and performance, that is, it identifies the gap between the promise which follows God's disclosure and the experience of people in the here and now. The Wisdom voice is concerned with making sense of things in the present and effectively using the resources of culture to their full potential, including in worship. All three voices share a common love of the tradition and narrative of the community, albeit appreciated from different perspectives (See also Malcolm, 2002, 24-30).

In working to create genuine hope for young people, it is essential that the education offered is not indulging a particular, perhaps unwitting, preference for one orientation to the neglect of the others. Not only do young people have the right to a thorough grounding in the whole Tradition, but it is essential that they see and experience the interconnectedness between the three orientations. They need to learn that dialogue-in-community is a conse-

quence of being a person-in-community, a person made in the image of God. As in Israel, none of us has the right to alter the Tradition in the sense of providing a less-than-wholistic or distorted introduction to the whole. The substance of our religious task lies in the whole. How competent are our teachers to deliver in this regard? Do such considerations feature in discussing the mission of the school?

Grounding Hope—Educational Challenges

It is not difficult to transfer consideration from Brueggemann's canvas, the Old Testament, to include the Christian Scriptures and the experience of the past two thousand years in which communities have attempted to engage in faithful living. Nor is it surprising that, independently of Brueggemann's work, Gonzales (1999), and Bevans and Shroeder (2004) have found quite similar orientations in Christian theology, as they have worked on issues of mission and identity. These scholars argue for the recognition and value of the pluralism inherent in our tradition. They also argue the need for dialogue within Christian communities as a way forward in re-configuring Catholic culture, and developing a new sense of belonging consistent with this reconfiguration. This is important in any work of evangelisation.

There are many implications for school leaders which emanate from the above discussion. The following represent some obvious examples. Teachers and leaders have a grave obligation to educate in the tradition *in its entirety*. In uncertain times, when we have to work particularly diligently at recognising the points of continuity and discontinuity in the way we relate to the heart of our faith tradition, the tendency to be inappropriately selective must be avoided. The surest foundation of the hope which will sustain young people and teachers alike is genuine and imaginative leadership in accessing God's disclosure to us as given in the canon of Scripture, and in our Catholic faith tradition, lived and offered within an ecclesial community-in-mission.

Students grow up in a particular youth sub-culture (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006). It is important to understand and have some empathy with its aspirations while being able to recognise both its limitations and potential as a vehicle to advance God's Kingdom. There is much that is intuitively prophetic in youth culture.

Communities that are not strongly and clearly mission-oriented are likely to be problematic in our post-modern context, and will struggle with the issue of identity. This is obvious in the case of school practices. Strategic planning, for example, even though rightly attractive to the Wisdom orientation within our tradition, does not in itself demonstrate that a school is mission-oriented, even if it gives lip service to what is fundamental in terms of a Torah orientation. Only if strategic planning is used as a servant of the whole Tradition, and is embedded in the Tradition as the foundation and model of the educational process, can the extent of the present attention and level of resourcing being given to it within Catholic Education be justified.

To encourage young people along the path of prophetic engagement is a core part of the educational enterprise, and one particularly suited to the sensibilities and generosity of the young. However, without capacity to discern the dysfunctionalities in our society so as to provide for human betterment, even the best efforts of generous people can be quickly dissipated. Similarly, without a firm adherence to the core of God's disclosure as given in Christ and lived in community, the prophetic voice tends to grow shrill or off-key, and finally becomes muted.

In Brueggemann's analysis the educational challenge is the same as that inherent in the living of the Tradition. *It is a challenge to see and live the connectedness of the elements.* We see the importance of this only too readily when we recognise that our sacramental life often seems to bear little connection with our struggle for justice, or our acceptance of the Holy Spirit seems not to seriously guide the sense we must make of living in a very com-

plex and seriously fragmented world.

Prayer and the willingness to pray are essential ingredients in all three orientations. There is thus no single orientation to prayer either for individuals or for the school community which alone does justice to our faith Tradition. People will come to value prayer through the experience of all three orientations. It is important to keep this in mind in preparing prayer opportunities and liturgies.

Fundamental to all three orientations within one Tradition, and to the sustaining of hope, is life in community. This is a great strength of most Catholic schools and provides a very sound basis on which to build in securing identity and mission.

God's mission exists beyond the scope of the Church's mission. Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God is a crucial element in taking forward God's mission in our work. Over many years we have had cause to be seriously concerned at the lack of even a basic grasp of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom amongst Catholic school personnel with whom we have been involved in study programs. Given that such understanding is fundamental to grasping both Jesus' mission and that of His Church, this constitutes a substantial challenge.

Building the culture of the school on the basis that the dignity of each individual lies in being a person-in-community has serious implications for school practices. These implications pertain to what the school promotes, what it asks of its teachers, and how it relates to the local Catholic communities such as family, parish and diocese. They bear directly on the hope students have of a better world and their place in it.

Since community cannot be separated from the culture in which it exists amongst teachers and leaders, more serious attention needs to be given to what is empowering and disempowering for people who live in Christian communities in Australia. Where is the culture inimical to the Gospel and where does it carry the seeds of the Word? What are the implications of the answer to this question for

the entire curriculum? A contrast community needs to know what it aligns with, and what it stands in contrast from, if it is to be an effective witness to the Gospel.

Conclusion

The theme of this paper has been the grounding of hope in uncertain times. We live in a post-modern era, a time of becoming, when it is difficult to discern what the shape of societal and cultural change will be, even in the immediate term. This has forced some fundamental re-evaluation of what it means to be Church and in consequence, what it means to be Catholic. The dynamics at work are complex. It seems impossible to retreat to the security of a traditional community and at the same time engage people with the message of Jesus 'to the ends of the earth'.

The dynamics of change point to the importance of ongoing discernment of God's mission and the responsibility of discipleship carried out by persons-in-community. There are a number of ways of framing responses that will be reached through dialogue, each

with its own legitimacy. Mission therefore needs to be formulated in a way that respects the 'dignity of difference' (Sacks, 2002) found in all authentic Catholic communities now and across time. Such an approach provides a basis for hope and unity within diversity.

A time of 'becoming' is also a time for choosing. This paper has endeavoured to explore some of the parameters of choice opened up by the developing theology of mission which has emerged as a result of the Second Vatican Council. Catholic identity is in the process of being redefined under pressure of changes occurring globally. If the mission challenges are grasped, the result will be a richer rather than a diminished understanding of what it means to be Catholic and a member of the Church. The outcome rests not only with Catholic leaders but with God's Spirit. In this context wise leaders recognise that young people deserve to be grounded in their tradition in all its richness. They also recognise that young people have their own role to play in the enrichment of that Tradition, as shapers and not merely inheritors.

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RESTORING VENICE

A Call to New Evangelisation

DAN WHITE

Introduction

In 2006 the Archdiocese of Hobart initiated an ongoing process of dialogue and critical reflection surrounding the evangelising mission of Catholic Schools in Tasmania. A *Day of Discernment* was conducted involving pastors, principals, representatives of various Governing Bodies and senior personnel from the Catholic Education Office. Flowing from the gathering, the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission (TCEC) established a *Call to New Evangelisation* working party to follow up on the many challenges that were raised. The brief of the working party was to recommend to the TCEC a range of policy options and strategies that could address, in a practical manner, the issues that had been identified.

The purpose of this paper is initially to articulate a range of challenges discerned by the *Day of Discernment* associated with the evangelising mission of the Church within the context of the Archdiocese of Hobart. Secondly, it will reflect upon the necessity and capacity of Catholic schools to respond to a growing awareness that we have moved into a phase of 'new evangelisation' within many Catholic communities across Australia. Finally, the paper will explore, in a practical manner, some of the emerging policy initiatives and strategies being formulated in response to the challenges associated with the identity and mission of Catholic schools.

A Modern Parable

Visitors to the medieval city of Venice would be aware of the continuous struggle of Venetians to save and restore their culturally rich and beautiful city. The city has continually sought to maintain a delicate ecological

balance between the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants and the natural environment that surrounds it. The gracious waterways and canals are both aesthetically pleasing and the potential source of its destruction. The removal of artesian water and the decaying foundations have made the city increasingly vulnerable to high tides and rising sea levels. In essence, Venice is slowly but surely sinking into the mud.

During the original construction of Venice the wooden foundations for the buildings were driven through many layers of silt and set firmly on the underlying bedrock. The portions of timber that were inserted into the soft mud have, over time, become petrified and are now inextricably linked to the bedrock upon which they rest. However the sections of the timber underpinnings directly connected to the houses that sit in and above the waterline are progressively deteriorating and rotting from within. Gradually, but unmistakably, the upper strata of the foundations are sagging under the weight of the impressive structures they support.

The civic leaders of Venice are fighting a constant battle to maintain its viability and beauty for future generations. The solution lies not in attempting to demolish every unstable edifice or by replacing the entire foundations for every building that is slipping below the waterline. Rather, the leaders have focused primarily upon restoring the substrata scaffolding that lies in the 'gap' between the mud of the channel floor and surface level of the buildings. The restoration is a complex and delicate process whereby the original building is 'jacked up' and the foundations critically examined. As necessary a new network of supporting crossbeams and secondary posts are installed through the subterranean level of the building and only on the rare occasion is it a

necessity to ‘drive’ a totally new foundational pillar through the silt to the bedrock. Lowering and reattaching the restored infrastructure to the original ‘petrified’ pillars ensures that a ‘solid connection’ is once again restored to the underlying bedrock.

In many respects the ‘Venetian parable’ is a metaphor for what is occurring in Catholic Education in Tasmania. Like the entire system of Catholic Education in Australia, the thirty-seven Tasmanian Catholic schools have been seen as ‘one of the jewels in the crown’ of parish pastoral ministry for over 160 years. In 2008, the school system is a vibrant, growing reality serving the needs of over 15,000 students which has grown by over 10% over the past five years. On the surface, Catholic schools are highly valued learning communities with rich charisms and a deep commitment to nurturing the Catholic ethos.

The *Day of Discernment* process provided an opportunity for the ‘institution of Catholic Education’ to be gently lifted from its foundations and a critical examination undertaken of the underlying pillars and beams. As with Venice, the exercise was not a response to a ‘deficit model’, whereby Catholic schools were being perceived as failing institutions that should be dismantled and consigned to history. Equally, there was great confidence in the depth of their ‘petrified’ foundations and the ensuing connection with the ‘bedrock’ of faith in Christ within the Catholic tradition.

A central premise of the *Call to New Evangelisation* process is for schools in Tasmania to continue to be vibrant Catholic learning communities aware of and connected to their spiritual bedrock. The process of restoration will focus on identifying and preserving what is really worth keeping, reinforcing existing structures and, in some places, building new supporting crossbeams in response to a changed secular and pastoral environment. As noted by the Secretary for the Congregation of Catholic Education, Archbishop Miller,

The Holy See... recognises the priceless treasure of Catholic schools as an indispensable in-



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strument of evangelisation. Ensuring their genuinely Catholic identity is the Church’s greatest educational challenge. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007, p.61)

Connecting with the Bedrock: What does it mean to be Catholic?

Whilst appreciating that the majority of the restorative work would be focused ‘just below the surface’, as the *Call to New Evangelisation* process unfolded in a variety of consultative sessions it became apparent that all stakeholders were vitally interested in touching base with the very essence of their Catholic tradition. At the heart of many discussions (eg. enrolment policies, spiritual formation programs...) was the fundamental question: *What does it mean to be Catholic?*

In response, a theological reflection paper¹ has been developed by the Archdiocese with a view to stimulating prayerful discussion and rearticulating for the next generation of educators and stakeholders what it may mean to be Catholic in an increasingly pluralist, secular and consumerist society. In particular, it is envisaged the theological reflection will become a seminal document that will inform a range of formation programs for staff employed in Catholic schools.

The reflection paper resonates with two main beliefs. Firstly an emphasis on the nature of Catholicity being grounded in a broad theological context which incorporates and synthesises a diversity of sources and does not simplistically rely on a uni-dimensional theological perspective. In particular recognition

is given to Revelation and the lived experience of faith, hope and love; scripture; tradition; the magisterium; scholarship and reason; and prayer and spirituality. Secondly the nature of Catholicity is held together by the essential ‘marks of the Church’, especially as articulated in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The reflection highlights connectedness with the ‘Body of Christ’ and the organic interaction of being ‘called’ and ‘sent’ particularly within the uniquely sacramental dimension of the Catholic experience. As noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

The word ‘catholic’ means universal, in the sense of ‘according to the totality’ or ‘in keeping with the whole’. The Church is catholic in a double sense: First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. ‘Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church.’ (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrn. 8,2). Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1997, #830 & #831)

Testing the ‘Petritified Pillars’: A Shift in Focus—Evangelisation, Catechesis or New Evangelisation?

Over recent years there has been a growing awareness in the Australian Church of a need to reconnect with a growing number of Catholic families who, for a variety of reasons, have become disconnected from the active life of their parish community. Pope John-Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (#33) recognised that people need to be invited and socialised into situations of vibrant faith. Three challenges for the Church of today were identified: firstly, the importance of the primary proclamation of the Gospel and the establishment of new communities of faith; secondly, the pastoral care of those communities where faith is healthy, mature and fervent; and thirdly, to attend to those Christians who have lost a sense of faith or whose faith has never had the opportunity for faith formation. John Paul II therefore identified a new challenge for the

Church particularly in western, secular society: the call for a *re-evangelisation* or a *new evangelisation*.

The *Day of Discernment* process was unambiguous in recognising that many of the philosophical pillars upon which the system of Catholic schools has been built have served the test of time. The deeply grounded principles of faith transmission, equity and social justice, Catholic spirituality, worship and ritual, inclusiveness and welcome, pastoral care and stewardship are as relevant and significant for today’s generation of schools as they have been for the past 160 years. Notwithstanding the confidence in these enduring structures and foundations, a critical issue being faced by Tasmanian Catholic schools is a growing awareness that one of the corner stones of their mission has shifted markedly in recent years.

When the Sisters of Charity first accepted an invitation from Bishop Willson to serve the Tasmanian community their ministry with the women of the ‘Female Factory’ was one of evangelisation through service and love. Their work gave flesh to the mission of the Church, ‘to enable all people to experience the abundant goodness, justice and peace of an infinitely loving God by knowing the person of Christ’ (John Paul II, 2001a, #1). Inspired by the charisms of many religious communities Tasmanian Catholic schools have continued to embrace the inherent nature of the evangelising mission of the Church. In the words of Pope Paul VI:

For the Church, evangelisation means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and, through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new... The purpose of evangelisation is therefore precisely this interior change... the Church evangelises when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and the collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs (Pope Paul VI, 1976, #).

As the system of Catholic schools flour-

ished across the state in the service of a clearly identified community of Catholic families, the evangelising mission shifted in focus from the early stages of ‘primary proclamation’ to ‘initiatory’ and ‘ongoing’ catechesis to a relatively homogeneous Catholic community whereby the truth of Christian faith was proclaimed in a context ‘that called forth a faith response upon the part of the hearer’ (Holohan, 1999).

The pastoral climate within which Catholic schools operate has shifted significantly over the last generation. The assumption of a comparatively homogeneous Catholic student population, which allowed for a catechetical focus both in terms of religious education and pastoral formation can no longer be sustained. Consequently, Catholic schools in Tasmania at this time are being called to operate as agents of evangelisation at four distinct levels:

- Primary proclamation (especially to the 44% of non-Catholic enrolments);
- Initiatory catechesis (particularly in response to the lack of home-based formation prior to children entering school);
- On-going catechesis (to the much smaller group of approximately 10% of students, directly involved within their parish community, who need explicit support in their growing faith awareness); and
- New Evangelisation (reaching out to the 90% of Catholic families who are not directly connected to their parish Eucharistic community).

This shift in the nature and spiritual needs of the families enrolled in Catholic Education evokes a challenge to reconceptualise one of the central paradigms of ministry upon which Catholic schools have been premised. Whilst affirming the integral nature of evangelisation and catechesis, it is appropriate for schools to begin exploring and constructing a third philosophical ‘pillar’ in the form of a commitment to the process of ‘*new evangelisation*’.

Distinct from primary evangelisation and catechesis is the call for a renewal and enlivening of faith. New evangelisation is for all who have lost or those who have never developed a

living sense of faith. New evangelisation is a response to those who are hungering for Christ within a context and a time when the message of the Gospel is only one voice within our modern culture of secularisation and materialism. From the perspective of a Catholic school, *new evangelisation* recognises that many baptised children, in fact the majority of students, are drawn from families who have become disconnected from the practice of their faith.

Examining the Subterranean Scaffolding: Key Issues of Concern

The *Day of Discernment* and subsequent deliberations have shed critical light on a number of the crossbeams that underpin the nature and culture of Catholic schools in Tasmania. Some issues, such as enrolment trends, were readily visible and objectively measurable, whilst others were far more subtle and difficult to define. Initially, there was a tendency to focus on what was easily observable (*above the waterline*), such as the proportion of non-Catholic students within each school or the religious education qualifications of staff. However, as the process has unfolded all stakeholders have begun to probe deeper and test the strength and resilience of the structures that lie further below the surface. Amongst a myriad of issues the following four questions were specifically identified:

- What are some of the specific hallmarks of a Catholic school that should always be proclaimed and celebrated?
- What is the nature and balance of the enrolment profile of Catholic schools?
- How can Catholic schools more proactively reach out to all Catholic families who have lost contact with their faith community, with a particular emphasis on those who are marginalised and disadvantaged? (*The challenge of New Evangelisation*)
- What formation strategies will help ensure staff employed in Catholic schools continue to have a deep understanding and commitment to their changing ministry?

***Restoring the Scaffolding and Crossbeams:
A Practical Response to the Call
to New Evangelisation***

***Developing a Charter and Mandate for
Catholic Education***

All Catholic schools have developed appropriate Vision and Mission Statements that unambiguously place the evangelising mission of the Church at their central core. It was felt that now it was timely for the Archbishop to develop a Charter for Catholic Education that clearly articulated his vision for, and expectations of, Catholic schools. The Charter articulates eleven key 'foundational' principles that, amongst a range of issues highlight: the relationship with the parish community; the centrality of teaching a 'Catholic' curriculum; the recruitment and formation of staff; the review of enrolment policies; and the role of schools in responding to Catholic social teaching.

What is significant about the Charter is that it moves beyond broad philosophical statements and, for the first time in the Tasmanian context, spells out the specific expectations of the Archbishop with regards to the conduct of a Catholic school. For example, the expectations associated with the Charter places much greater emphasis on selecting teachers on the basis of commitment to the Catholic tradition and involvement in ongoing formation linked to a revised Accreditation policy. Similarly the imperative of working towards a system-wide target of enrolling at least 75% of the student cohort from Catholic families is especially highlighted.

In terms of Religious Education, schools will be challenged to introduce a triangulated model of assessment that replicates assessment processes being proposed in other Key Learning Areas. In essence, the Archdiocese is planning to adopt a model of moderated assessment against explicit standards that involves internal and external moderation in association with standardised Religious Literacy tests at Grades 4 and 8.

Schools will also be 'challenged' to reflect upon the signs and symbols that will distinguish them as uniquely Catholic. For example

with the growth in Tasmania of a number of Independent and Christian schools, local school communities will be asked as to whether the inclusion of the term Catholic (eg. St Aloysius *Catholic* College) should be explicitly included in their nomenclature and promotional material.

Following the promulgation of the Archbishop's Charter, as part of the newly introduced School Improvement process, each Catholic school in Tasmania will be requested to develop a detailed response to the charter. Over the next two years leadership teams will be afforded a two-day formation opportunity to both 'unpack' the charter and explore strategies for formulating a response to the Archbishop's 'expectations' in association with their local communities. It is anticipated the Archbishop will contribute in a substantive way to the input during the formation program.

Of special significance, each Catholic school in Tasmania will be expected to submit a detailed response to the charter in order to obtain, from the Archbishop, a '*Mandate*' under Canon Law² to function as a Catholic institute. The external validating component of the cyclic School Improvement process, once every six years, will be utilised to ensure that, over time, the Archbishop's mandate is progressively affirmed and refined in each school community.

Discerning an appropriate enrolment profile

In 2007, 56% of enrolments in Tasmanian Catholic schools came from Catholic families, the lowest proportion of any state or territory in Australia. Concurrently Census data indicated that approximately 50% of Catholic children are being educated in State (*lower income families*) or independent (*higher income families*) schools.

Reflecting upon this data at the *Day of Discernment* brought forth a number of key issues. First and foremost debate centred on the intrinsic purpose of Catholic schools. From one perspective the evangelising mission of the Church reaching out into the wider Tas-

manian community was counter-balanced by the theological imperative of supporting the catechetical formation of baptised Catholic children. At a more subtle level concern was expressed as to whether the absence of a 'critical mass' of Catholic children could potentially undermine the mission and potency of a Catholic school, especially in a secondary college context. Furthermore it was suggested that some families, whilst accepting enrolment in a Catholic school, might not fully appreciate its core purpose and potentially not encourage their children to participate fully in the spiritual life of the school community. Finally, anecdotal evidence was presented that, within the context of some Catholic schools, committed Catholic students felt the burden of peer pressure and were disinclined to admit to the witness and practice of their faith.

Addressing the issue of finding the appropriate enrolment mix between Catholic and non-Catholic students has sparked a rich and vibrant debate both within the Catholic education sector and the wider secular community. In terms of a policy response, the TCEC has adopted a measured and realistic approach. The major philosophical foundation of a revised enrolment policy is premised on the notion of actively encouraging and inviting a greater number of baptised Catholic families to consider enrolling in Catholic Education.

Overall the Catholic sector in Tasmania has committed itself to working towards a target of 75% Catholic student enrolment across the entire system of schools. Firstly, local communities are to discern an appropriate *Catholic enrolment target* for each individual school taking into account current demographics, economic viability and enrolment demands. Secondly, in high demand enrolment areas, schools will be encouraged to reserve enrolment places for Catholic families who transfer into the area after the traditional enrolment periods. Finally in 2008, the TCEC will introduce a pilot program specifically aimed at reaching out to Catholic families who may not be regularly attending Mass in the parish. Sim-

ply stated, the initiative involves the parish priest sending a '*baptismal anniversary*' card to each child who has been baptised in the parish over the past five years and including in the card a small symbolic gift, information about the parish and invitations to key liturgical and sacramental events.

Reaching out to Marginalised and Disadvantaged Families

In economic terms Tasmania is the most socially disadvantaged state or territory in Australia. Over two thirds of Catholic primary schools fall into the bottom quintile (20%) of the national socio-economic index. Whilst not subject to extreme poverty, average family incomes are relatively low and unemployment levels are significantly higher than the national average. The *Day of Discernment* questioned whether Catholic schools in the 21st Century are now more actively catering for 'aspirational' middle class families in contrast to authentically reaching out to marginalised or financially disadvantaged family units?

The assembly concluded that the Catholic system in Tasmania needed to revisit its founding purpose and renew its efforts to reach out more tangibly to families who live on the margins of society. Grappling with this complex question is one of the most vexed and difficult areas currently confronting the TCEC. At the time of writing, a response to this issue is very much work in progress. To date, two key strategic ideas have been piloted:

In partnership with the Archdiocese, an *Archdiocesan Catholic Education Foundation* has been established. Supported by bequests and some systemic funding, the Foundation will financially support low-income Catholic families in accessing Catholic schools, especially at the Kindergarten entry level. Managed by Archdiocesan trustees the Foundation proposes to provide 'establishment grants' of approximately \$400 to disadvantaged families to assist with the costs of starting school. Tasmanian research conducted by Anglicare identified the burden of the 'on-costs' (uniforms, bags, books, excursion levies...) was a major

concern for low-income parents. It is also proposed that the Foundation will pay a grant of up to 80% of the annual school fees for the first three years of a child's enrolment, after that point it is hoped the normal, pastorally-oriented school based fee relief protocols would be activated.

Following a detailed study into the needs of refugee families in Tasmania a range of educational and pastoral initiatives to help further support humanitarian entrants have been developed. Apart from financial assistance (via the Archdiocesan Foundation), recommendations have been acted upon that will see the establishment of an intensive language centre potentially operating on a 'summer' and 'winter' school model, improved trauma counselling services, cultural awareness professional development and the employment of a community liaison officer.

Enhancing the Spiritual Formation and Commitment of Staff

Of paramount concern to the assembled community at the *Day of Discernment* was an appreciation that the strength and maintenance of a vibrant Catholic culture and ethos in school communities were directly proportional to the quality of formation and commitment of the staff. A constant theme that emerged from the discernment process was a call to develop strategies that promoted a deep understanding of and an enduring commitment to the ongoing ministry of the Church in Tasmania. At every level from staff recruitment, to induction, to ongoing professional learning and spiritual formation and ultimately staff appraisal, questions were posed as to whether more could be done to ensure every staff member was adequately equipped to fulfil the mandate conferred on them by the Archbishop.

For a variety of reasons which include the historical (the lack of access to a campus of the Catholic University), cultural (the primacy of the Department of Education as an 'employer of choice') and resource (declining enrolments in the 1990's severely limited the

capacity to initiate formational programs), Catholic schools in Tasmania have not been able to offer a coherent, integrated programme of staff induction and ongoing spiritual formation. It was noted that a significant percentage (37%) of teachers were teaching Religious Education without the appropriate levels of Archdiocesan Accreditation. Additionally, the staff employment profile indicated 40% of teachers were affiliated with other Christian faith traditions and, in a number of cases, were being called upon to teach Religious Education. Whilst acknowledging the absolute sincerity and dedication of these teachers in supporting the Catholic ethos, uncertainty was expressed as to whether teachers from another faith tradition could effectively move beyond the instructional mode in Religious Education and, with authenticity, engage students in catechetically oriented formational and transformational experiences within the Catholic tradition.

In response, the Catholic Education Office has named spiritual formation as one of its major strategic and budgetary priorities for the next quadrennium and beyond. In this respect a detailed, integrated plan has been developed that will see funding for formation initiatives increase five fold over the next four years. Key aspects to the plan will see an expansion of personnel in the Mission & RE team so as to place even greater emphasis on adult spirituality. Key aspects of the emerging Archdiocesan plan include:

- The appointment of a *theologian in residence*.
- The introduction of two day *retreats* based on Parker Palmer's *Courage to Teach* program.
- The introduction of a four-day *spirituality of teaching* retreat program, broken into two, 2-day experiences for prospective beginning teachers.
- The provision of *spirituality grants* of approximately \$2,000 annually to each systemic school.
- Creating the opportunity for teachers to

- become involved in an *immersion program* and attend the Tantar spirituality program in Jerusalem each year.
- Revising the current Accreditation program to introduce provisional accreditation for newly appointed RE teachers and leaders.
 - The appointment of jointly funded and shared *School/Parish Pastoral Associates*.

Beyond 2011: Other Strategic Priorities

The Catholic Education system in Tasmania recognises that the *Call to New Evangelisation* project is simply work ‘in-progress’. Many other supporting beams need to be developed in order to strengthen and reaffirm the Catholic identity of the school communities. At the time of writing a variety of further issues are under consideration. Major initiatives include: investigating parish based child-care provision in disadvantaged areas; strengthening formation programs for School Boards particularly with respect to Catholic ethos; developing a Charter for Parents which focuses on the tripartite relationship between parish, school and families; and supporting action re-

search projects in direct response to the *new evangelisation* agenda.

Conclusion

Restoring the city of Venice is a never-ending story; the advances in technology and human ingenuity are being constantly pitted against the eroding influence of climate change and human indifference. Similarly Catholic schools in Tasmania need to be totally committed to an ongoing process of *School Improvement* that has at its centre the constant strengthening and revitalisation of the pillars and structures that underpin a vibrant Catholic ethos. The challenge of *new evangelisation* requires a heightened awareness on the part of Catholic schools that they now minister within a very different and rapidly changing social milieu. If the beauty and richness of Catholic Education is to be sustained it is simply not sufficient to ‘paint over the cracks’. Rather schools and system authorities need to periodically ‘lift up the building’, strengthen the enduring foundations and insert innovative scaffolding that is responsive to the mission of evangelisation in a contemporary world.

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NOTES

- 1 The theological reflections developed by Mrs Helen Healy (Head of Mission & RE) and Dr Drasko Dizdar (‘Theologian in Residence’) are particularly acknowledged and have been incorporated within this paper.
- 2 Canon 806: The diocesan Bishop has the right to watch over and inspect Catholic schools in his ter-

ritory, even those established or directed by members of religious institutes. He also has the right to issue directives concerning the general regulation of Catholic schools; those directives apply also to schools conducted by members of a religious institute, although they retain their autonomy in the internal management of their schools.

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YOUNG PILGRIMS

In Search of Treasure Ancient and New

ANTHONY CLEARY

THE RECENT beatification of the late Pope John Paul II provides an opportunity to once again reflect, not just on his own personal witness to the Gospel, but on the very nature and significance of his pontificate.

In light of his regular and extensive travels John Paul II was often described as the 'Pilgrim Pope'. He was acutely aware of the contemporary revival of the ancient practice of pilgrimage, especially amongst the young, and he saw it as a source of deep spiritual significance. At Santiago de Compostela (1989), which over the centuries has drawn countless thousands of Christian pilgrims along the El Camino Way, he implored young people to experience pilgrimage 'as a way to interior renewal, to a deepening of faith, a strengthening of the sense of communion and solidarity with your brothers and sisters and as a help in discovering your personal vocation.'

An initiative of the late Pope, World Youth Day is underpinned by the ancient practice of pilgrimage and since its very inception participants have been described as pilgrims. It has become the largest regular gathering of young people in the world. In pioneering the concept of World Youth Day, Pope John Paul II was extremely mindful of St Augustine's words, 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you' (Confessions, Chapter 1), and their particular relevance to young people. Despite a plethora of research to suggest that a growing number were abandoning 'institutional religion', rejecting the core principles and teachings of religious traditions and questioning the existence of God, he be-

lieved that they were in fact yearning for the transcendent and desiring a relationship with God.

In April 1984 over 300,000 young people descended upon Rome in response to an invitation from the Pope to come to the eternal city for a youth jubilee to mark the end of the Holy Year of Redemption. The magnitude of the response, and the euphoria and solidarity of the young people shocked both civil and religious authorities alike. The occasion was enormously satisfying for the pope, who had a longstanding trust in and conviction about the religious commitment and potential of young people. He remarked:

What a marvelous spectacle this assembly makes. Who says the youth of today have lost their sense of value? Well, I say that the experience of these days—a great and consoling experience of solidarity, fraternity and courage in the open profession of faith—is already in itself an answer to these questions and a negation of these doubts.

It was from the Youth Jubilee, aptly titled 'Festival of Hope', that the vision of World Youth Day was born. In a very real sense the birth of World Youth Day coincided with the birth of the 'new evangelisation', a concept which according to Rymarz (2010, p.24) was to become a *leit-motif* of John Paul II's pontificate. A year earlier the Pope had urged Church leaders to reconceptualise and renew their approaches to evangelization, believing that a commitment to renewal was vitally necessary, especially in light of changing social and cultural contexts and growing indifference to the Gospel message. In order to respond adequately to the emerging challenges and to be truly effective in her missionary

activity the Church required an evangelization which was to be ‘new in its ardour, its methods and its expression.’

John Paul II was acutely aware that a rejuvenation of faith and Christian identity within western societies like Australia was largely dependent upon the Church’s capacity to reach out to and actively engage young people in the life of the Church. His view was that they were especially vulnerable to becoming detached from the Gospel message, and becoming absorbed into a cultural milieu which was increasingly indifferent, and at times hostile, to Christian life and values. To this end he saw that renewed enthusiasm and innovation was required to attract and engage young people, and offset the prevailing culture. The World Youth Day phenomenon epitomizes the Church’s efforts for the ‘new evangelisation’. It is unprecedented and unparalleled as an approach to young people in its energy, innovation and dynamism.

Properly understood, the ‘new evangelization’ is Christocentric in nature and purpose. It seeks to enable an encounter with Christ and a deepening of relationship with him. The Church affirms that this experience of encounter can be the catalyst for a profound transformation, especially for those who have not closed themselves off totally from Christ (*Ecclesia in America* # 68).

While young people’s perception and image of God is extremely diverse and deeply personalized, the Church hopes that their experience of the transcendent at World Youth Day will be an encounter with Christ. Pope John Paul II (1996) defined that ‘the principal objective of World Youth Day is to focus the faith and life of every young person on the person of Jesus Christ so that Jesus may be their constant point of reference’. This Christocentric emphasis is reflected in the principal writings associated with World Youth Day, the themes that have been chosen, as well as the homilies and addresses given by both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI at the various international gatherings.



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While some of the international gatherings have been held in cities which are renowned places of pilgrimage (Santiago de Compostela 1989, Czestochowa 1991, Rome 2000) other World Youth Days have been conducted in modern cities with no obvious religious appeal (Denver 1993, Toronto 2002, Sydney 2008). Irrespective of it being a place of the sacred or the secular, hundreds of thousands of young people, and on occasions several million, have made the journey to unite as part of the universal Church at World Youth Day, which at its heart is a pilgrimage of faith.

Despite the great distances, young Australians have made the journey so as to be represented at every international World Youth Day. They have travelled as members of ecclesial groups and movements, with parishes and schools, and with family and friends. Others have made the journey alone. Compared to their European and North American counterparts the sacrifices of their pilgrimage are far greater, especially in regard to the cost and duration of their travel. It may well be that in overcoming the inconveniences associated with Australia’s ‘tyranny of distance’, and in meeting hardships along the way, a common bond and identity is forged between Australian pilgrims. These shared experiences perhaps help distinguish the young Australians as ‘pilgrims’ rather than ‘tourists’, and may well suggest that the true significance of World Youth Day lies beyond the key events of World Youth Day week, further reinforcing the well-worn adage that ‘the journey is as important as the destination’.

We are a pilgrim people of a Pilgrim Church and throughout the history of Christianity pilgrimage has developed as a religious and cultural phenomenon. Sites associated with the life of Christ and places with a tangible connection to saints, or renowned for apparitions, have become centres of spiritual significance and renewal. They include Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, Lourdes, Fatima and Guadalupe. The custom and practice of pilgrimage, however, pre-dates the Christian story and extends beyond the practices of the Christian Tradition and the other Abrahamic Faiths. It has deep anthropological roots, going to the heart of our humanness and our relationship with God. The ‘longing’ identified by St Augustine is common to all people according to Gabriel Marcel (1945), who coined the term *homo viator* to describe our ever searching relationship with God.

Symbolic of the Christian life, ‘pilgrimage’ represents the deepest longings of the human heart. According to Br John of Taizé pilgrimage is ‘consonant with a thirst for communion with God and with each other’ (1984, p.388). Seemingly innate to human nature is the desire for connectedness and solidarity with others. Catholic anthropologist Victor Turner (1972) identified that satisfaction of this longing comes through the experience of *communitas*, as he termed it, which can emerge at large gatherings, especially those which are religious in nature or are underpinned by ritual. Such gatherings are inherently communal and collective and are characterized by high levels of enthusiasm, feelings of euphoria and the strong sensation of interpersonal connection between participants. This experience, and the new-found level of consciousness which accompanies it, is deeply satisfying, fulfilling an innermost human need, a melding of selves.

While diversifying as a phenomenon from its traditional religious roots, the practice of ‘pilgrimage’ is on the rise in contemporary society, especially as a means of expressing and forging national, cultural, social and reli-

gious identity. This is particularly true of young people who travel in unprecedented numbers to historic landmarks and places of national significance, especially the battlefields which have helped shape the national identity and psyche—Gallipoli, the Western Front and the Kokoda Trail. While not ostensibly religious these sites are very much considered to be sacred places by the young who journey there. They are able to connect with the past and appreciate the legacy to which they are heirs. Paradoxically, while contemporary society promotes a culture of unbridled individualism many young peoples’ search for identity and meaning comes from their being drawn into deeper relationship with others.

When visiting Anzac Cove many young Australians speak of ‘very special and emotional moments’, and their admiration for the heroism and sacrifice shown by soldiers as young as themselves. A clear sense of empathy is evoked from being present at the very site itself, a point attested to by a pilgrim this year in the Turkish newspaper, *Today’s Zaman*:

Coming to Gallipoli is a rite of passage ... because you witness what they actually felt, witness the actual conditions, such as the cold weather, and lie on the soil where soldiers have fought and died. ... [It] makes it a whole lot more special than attending dawn services back home.

While representing a physical journey, pilgrimage more profoundly represents an inner journey of change and growth, often spiritual. If properly travelled it enables a *metanoia* or conversion of heart, where attitudes and perceptions are changed and where life is viewed and lived differently. But do all pilgrims truly experience this *metanoia*, or even seek to? Antier suggests that while a highly motivated nucleus of people go to holy places seeking some special grace or conversion experience ‘the majority go on pilgrimages to discover something different, but more from outside than from within’ (1984, p.370).

In recent years several attempts have been made to categorise and describe the typical

group types drawn to World Youth Day and its associated pilgrimages (Allen, 2007; Rymarz, 2007 & 2008; Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2008). While many are deeply committed to their faith, fiercely loyal to the Holy Father and the Church's Tradition, others are motivated by a sense of spiritual renewal, desirous of a new-found grace. Others again are searching, impelled by curiosity, unsure as to what they will discover. As with all pilgrimages, both religious and secular, the journey to World Youth Day has no 'atypical pilgrim'. Rather, evidence suggests that there a number of distinct groupings, each in-turn motivated by an amalgam of factors.

One might hypothesise however that those who consciously make the decision to register as pilgrims for World Youth Day are proactively seeking an opportunity to experience the transcendent or further deepen their relationship with God. It is, according to Pope Benedict XVI, a time of deep spiritual renewal when 'young pilgrims are filled with the desire to pray, to be nourished by Word and Sacrament, to be transformed by the Holy Spirit' (2007).

Irrespective of one's particular view, the World Youth Day phenomenon has had a profound impact upon young Catholics, the way they see and express their faith, and the way in which they engage in the life of the Church. In the early years of World Youth Day this was especially true for young people from Europe and North America. With the passing of time and greater promotion locally, increasing numbers of young Australians have been drawn to the great international gathering.

The potential and significance of World Youth Day was highlighted in *Ecclesia in Oceania*:

In many places youth pilgrimages are a positive feature of the Christian life of young Catholics. Pilgrimage has long been part of the Christian life in conferring a sense of identity and belonging. The Synod Fathers recognized the importance of World Youth Day as an opportunity for young people to experience genuine communion. (#44)

The watershed moment for the 'local Church' came in July 2008 when Sydney hosted World Youth Day XXIII. With this came an unprecedented awareness of the event for all Australians, both young and old alike; and for all Catholics, for those actively committed to their faith, for those only occasionally involved with their parish community and even for those who disassociate themselves from all things seemingly religious.

In August this year hundreds of thousands of pilgrims will gather in Madrid, Spain to celebrate World Youth Day XXVI. Among them will be the largest ever contingent of Australian pilgrims, many still buoyed by the joyous enthusiasm and infectious spirit of Sydney's very own World Youth Day. Prior to July 2008 many Australians were oblivious to these great international Catholic gatherings, and at times, only a few 'diehard pilgrims' made the great trek to a distant host city. Today however there is unprecedented interest amongst young Australians, many eager to accept the Pope's invitation to join together with the youth of the world. It is anticipated that some four thousand will make the journey, which Pope John Paul II believed 'builds bridges of fellowship and hope between continents, peoples and cultures' (1996).

* * *

In recent weeks I have interviewed a number of the pilgrims bound for Spain. It is apparent that their reasons for going are many and varied. Typically, the older pilgrims are more deeply committed to their faith and regularly attend Mass. Many belong to particular ecclesial groups and movements and actively lead or contribute to youth ministry within their local parish. Their commitment to World Youth Day is evidenced by their willingness to take leave from work or university and to take on part-time work to fund the journey. For many, this will not be their first pilgrimage to World Youth Day, a number making the journey each time since the great gathering in Paris (1997). In the interviews some cited particular memories of World Youth Day, including the oppres-

sive heat of Rome (2000), the sudden sunburst during the Final Mass in Toronto (2002) and welcoming the new 'Pope' in his homeland at Cologne (2005), however without fail they also recounted their pilgrimage, especially those who journeyed through the Holy Land. One pilgrim, obviously well-read, quoted Robert Louis Stevenson in reflecting on her journey through Galilee: 'there are times and places where the past becomes more vivid than the present, and the memory dominates the ear and the eye.'

A number of the older pilgrims also emphasized the critical importance of formation in preparation for World Youth Day and its associated pilgrimages, citing that 'one must have an open mind and open heart to get the most out of it and to fully appreciate where one is going.'

By contrast, the school-aged pilgrims are less connected with Church, but they are by no means disaffected or indifferent to the Gospel message. Their interviews were generally characterized by genuine enthusiasm for World Youth Day and a heightened sense of anticipation. Many looked forward to the opportunity of travelling to places they had only ever read about, especially with close friends and peers. Without exception, all of the school aged pilgrims affirmed their belief in God and many expressed the hope that their relationship with God would be strengthened by the

World Youth Day experience. Furthermore, their description of God was couched in 'Trinitarian' terms, and repeated reference was made to Jesus, the one to whom they prayed and modeled their lives on. In identifying World Youth Day events that they considered important, and which were of particular appeal and interest, the school-aged pilgrims named religious, as well as cultural and social occasions.

At a time when growing numbers of young people set out for World Youth Day an opportunity exists to help them see the true nature and purpose of pilgrimage, and to distinguish it from mere 'religious tourism'. While we are each naturally drawn to the unknown and to places of beauty, pilgrimages enable moments of encounter, like that experienced by the two disciples on their journey to Emmaus; 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road?' (Luke 24:32). Ultimately, it is this encounter that all pilgrims seek, as they respond to the deepest yearnings of the heart.

For the true pilgrim, their journey is a sign of their 'hungering for God', a hungering which Pope Benedict XVI reminded us of at the World Youth Day Vigil in Sydney, 2008:

There are times when we might be tempted to seek a certain fulfillment apart from God ... but where does this lead? ... God is with us in the reality of life, not the fantasy! It is embrace, not escape, we seek!

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Evangelisation is the ultimate reason for which the Church proposes and encourages pilgrimages, such that they are transformed into an experience of deep and mature faith.

—Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People 1998, n.2

Stand at the crossroad and look, ask for the ancient paths. Ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

—Jeremiah 6:16

Pilgrims are persons in motion—passing through territories not their own—seeking something we might call completion.

—Richard Niebuhr

TALES ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The Story of Bob and Cathy

RICHARD RYMARZ

I LIVE IN A very cold place, Edmonton, Alberta, on the 53rd parallel, the most northerly large city in North America. I got a foretaste of this when I was travelling from the airport to the hotel for my interview for the position I now hold. I remarked to the driver that the roads looked sandy, which I must say really surprised me. She responded that I was right—they put sand on the roads in Edmonton for the long winter. I asked, ‘Why?’ ‘To help melt ice’ was the answer. ‘But don’t you use salt for that?’ Pardon the pun, but the chilling reply was that salt doesn’t work as a melting agent below -24 degrees. In Edmonton there are many, many days below -24^o! Let me put that another way: for many, many days in Edmonton it is actually much warmer in a meat freezer than it is outside!

So you can imagine that in such a climate winter sports are very popular, especially indoor ones. The most popular is ice hockey, in Canada the ‘ice’ is redundant, it’s just called ‘hockey’—I mean, what other type is there? Devotion to hockey is at a very respectable level in Canada, although I should note that it still falls short of the obsessive, almost pathological, interest in AFL in Melbourne. But I digress.

In a land where snow and ice dominate the landscape, one of the big banks in Canada runs a series of television ads which feature the efforts of a man, let’s call him Bob, dedicated to keeping open and maintaining community hockey rinks. (The bank sponsors a program which supports these individuals and so it is hoping, I guess, that you acknowledge what fine corporate citizens they are and do more

business with them). In Edmonton every community has a rink that is available for members to use. But there is a catch, and that is that the rink needs to be overseen. Believe me, growing ice is no problem! However, things like opening and closing the rink, shaving the ice, repairing divots...take time and sustained effort. Also, extra projects which try to make the rink more community friendly are also the responsibility of people like Bob. In the ad, for instance, Bob converts one of the storage rooms into a female changing room so girls can participate in hockey without the bother of coming to the rink dressed to play. Nice touch!

Now what does all of this have to do with Catholic schools? I have done a lot of work over the years with Catholic schools on a number of levels; working with teachers, developing religious education programs, teaching courses for school leaders, *etc. etc.* In that time one thing has become increasingly apparent to me. The point that I want to make here is that I see a fundamental similarity between the fate of community ice rinks and that of Catholic schools. How so? In order to flourish both depend on Bob and others like him.

It is true that some community rinks get by without having a Bob to call on. These rinks have very restricted opening hours, there is a limited range of activities—for example, you can’t play hockey because if the ice isn’t relatively smooth the puck flies everywhere, and you can assume that no one is going to make a special effort to build a ladies change room.

Let’s try to extend this argument to Catholic schools. They can exist, in a fashion, and

provide a basic level of service without Bob and his ilk, but they are operating far below their capacity especially in a culture where there are many alternatives and—to stretch the analogy—average hockey rinks are in hot competition with other options.

In concise terms one of the challenges facing the Church today and in the immediate future in countries such as Australia is one of what economists would call human capital. Any group which cannot point to a significant number of members who are highly committed to it faces a problematic future: without Bob the rink will either close or offer restricted service.

To give one example of this in relation to Catholic schools, consider the case of Kathy. Schools are particularly important for, as Kelly reminds us, ‘the flagship of Catholic commitment to Australian culture has been the enormous institution of church schools’.

Kathy—the Bob of Catholic Schools.

Kathy is married and her children are now adults. She started teaching in Catholic secondary schools in 1969. In her career she has been a Year Level and Religious Education Coordinator and a Deputy Principal. She has also had some time away from schools when her children were young. Over the years Kathy has had a long involvement in her parish...

The list of Kathy’s accomplishments could be extended even further. There are at least two points to note here, leading to a number of pertinent questions that go to the heart of the need for the new evangelization. Firstly, Kathy has been at the forefront of providing leadership and embodying the religious dimensions of Catholic schools. Kathy is a good example of the conviction that Benedict XVI spoke of at his address on Catholic education at Catholic University of American on 17/4/2008:

A university or school’s Catholic identity is not simply a question of the number of Catholic students. It is a question of conviction. Do we



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accept the truth Christ reveals? Is faith tangible in our universities and schools? (Pope Benedict’s address to Catholic Educators on his journey to the United States, 17th April 2008; see www.vatican.va.)

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.

Secondly, Kathy, and many others like her, will retire in the very near future—it’s now official: the first baby boomers have turned 65! A critical question that this poses 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’.

Let me return for a moment to the bank ad about Bob. The ad shows people dropping off their kids at the rink, thanking Bob for his efforts and even being prepared to chip in on occasion. All of this is important, but it still depends on Bob’s providing a sustaining presence at the rink.

In terms of Catholic schools many teachers and those associated with the school community bring a range of strong human qualities and professional competence to their working lives. They may accurately describe themselves as being spiritual rather than religious—a topic we could say a lot more about.

How many, though, are prepared to create and animate the ethos of the institution instead of just supporting it?

In terms of the work that Kathy does, who is going to teach religious education in a convincing manner; who is going to help prepare liturgies; who is going to help induct new teachers into the school's ethos? On a deeper level, who is going to give embodiment to the beliefs and values that the school proclaims?

The pivotal role played by Kathy arises out of her sense of being a living witness. This is the vital link that makes talk of the Catholic culture of schools come alive and be more than a series of programs or inanimate ideas. Chaput in quite stark terms reminds us of the fate of Catholic institutions if they rely on a sense of culture that is not closely associated with overt personal response:

Catholic culture comes from an active Catholic faith. Unless we truly believe and practice our faith, 'Catholic culture' is just a dead skin of nostalgia and comfortable habits. (Charles J. Chaput *A Light to the Nations: The Meaning and Future of the Catholic Church*, obtained on 1/4/2008 from <http://www.holyspiritinteractive.net/columns/guest/charlesjchaput/alight.asp>)

The human element is an irreplaceable part of the Church's ability to proclaim its message in the third millennium. It is important

not to overstate this argument. Catholic institutions do not need to be made up exclusively of people of strong personal commitment, to be disciples of Christ in the full sense of the term. It is probably not critical that a majority of people show this type of dedicated service—I suppose having too many Bobs could create some problems! The case that is being made here is, ultimately, not a moral one but a pragmatic one; there is a point below which the work of the school in the world is imperilled if it does not have a sufficient number of highly committed individuals to carry this work forward. The exact ratio may differ depending on circumstances, but it does exist. This highly committed group is not in opposition to more loosely affiliated individuals but it is 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.

To conclude, Avery Dulles writing in *Theological Studies* in 1984 commented, 'Christianity even more than the scientific community needs mature believers who have personally appropriated the patrimony and who can transmit it by example and formative influence'.

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PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRINITARIAN LIFE FOR US

DENIS TOOHEY

Part Three: *Living Marriage as Vocation in the Life of the Trinity*

IN PART ONE of this series, the doctrine of the Trinity was explored through the work of Walter Kasper and Catherine LaCugna. By putting emphasis on the saving work of God in the world (rather than the life within Godself) and on the relational dimension of the meaning of ‘person’, these authors showed how the Trinity can start to be seen as the perfect communion with implications for how we can lead our lives.

Part Two identified twelve particular attributes from this re-vitalised understanding of Trinity and considered them from the perspective of their likeness to the marital relationship. Through these twelve attributes, it was shown that, in their marital relationship, a man and a woman can together image the Trinity, albeit in a limited human way.

In this current Part Three, an understanding of how marriage as vocation is lived in the life and image of the Trinity is developed by briefly outlining various authors’ perspectives of marital vocation and then gathering aspects of their work together within the twelve attributes of trinitarian life identified from the reflections in Parts One and Two.

Perspectives of Marriage as Vocation

The concept of marriage as vocation has been explored by many theologians and other authors. Here, the approaches of eleven authors are, for purposes of convenience and differentiation, given a label to indicate the primary perspective.

The psychological perspective of Evelyn

and James Whitehead sees a successful marriage dependent on a lifelong maturing of the couple in response to their growing awareness of their own identities and to the realisation of invitation coming from a loving God (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 199). In his ‘self-actualising’ perspective, William P Roberts sees each of us as being called to image this loving God by becoming ‘all we can be’ in both our state of life (married, single or celibate) and our occupation or role (Roberts 2004, 99-101).

From an ethical perspective on the married state of life, David Leal looks particularly at the ‘internal goods’—the experiences of the couple—and sees marriage as vocation to be a special calling not just to the married state but even to one particular person, chosen above all others (Leal 1996, 7). Walter Kirchschrager draws on Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians for a biblical perspective in which he notes that marriage as a spiritual gift (synonymous with ‘God’s call’) is not only for the benefit of the couple itself but also for the benefit of the church and the world by giving testimony of God’s loving life in Trinity (Kirschrager 2003, 159-161).

This experience of the God of love within the life of the married couple also comes through in Carlo Rocchetta’s three main areas for reflection in his sacramental perspective of marriage as vocation, as consecration and as communion (Rocchetta 1996, 5). From a missionary perspective, Thomas M Kelly argues a Christian marriage which takes place within an ecclesial community can both give

and receive much: the couple provides a visible example of and witness to the unconditional love of God through their unconditional commitment to each other and their outreach beyond this; the church provides the married couple with a supportive community that challenges materialism and convenient relationships (Kelly 2004, 153).

Coming from a marital spirituality perspective, Monica Sandor observes that true marital love is now understood to participate in the very being of God rather than merely being a metaphor for the love of God. Her research suggests that the Christian vocation of the married couple is to experience in their life together that ‘the personal spiritual quest for holiness overflows into the building up of the kingdom of God’ (Sandor 2004, 174). For Patton and Childs in their pastoral care perspective, marriage—understood as a shared calling—is not about living up to preconceived ideals but rather an undertaking to be involved deeply in the real world (Patton & Childs 1998, 101).

Adopting a societal perspective, William Johnson Everett also considers the private and public dimensions of the life of the married couple. He sees that to have a vocation is to be called out and lured ‘by a power and a purpose beyond ourselves’ to that which is not yet—‘the unique new life God intends for us’ within God’s redemptive purpose. Each married couple forges a new and unique identity which seeks its own worldly manifestation as the couple’s vocation (Everett 1985, 111-3).

From a feminist perspective, Denise Carmody seeks a fuller recognition (and hence expression) of vocation both for women and for the married couple in the life of the church. The church’s standard of suitability for ministry should be determined by a person’s gifts of the Spirit, not by one’s gender or marital status (Carmody 1985, 163-7). Another author seeking a fuller expression of the couple’s gifts is Julie Hanlon Rubio who argues that Christian mothers and fathers have a ‘dual voca-



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tion’—to care for their children and to contribute to the betterment of society. The call to be active disciples in the world today is especially strong for Catholics whose rich tradition of social teaching stresses the spiritual dimension of work and the prophetic role of the family in society. However, it is necessary to balance this with the commitment to care for children which is also part of the Christian tradition (Rubio 2004, 193-6).

Marriage as Vocation and Trinitarian Life

Aspects of the work of these eleven authors are now gathered within the twelve attributes of trinitarian life which were first noted in the previous article to demonstrate how, through their vocation, the married couple images Trinity (albeit to a limited extent).

1 Love

Just as the Trinity is founded on love, so too a personal vocation is a particular way of being called ‘to love, to care for world and to witness to Christian faith’ (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 199). The vocational aspect of marriage occurs within an intimate partnership of life and love which is a manifest realisation of the love of Christ as Redeemer and of the irrevocable love of God for humankind (Roccheta 1996, 6-9). The married couple is called to grow in their love (Sandor 2005, 255) which first renews them and then seeks to spread out and renew the earth (Everett 1985, 113).

2 Self-Giving and Receiving

Characteristic of successful marriages, the trinitarian sense of self-giving and receiving depends on confidence in 'self' (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 195) and on awareness, acceptance and practice of one's particular spiritual gifts, or 'God's call' (Kirschlager 2003, 158-9). The spouses participate no longer as individuals but as a couple (Rocchetta 1996, 9) in an active form of discipleship, of mutual giving and receiving (Kelly 2004, 149), by being Christ-like to each other (Roberts 2004, 102) and by putting the needs of the other before one's own (Sandor 2005, 248).

3 Freedom of Choice

The love in marriage is also given in freedom of choice. Marriage should be a chosen way of life which matches both identity and calling (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 208). To marry before being aware of one's vocation is to marry prematurely (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 201) because a vocation, whether taken to refer to a state of life or an occupation, must be freely chosen on its own set of merits for each person (Roberts 2004, 99). Leal's view of marriage as vocation also includes the calling not just to marry but to marry a particular person, chosen above all others, and he adds that the couple's consent is to share together a largely unknown future involving change and transformation (Leal 1996, 12-17). Kirschlager adds that 'marriage is not simply a choice but is God's calling of two persons within a community' (Kirschlager 2003, 158).

4 Persons in Relationship

It is perhaps as persons in relationship that the married couple most closely resembles the Trinity. Just as their relationality gives meaning to the three divine persons, it is the process of 'becoming one flesh' that gives meaning and purpose to a marriage. Rocchetta sees the vocational aspect of marriage as being es-

entially expressed in the man-woman relationship, occurring within their human community of love, not beyond or above it (Rocchetta 1996, 6). Patton and Childs agree on the importance of the relationship when they say that vocation is a way of looking at life and marriage as a process, with its meaning discovered from the journey itself rather than the manner in which the journey was begun (Patton & Childs 1998, 101).

Kirschlager finds even in Paul's rulings in 1 Cor 7 that marriage is described 'less in legal terms than in terms of the persons involved', i.e. in the relationship with each other. Kirschlager specifically sees that marriage images trinitarian life by participating in the process of a diverse sharing of life that reflects the vibrant life of God (Kirschlager 2003, 157-8). Kelly believes that in an intrinsically sacramental marriage, the spouses consciously choose to focus on their relationships, rather than on worldly things, but also accepts that these relationships do not always run smoothly (Kelly 2004, 152). Along similar lines, Leal sees marriage as a vocation towards a future and a quality of relationship which largely cannot be predicted (Leal 1996, 16-17). For Sandor, the core vocation of the couple includes the call to 'incarnate in their relationship ... the peace and unity that Jesus prayed for' (Sandor 2005, 248). In arguing that the couple's vocation flows from their baptismal life, Roberts sees that, as the couple grows in marital union and overcomes divisive issues, their relationship comes to new life and, relying on the action of God's Spirit, empowers them to grow in shared truth and love to reach out to the broader human community (Roberts 2004, 101).

So, just as the relationships among the Father, Son and Spirit are essential to the meaning of trinitarian life, it is the relationship between husband and wife which gives primary meaning to their vocation.

5 Equality

That being called to marriage as vocation means that the persons in the relationship are

equal is mostly accepted and implied in the various authors' perspectives in words such as 'mutual' and 'shared', rather than expressly stated. While Kirchschrager notes from 1 Cor 7 that Paul understands marriage as 'a partnership of equals' (Kirchschrager 2003, 158), it is perhaps not surprising that Carmody's feminist perspective emphasises the point most clearly when she writes that the gift of femininity 'moves marriage towards an equal partnership, a shared life in which humanity actually is male-female, woman-man'. She later goes on to assert the priority of marriage among the sacraments 'because it most clearly shows the male-femaleness of our image of God' and laments the lack of equal rights for married people among the Catholic Church's administrative structures—a non-trinitarian approach (Carmody 1985, 163 & 167). Just as there is equality of the persons of the Trinity even though there is a significant differentiation of roles, so too husband and wife—created by God as equals—share equally in their vocation, albeit in different ways.

6 Unity

There is widespread acceptance that marriage as vocation involves a process of change and transformation of the spouses such that their love forms a unity—a communion of love. It is especially in this way that the couple can image the Trinity where the interaction in love brings about perfect communion. Everett sees that call to the vocation of marriage in part emanates from human need and desire for one's sense of worth to be affirmed and that this happens in the experience of marital communion which leads to the forging of a new and unique identity (Everett 1985, 111-2). Carmody adds that through their marital communion the couple can together accomplish things that neither could alone (Carmody 1985, 163). Leal agrees that becoming 'one flesh' is a way of living 'which is both more than and other than the two people who enter it' (Leal 1996, 15).

For Rocchetta, 'it is the very community of

love between man and woman which, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, becomes a 'sacrament' in Christ and in the Church' (Rocchetta 1996, 6). Kelly also refers to the couple's 'true community of love' from which the mission of social transformation emerges (Kelly 2004, 153). The couple's growing together in marital union and giving of themselves to each other brings new life in their relationship and opens themselves to greater communion with God (Roberts 2004, 101-3) which is part of the 'personal quest for holiness' within the Christian vocation of the married couple (Sandor 2004, 174).

7 Differentiation

A true vocation is one that also preserves within the marital unity the differentiation or uniqueness of each spouse. As earlier noted, the persons of the Trinity, though equal, have different roles; this is also true for the married couple. The Whiteheads caution that to marry before one has some awareness of one's own vocation is to marry prematurely and that, while marriage is a commitment to faithfulness to each other, faithfulness does not begin in marriage but in fidelity to who one is called by God to be (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 201 & 211). Roberts agrees that one's vocation is to image God, who loves each of us in our unrepeatable individuality, by becoming all we can be in accordance with our unique personality and gifts (Roberts 2004, 99). Hence, these authors are in agreement that one's 'state of life' vocation needs to be discerned from one's gifts and sense of call – and that this vocation may not be to marriage; but even if it is to marriage, then there is still a need to be true to oneself. Kelly sees that in a sacramental marriage the spouses consciously seek to fully realise each other's humanity and thereby will the good of each other (Kelly 2004, 152).

Patton and Child have a view of marriage as vocation to mean an understanding of the two spouses—separately and together—being responsible for making a future (Patton &

Childs 1998, 101). Everett points out that as well as the couple having its own vocation, another equally important aspect of vocation recognises that each of us has a unique role to play in God's renewal of creation (Everett 1985, 113). Similarly, Carmody asserts the couple's vocation with her expression, 'the gift of marriage', as well as emphasising the unique contribution of each partner in her use of 'the gift of femininity' (and by implication, the gift of masculinity) which is not forgone within the unity of marriage (Carmody 1985, 163).

8 Intimacy

The vocation of the couples in marriage to become 'one flesh' requires that within their unity there is profound intimacy. It is by accepting sexual life and intimacy 'as gifts from God and as finite images of God's very life' that, by becoming one, the couple most closely images trinitarian unity and intimacy (Roberts 2004, 100). Marriage is described by the Catholic Church as 'an intimate partnership of life and love' (Gaudium et Spes, n. 48). The intimacy within marriage refers to much more than only conjugal union and is achieved through the self-giving in love and the continual striving to break down barriers through greater honesty, humility and empathy (Roberts 2004, 103).

9 Permanence

In choosing the vocation of marriage, the partners must commit to the relationship as being permanent, as the lifetime sharing of one's self with another (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 195). As much as is possible in human terms, this images the eternal vocation of the Trinity. The Catholic Church refers to marriage as 'an unbreakable unity' demanding total fidelity (Gaudium et Spes, n. 48). However, Leal points out that the marrying couple are giving their consents to a future which is largely unknown (Leal 1996, 16-17). Similarly, the Whiteheads recognise that a vocation is 'a lifelong conver-

sation (rather than a single cosmic command)' and hence there is a need for the couple to 'learn the difficult virtue of fidelity to growing and changing persons'—oneself included.

Patton and Childs also acknowledge that marriage, as a shared calling, is not about living up to preconceived ideals but rather an undertaking to be involved deeply in the real world (Patton & Childs 1998, 101). Kelly goes even further by saying that there needs to be a better understanding of marriage that 'allows for the human element ... to fail at times, even break completely' so that real married love can become 'a form of discipleship ... and not a form of magic' (Kelly 2004, 149). Hence, while virtually all Christian marriages are undertaken as a calling to a permanent relationship (and most are lived out that way), human aspects in the changing circumstances of real life will inevitably mean that some marriages will fail.

10 Fruitfulness

The vocation of marriage usually carries with it expectations—by the couple, the church and society—that the unified love will be fruitful, especially in the procreation of children, in a way which parallels the creative and nurturing dimensions of Trinity. Indeed, this is a special and particular outcome of marriage intended by God and has been the dominant aspect emphasised by the church. The Whiteheads highlight the ongoing fruitfulness of Christian parents who, through living out their vocation of marriage, not only give birth to a new generation of Christians but also model for them a way of life which they too can later live out (Whitehead & Whitehead 1983, 207).

But the fruitfulness in marriage is not limited to procreation. Through their love for each other and the presence of the Spirit, the couple grows in themselves and in their giftedness which is another level of fruitfulness. (However, while fruitfulness is undoubtedly an important attribute, church and society have tended

to focus most heavily on this fruitful aspect of marriage and the good that comes from it while largely ignoring the transcendent and transforming dimensions covered below.)

11 Transcendence

The married couple begins to fulfil their vocation further when their unified love becomes transcendent such that they begin to reach beyond the relationship between themselves and with their immediate family. Kirchsclager, Kelly and Roberts use similar language to describe how the sacramentally-married couple, through their mutual love, reach out to meet the needs of the vulnerable and weak when they share this love with them for the others' sake rather than their own; in doing so, they witness to God as a God of love (Kirschlager 2003, 161; Kelly 2004, 150 & Roberts 2004, 102).

Sandor's research finds a growing recognition of the need to correct what is now being seen as an inward focus on the family but also acknowledges that there is a delicate balance involved and that developing an outward focus may depend on the married couple reaching a more mature stage of their journey together (Sandor 2004, 172-3). Rubio addresses the issue directly with her 'dual vocation' approach and draws on Jesus' teaching to warn that the married couple, as disciples of Jesus, must not make care for their family their only mission in life (Rubio 2004, 195).

12 Transformation

Marriage as a vocation undoubtedly reaches its climax when the couple becomes a transforming force in the world. As well as fulfilling their own vocations through marriage, the couple—through the process of becoming 'one flesh' forges a new and unique identity which itself seeks expression as the couple's vocation (Everett 1985, 113). In this way, marriage has a purpose beyond the benefit of the two persons involved; by imaging and participat-

ing in trinitarian life, the couple is able to introduce this process to the world and by understanding that their love for each other is a foretaste of God's love, they give testimony to this hope and belief through their marital life (Kirschlager 2003, 157-8). Rocchetta sees that the couple's covenant with each other takes place 'in the Lord' and 'transforms the earthly reality of marriage into a mystery of salvation.' (Rocchetta 1996, 6) In identifying marriage as an historical realisation of God's love for humankind, Rocchetta describes the vocational nature of marriage as a mission (Rocchetta 1996, 10).

Kelly develops the outward mission aspect further by envisioning marriage and family as a transforming source in society; by acting as leaven for the church's mission of proclaiming and furthering the reign of God in the world today, they become the principal way in which Catholic social thought impacts on it (Kelly 2004, 144) as they challenge 'ignorance, injustices and obstinacies' (Roberts 2004, 103). Everett expresses this as the redemptive and innovative impact of the couple's love which, having first renewed them, now seeks to spread out and renew the earth. Everett laments that within the church and society, this sense of joint vocation of the couple has been largely ignored and that the redemptive-innovative aspect has been carried almost solely by unmarried individuals (Everett 1985, 113-4).

This is very similar to Carmody's argument that the church has undervalued and underutilised not only the 'gift of femininity' but also 'the gift of marriage'; this argument leads her to claim that the church's standard of suitability for ministry should be determined by a person's gifts of the Spirit, not by one's gender or marital status (Carmody 1985, 158-167). This issue also troubles Rubio who notes that, while contemporary Christianity celebrates the 'dual vocation' of marriage, it also upholds the 'higher calling' of celibacy and in doing so implicitly questions the sacredness of marriage and family life (Rubio 2004, 195).

Conclusion

A re-vitalised understanding of the Trinity as outlined in Part One provides the basis for a better appreciation of how the marital relationship can be the closest human image of and likeness to it. This was demonstrated in Part Two by considering relevant and common attributes of both the trinitarian and marital relationships.

The trinitarian relationship also serves as a model or pattern for the married couple to follow in their life together. By modelling their marriage on this perfect example of unity and community, the couple begins to fulfil its vocation in bringing about the reign of God not only in their own lives and family but also, through their witness to the love of God, in the world.

When truly called to use their gifts and coupleness in full realisation and understanding of trinitarian life for the betterment of the world, the couple does not only image and model Trinity but also participates in trinitarian life. God came to us in the human form of Je-

sus to be with and to involve us. Through baptism we are drawn into this trinitarian life. Far from being a lesser calling, marriage can in fact be the highest human participation in or example of trinitarian life.

If then marriage is the sacrament of trinitarian life, for the sacrament to be the true sign of what it represents the couple must strive beyond their own relationship and family just as God as Trinity has reached out to include humanity within trinitarian life.

This striving is itself part of God's plan—the vocation of the couple—and God's way of using the couple in the trinitarian work of salvation. The married couple, within the fullest expression of their sacramental marriage, image Christ as they strive for peace and unity.

While there is a growing understanding of the significance of the marriage vocation and its transforming potential for both the church and the world, this is not yet fully appreciated by most couples themselves, by society in general or within the church's administrative structures.

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CATHOLIC PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Reflections on an Emerging Field

TERRY A. VELING

Abstract: This essay is a reflection on the place of Catholic practical theology within the field of theological disciplines. It suggests that practical theology is a discipline in the sense that it is a *practice* or a way of life—a discipleship. To venture a theological life is to live *theologically*. It is not so much to ask about the ways that theology can be made practical; rather, it is to ask how the practices of my life can be made *theological*.

FOR SOME YEARS now, I've never quite known where to place myself as a theologian. When I am asked (at conferences or conventions, for example), 'What is your area?' or 'What do you teach?', I always feel a little lost for words. None of the designated areas of theology offer me a ready place to hang my hat.

When I look at the books on my shelves, there seem so few that qualify as 'theology books' – unless one considers that books on philosophy, culture, poetry, education, etc, have something to do with theology. I've always had an instinct that theology isn't meant to operate as a discipline unto its own or with a haughtiness that separates it from other human disciplines. If it is a 'divine discourse' or a 'sacred discipline,' then it seems to me that the Christian tradition has always urged the intimate bond between the divine and the human. As the Second Vatican Council so eloquently says, nothing authentically human is alien to the Gospel.¹

I was initially attracted to practical theology because of its interests in connecting theories/ideas/texts with practice/life/reality. It seemed to understand the link between theology and life, heaven and earth, question and answer, call and response. I also liked its lack

of self-regard—it didn't seem too pre-occupied with itself and it didn't feel 'boxed-in' or 'pinned-down.' I liked its beautiful ambiguity, its unabashed complexity, its passion, its life, its energy. As Karl Rahner suggests, '*everything* is its subject-matter.'² Moreover, it seemed to give me a place to hang my hat, so that when someone asked about what I do or what I teach or what my area was, I could reply: 'practical theology.' Of course, the next question would be, 'what's that?'—but at least a conversation could ensue. Or, people would simply be satisfied, 'Oh, so you make theology practical and concrete in people's real lives' (the typical stock-standard response).

I have a love-hate relationship with the phrase 'practical theology.' It's a cold, hard term. It also carries connotations of making theology practical lest it be of little or no use. I like the Catholic instincts behind the phrase 'pastoral theology'—to shepherd each other's lives, to be pastoral people through and through, filled with God's love and mercy. That's much more poetic than being 'practical.' But of course 'pastoral' also has its own connotations of limiting itself to such areas as pastoral care, ministry, counseling, *etc* (none of which I am specifically trained in).

In my recent book, *Practical Theology: On*

Earth as It Is in Heaven, I was surprised to find myself arguing against practical theology as much as I argued for it.³ There are conceptions of practical theology that are misconceptions. For example, that theology needs to be made practical. Or that theology isn't of much use, unless it can be made useful. Or that we need to take theology—which sits in a rarefied and abstract realm—and turn it into something relevant and applicable. Generally speaking, Western society doesn't like to suffer useless things (or useless people). It likes progress and achievement. It likes concrete facts and ideas that are tested. It likes things that are workable and effective—even though, any trip to the shopping mall will quickly reveal the plethora of useless things we produce and consume.

Many people are interested in the method of practical theology, as though it offered a secret recipe that could produce successful outcomes. The word *method*, however, comes from the Greek word, *methodos*, which means a *path* or a *way*. Practical theology is a choice to practice a theological way of life—a choice or a decision that doesn't come at the end of a process like an outcome, but rather stands at the beginning, like a true test of faith: 'Can I practice *this way of life*?'

In his study of ancient philosophy, Pierre Hadot notes that philosophy was never conceived by the ancients as a *mastery of life*—borne of speculative theorizing—but always as a *practice*, a *discipline*, a *way to follow*, a *questioning* and a *searching*. While the ancient philosophical schools were guided by ideals and *forms of life*—the true, the good, and the beautiful, for example—these were never considered as remote ideals or detached theories; rather, they were tasks to be enacted in our world. The ancients knew that the great universals such as 'the true, the good, and the beautiful' would remain great abstractions unless they were invested with a real weight or 'heaviness' that anchors them in actual existence. They considered that humans were the 'bearers' of these virtues in such ways that



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unless we learnt to *practice* them, we would remain mired in falsity and illusion—in lies, in hatred, and in ugliness. Rather than offer abstract principles, philosophical discourse 'always intended to produce an effect, to create a *habitus* within the soul, or to provoke a transformation of the self.' It sought to 'render active, efficacious, alive—to inspire judgments which generate useful acts, and choices in favour of the good.'⁴ The philosophical way was always in search of the best way to live. The goal was never simply knowledge, but the practice of a way of life. 'From this perspective,' Hadot says, 'we can define philosophical discourse as a spiritual exercise—in other words, as a practice intended to carry out a radical change in our being.'⁵ Unlike the many 'how to' books that fill the shelves of our bookstores today, knowledge was not an 'ensemble of propositions or formulas which could be written, communicated or sold ready-made.' Rather:

We must discern the philosopher's underlying intention, which was not to develop a discourse which had its end in itself but to act upon souls... Whether the goal was to convert, to console, to cure or to exhort the audience, the point was always and above all not to communicate to them some ready-made knowledge but to *form* them. The goal was to change people's way of living and of seeing the world.⁶

Hadot notes that Christianity, especially in the monastic movements, was also considered as a *philosophia*, as a way of life that sought to live according to the paths of divine Wisdom.⁷ Indeed, Ellen Charry has recently shown

that early Christian doctrines and teachings were less concerned with developing conceptual theories and more concerned with the promotion of virtue and a life of ‘Christian excellence.’ Knowing the truth implied ‘loving it, wanting it, and being transformed by it.’ Theory was not opposed to practice. Rather, theology was an exercise of life ‘nurtured through prayer, reflection, and the study of God’s word.’⁸

In modern thought, practice is often contrasted with theory. Practical theology is an attempt to heal this dichotomy, so that thought and deed can *work together* rather than against each other. David Tracy refers to the dichotomy between theory and practice as a ‘fatal split.’⁹ When we divide theory and practice, we injure life, and it is the task of practical theology to heal this fatal wound.

Often, we are impatient with ‘theories.’ We can easily dismiss them as heady speculations. We want to get on with life. Unlike theory, or in contrast to theory, we typically associate the word ‘practical’ with things that are *useful, workable, feasible, doable, realistic, sensible, functional, pragmatic, applied, hands-on, effective, relevant*. These ‘practical’ words carry a positive content for our modern ears. We like to feel useful and productive. We like things that are relevant and applicable. Theology would lose its very soul if it were reduced to this understanding of the word ‘practical.’

In a strange twist, however, there is also a sense in which we privilege theory over practice. Theory is the bright light that illumines all we do. Theory represents our ‘thinking selves,’ so highly prized in Western philosophy. It comes first and foremost. Practice plays second-fiddle to theory because practice typically comes *after* theory, in second-place. Practice is what remains after theory has accomplished all its winning work—all that now needs to be done is for practice to demonstrate or test how well the theory works. Too often practice functions as the hand-maiden of theory. In terms of theology, we have often considered ‘systematic’ theology as the queen bee,

and ‘pastoral’ theology as the worker bee.

Practical theology sees theory and practice as partners that belong together. They are made for each other. They require each other. Action requires reflection. Reflection requires action. They are not one or the other; they go hand-in-hand.

At one point in my book, I likened practical theology to a ‘rolling stone,’ and wrote:

Practical theology—always moving and restless—cannot stop to gather and formalize itself into a neat and tidy system or specialization of theology. ‘Once upon a time you dressed so fine,’ Dylan says. Yet while it is tempting to debate the formalities and proprieties of practical theology in academic journals and convention halls, practical theology nevertheless finds itself continually underdressed for the occasion, like an unruly itinerant, always on the move, on the way, *viatores*, as Aquinas said, ‘people on the road.’ There is a very real sense in which practical theology is ‘without a home/like a complete unknown/like a rolling stone’ (Dylan). It resembles its teacher who had ‘nowhere to lay his head’ (Matt 8:20), and who sent his disciples out into the world to move from town to town, ‘with no bag for your journey, or sandals, or a staff,’ proclaiming that the ‘kingdom of heaven has come near’ (Matt 10:10,7). So what does it mean to do practical theology? How does it feel? It feels like being-on-the-road, being-underway, even being homeless, in brief: discipleship.¹⁰

Practical theology is a discipline in the sense that it is a ‘practice’ or a way of life—a ‘discipleship.’ What I learnt from writing a book on practical theology is that to venture a theological life is *to live theologically*. It is not so much to ask about the ways that theology can be made practical; rather, it is to ask how the practices of my life can be made *theological*.

It would be a mistake to assume that practical theology is simply arguing for a ‘practical method’—something that will turn our systematic workings into practical workings. Rather, it is arguing for the somewhat maddening idea that we actually have to live the Gospel message much more than we think. J.B.

Metz says: ‘In itself, the Christian idea of God is a practical idea. God cannot be thought of at all unless this idea irritates and encroaches on the immediate interests of the person who is trying to think it.’ He then offers this rather maddening statement about the ‘folly’ of Christ: ‘Christ has always to be thought of in such a way that he is not simply thought of.’ Rather, ‘All Christology is nourished, for the sake of its own truth, by praxis and particularly the praxis of the imitation of Christ. It is, in other words, expressed in practical knowledge.’¹¹ Two simple verses from Luke’s gospel are enough to exemplify Metz’ point: ‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you’ (6:36-38).

‘If God were a theory,’ writes Abraham Heschel, ‘the study of theology would be a way to understand him.’¹² What if God were not a theory, but a method? What if we were meant to be studying, not the ‘theory’ of God, but rather the ‘way’ of God—God’s method, God’s ways, God’s thoughts, God’s hopes, God’s desires, God’s concerns—or, in traditional theological language—God’s will? At its simplest—and yet most difficult—practical theology is a way of life that needs to be practiced.

Will Catholic practical theology eventually find a home within the field of theological disciplines? My own sense is that practical theology readily lends itself to a deep reception within Catholic theological circles. I am thinking, for example, of the following highlights of the Catholic theological tradition, all of which draw us into the living practices of our faith:

- (i) A deep appreciation and respect for human cultures, with the ever-constant need for dialogue among us, evidenced in the documents of Vatican II and advanced by many contemporary Catholic theologians.
- (ii) A reflective body of Catholic social teachings, stressing the dignity of the human person and the inseparability be-

tween the love of God and the love of neighbour. *Divinitas* can never be separated from *humanitas*. We cannot love God unless we love our brother and sister.

- (iii) A rich sacramental tradition that recognizes God’s presence in the ordinary and the ‘down-to-earth.’ An ‘analogical imagination’ that finds divine correspondences ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’
- (iv) A prophetic imagination, especially as this has been advanced and developed by Catholic liberation and political theologians.
- (v) A profound respect for faith working together with reason, and for faith working together with good works. To love God ‘with all your heart and mind and soul and hands.’
- (vi) A deep and sustained awareness that the Scriptures have been read and received by fellow travelers over many centuries, and that we stand in this long line of descendents—called, like them, to activate the meaning of the Scriptures for our own times and in response to our own searching questions.
- (vii) A spirituality that recognizes life’s joyous, sorrowful and glorious mysteries.
- (viii) A commitment to finding and promoting the ‘Good’ in all things. A confidence in God’s love for the world, especially as that love inclines toward the least and the last.¹³

Exemplary truths are often considered as high ideals, yet that does not mean they are therefore impractical. Rather, it means that they continually put us to the test. ‘Examine yourselves to see if you are living in the faith. Test yourselves’ (2 Cor 13:5). As Emmanuel Levinas suggests, there is a very real sense in which ‘every truth must be attested,’ such that truth is always tied to ‘the veracity of the people who testify to it.’¹⁴ The gospel saying, ‘You will know them by their fruits’ (Matt 7:16), suggests that truth is intimately linked with those who *testify* or *bear witness* to the truth they are liv-

ing. The *practice* of truth is not something ‘added’ to truth; rather, the practice of truth *inheres* in truth, such that without a living testimony or witness, truth would ring hollow or, as St. Paul says, it would simply be a ‘noisy gong or a clanging cymbal’ (1 Cor 13:1).

Catholic practical theology requires a ‘whole way of life’—an *exemplum vitae*, as Tom Ryan reminds us, citing Aquinas.¹⁵ It is not a part of something, a segment, a piece, a specialized area or a set-aside realm. ‘This is what I understand by a theology that is practical,’ I wrote in my book. ‘It requires a way of life—living it, testing it, seeking it, treasuring it, daring it.’¹⁶

I would like to conclude with a poem from

Rainer Maria Rilke:

Only in our doing can we grasp you.
Only in our hands can we illumine you.
The mind is but a visitor:
it thinks us out of the world.

Each mind fabricates itself.
We sense its limits, for we have made them.
And just when we would flee them, you come
and make of yourself an offering.

I don’t want to think a place for you.
Speak to me from everywhere.
Your Gospel can be comprehended
without looking for its source.

When I go toward you
it is with my whole life.¹⁷

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ST. JOHN'S ACCOUNT OF THE PASSION

A Reflection

MARK O'BRIEN O.P.

ONE NOTICES a striking contrast between the end of John's account of the Passion and what precedes it. There much talk and action take place, mainly on the part of those who arrest Jesus, put him on trial, and eventually have him crucified. At the end Jesus is the only one who speaks; his final words are 'it is accomplished'. A sense of silence reigns as Joseph of Arimathaea and others quietly take the body away for burial. This brooding or pregnant silence is something that we often experience after witnessing some terrible or wonderful event and the crowd disperses. I'm sure that most of us were reduced to awed and horrified silence in seeing on TV the devastation wrought by the recent Queensland floods and the more recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Something similar can also happen when we witness a wonderful event.

These are not just empty silences; they call for or invite some response because we sense they are full of meaning. Human beings are always seeking to make sense of reality, to give meaning to life's experiences. John's account of the Passion provides us with a number of points for reflection that help us in the quest for the meaning of Jesus' death. But we human beings are limited, even inspired ones like evangelists. We see things from certain angles and we need to have others' angles on things otherwise we'd be stuck with just our particular take on reality. How much poorer our lives would be. So we can thank God for inspiring our four Gospel writers to give us four somewhat different angles on an event that we believe to be foundational for our faith and for

the whole of human history.

What are the particular features of Jesus' passion and death that John was inspired to 'see' and pass on to us? A key one is that the passion and death of Jesus is about the revelation of who God is and what is God's purpose for humanity. These two themes appear in the very first scene of John's account when Jesus asks those who have come to arrest him, 'Who are you looking for?' When they reply 'Jesus the Nazarene', Jesus says 'I am he'. Jesus' declaration is a clear echo of Exodus 3:14. When Moses asks what is the name of the God who is speaking to him at the mountain, God answers 'I am who I am'.

We often find statements in the Old Testament that God is doing something 'so that you may know that I am the Lord'. It is a particularly striking feature in the book of Ezekiel. One could be forgiven for thinking that God has an almighty ego and indeed this has to be the case because the Bible claims that it is only when we know who God is and what God's purpose is that we have a chance of knowing who we are and what life is about.

John is echoing Old Testament texts in order to proclaim that in Jesus we have the presence and manifestation in human form of God, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Appropriately therefore, John has the arresting party 'move back and fall to the ground' in adoration. But our God is not a God who repays violence with violence and Jesus allows himself to be taken prisoner.

At this point John signals a second key thing that he 'sees' in the passion and death

of Jesus; that God acts for our sakes. So Jesus provides for his disciples (who fail him) by commanding the arresting party to let them go free. And in obedience to the divine command they let the disciples go. A feature of John's account is the delicate balance that he seeks to strike between Jesus as sovereign divinity and Jesus as suffering humanity. John does not water down his account of the brutal treatment of Jesus: the reality and glory of God is revealed in the very real suffering of this human being.

These two themes or insights reappear towards the end of John's account, forming as it were a frame around the whole. Jesus, with divine authority, provides for Mary by telling the beloved disciple that 'this is your mother'. In the same way he provides for the beloved disciple by telling his mother 'this is your son'.

A further indication that the death of Jesus is a revelation of the presence of God and the triumph of God's purpose is Jesus' final words 'it is accomplished'. Within the context of John's Gospel, this does not mean 'it is over/ended' but that God's purpose in his life and death has been fulfilled. As God, Jesus is the only one who can make such an authoritative proclamation.

The lead-up to the crucifixion is dominated by two trial scenes, one before the Jewish high priest and the other before the Roman Pontius Pilate. Here John's account again draws attention to the presence and purpose of God in Jesus and it is, as before, in relation to two things. The first, to which Jesus testifies before both 'judges' is that he always speaks the truth openly. God is not a God of secrets but one who reveals—as the Bible claims. God has nothing to hide but is a mystery that is always unfolding its meaning.

We who are in the image and likeness of God are also mysteries that are forever unfolding their meaning. But a crucial difference between Jesus and ourselves is that we are sinners and this drives us to be secretive. Peter cannot speak the truth about who he is. In words that form a telling contrast to Jesus'



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earlier declaration 'I am he', Peter replies to his interrogators 'I am not'.

At times we all have stuff that we seek to hide from others who we see as prying eyes, wanting to take advantage of us. Our reaction to those who speak the truth about us, particularly a truth that cuts too close to the bone, is to slap them down (reduce them to silence) as the guards do to Jesus in the Gospel. Our supposedly open western society expends a lot of effort trying to shut up or shut down sources of information that expose our secrets. Yet the Bible teaches that this is a pointless exercise in relation to God because God knows all our supposed secrets anyway and comes to rid us of our fears about them. God does not seek to take advantage of us by exposing our failures but to give us the advantage; to free us from them and from the fear that they generate in us and in others. The truth that Jesus speaks about us is that we are, each one, unique and eternal presences of the image and likeness of God and that it is for the good of all humanity that this be made known and acknowledged. God is a lover and lovers do not impose; we are free to accept or reject God's invitation, God's courting of us. But it is not only bad for us but also bad for humanity and creation if we refuse or resist God's invitation to be 're-made' in the true image and likeness that we are meant to be.

Jesus' second testimony, that he is a king, is made before Pilate, the Roman governor. This scene provides a vivid contrast between God's notion of kingship and that of the domi-

nant power of the day, the Roman Empire. God's kingdom is not of this world; by that Jesus means that it is not another kingdom in competition for power as kingdoms and empires seem to have been and continue to be.

We like to speak of the great civilisations and their achievements, Rome being regarded as among the greatest. However, as I get older I have developed something of an aversion to celebrating 'great' civilisations. Sure, they have at times done good things but too often civilisation seems to me to mean one group living very well at another group's expense. So it has been in Australia where for over two hundred years now we have lived very well at the expense of the indigenous people of this land.

Kingdoms also see each other as rivals and competitors whereas God does not have to compete with anybody or any kingdom; God is sovereign and comes to free humanity from the desire to control others and from rivalries that frequently turn violent and destructive.

Jesus assures Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world and confirms this by pointing out to him that there is no army advancing to rescue Jesus. Pilate cannot appreciate any other kind of kingdom, particularly one that is about the truth, and so concludes that Jesus is completely insignificant, a threat to no one and should be released. His soldiers express much the same idea by dressing Jesus up as a toy king and mocking him with their little game. But they do not know that they are, in a way, acknowledging their one and only king—a touch of irony in John's account.

The almost inevitable outcome of a world that operates on secrecy, deceit, falsehood and violent control is ugliness and this is displayed in a most graphic way in the Roman practice of crucifixion. It is a telling irony that the greatest empire/civilisation of the day also had one of the cruellest and most degrading forms of execution. It was designed to make the victim repulsive to all onlookers and to instil into them fear of the same fate.

But this paradigmatic sign of how ugly

we human beings can be towards one another leads us to reflect on another powerful image in John's Gospel. Early in the Gospel (3:14) Jesus tells Nicodemus that 'just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life'. This is not only a reference to Jesus' crucifixion but also to a rather strange story in Numbers 21 where God tells Moses to make a bronze image of death-dealing serpents and hold it aloft. Any afflicted Israelite who looks on it is saved. The message seems to be that God can turn what is death-dealing into what is life giving.

At the end of John's account of his ministry, Jesus makes a second reference to his crucifixion as a lifting up (12:32) and adds that 'I will draw all people to myself'. The implication here is that God can transform what is most ugly and repulsive into what is beautiful and desirable. Christian art has sought to capture something of this mysterious transformation by the various ways it has represented the cross and the crucifix. One of the ugliest and most repulsive sights that a human being would ever see is turned into something beautiful and desirable. This theme is captured in John's report that the resurrected Jesus showed the disciples the marks of the crucifixion on his body, signs that now enhance his beauty and desirability rather than disfigure it (20:20). Similar reports occur in the other Gospels. The Gospels and works of art testify to the long-standing Christian devotion to the crucifix.

The emphasis on the presence of our good God in the figure of the suffering and dying Jesus, his testimony to the truth, and the theme of the beauty and desirability of the crucified Christ invite us to step outside the biblical world for a moment to draw on an insight of philosophy. According to the scholastic philosophers there are five attributes that above all characterise God. God *is* or *exists*, whereas the existence of everything else depends on God's existence and

on God's creative act. God is *one* because there is no other being that simply 'is'. God is *good* and the source of all goodness; God is also *true* and God is *beautiful*. From this we can draw the conclusion that the death and resurrection of Jesus is as complete a manifestation of God and God's purpose as can be made in this world to us limited human beings.

It reveals that Jesus is God, one in being with the Father. It reveals that all existence depends completely on God, as does Jesus in his humanity and all those who are bent on destroying him. God holds them lovingly in existence, hating their sin but loving them as sinners. God is good because Jesus through his life and death reveals that God is on our side, acting for our salvation. God is true, with no secrets and nothing to hide but unfolding the meaning of the Godhead to us. And last

but certainly not least, God is beautiful and desirable.

When we come to know God in Jesus, we will come to know what is true and good for us. In thus knowing God and acting accordingly, we will also come to appreciate that Jesus has given himself completely for our sake so that we too may become one in Christ. In this way we become fully our true, good and beautiful selves, each one of us in the image and likeness of Christ who is God.

Hopefully these few reflections will be of some use to those who have listened to or read John's Passion Narrative on Good Friday this year. Because it is an integral part of the mystery of Jesus, no one can claim that any explanation of it is complete. There is always more than our limited perspective can see at any one time; it will continue to unfold its meaning throughout human history.

BOOK REVIEW

Encounter, The Past and Future of Remote Kimberley by Brigida Nailon. Brigidine Sisters, Echuca, [2010], hard cover, 116 pages, illustrated, maps, ISBN 978-0-9579361 -7-1, RRP \$44.

The author, Sr Brigida Nailon csb, included with the complimentary copy she sent us a good synopsis of the book by Cathie Clement from Boab Bulletin):

'On 3 September 2008, the author of this book spoke to the Kimberley Society about what was then only a work in progress. An overview of her talk appeared in the *Boab Bulletin* in December of that year and is available on the Society's website.

'Sister Brigida's earlier works (as either author or editor) dealt with the encounter between Catholicism and Aboriginal peoples in

and beyond the Kimberley. Her new book draws on some of that material, delves into new areas, and ends with a philosophical look at the present.

'A 'Background' section introduces the author by way of her involvement with the church, education, and indigenous people. 'Beagle Bay Mission Stories' follow, telling something of life at the mission, leprosy, the taking of children from their parents, the Sisters of Saint John of God, and people's lives away from the mission. Author's comments on the individual stories clarify things mentioned in them, and, in some cases, explain how situ-

ations resulted from policies or legislation imposed on indigenous populations.

‘Chapter 2 discusses missionaries and their endeavours at Beagle Bay, La Grange and Balgo. It also mentions lay missionaries (male and female), Aboriginal workers, and Aboriginal girls who entered religious life. Some of the girls are shown in a photograph of Daughters of Mary Queen of Apostles, 1939-1951. A feature of this chapter is a long petition submitted to the 1934 Moseley Royal Commission into the condition and treatment of Aborigines. It concludes: ‘Again Sir we the Half-caste population of Broome ask you to give us our Freedom and ... release us from the stigma of a native and make us happy subjects of this our country.’ It is not the first time the petition has been published but, here, presented in its original handwritten form, it has a far greater impact than a closely typed transcript. It is through such material that Sister Brigida seeks to change not only how readers look at the problems faced by Aboriginal and mixed-descent people but also how they view those people in their own right.

‘The coverage of missions and missionaries continues in the post-war material in Chapter 3 where expansion into Wyndham, Halls Creek and other parts of the East Kimberley is mentioned. Here, too, there is discussion of parishes, communities and the significant social changes that took place in the 1960s and ’70s. The chapter concludes with a brief commentary on the limitations of academic analysis of both Australian missionary endeavour and the interaction and accommodation that occurred between the missionaries and those they sought to help.

‘Chapter 4 comprises an informative chronological commentary on Aboriginal legislation in Western Australia from 1829 to 1981. Self-determination is mentioned, and the discussion of social change continues in Chapter 5, culminating with a look at current di-

lemmas, aspirations and achievements, particularly in education. It ends with the following observation: ‘The Future lies with Education—It is in our hands to make it happen.’

‘The book can be purchased by sending a \$54 cheque or money order (made payable to Brigidine Sisters) to Sister Brigida Nailon, 1 Charlotte Street, Echuca 3564. That price includes postage within Australia.’

* * * *

The book is hard-covered and generous in size (12 in x 8 ½ in), handsome coffee table style, easy to browse through. The photos have been chosen for their historical content rather than for their artistic qualities – the complicated provenance of old mission photos leaves its mark on them.

The text is set in fairly small print: old eyes might have appreciated a point or two increase. As a producer of the now defunct missiological journal, *Nelen Yubu*, I must confess surprise at its absence from the bibliography or sources. I used to rely on the Kimberley missionaries to supply me with good juicy copy in the days when my fellow missionaries in the Territory found little to say—but of that rich missiological and sociological thought there is little sign. I think of the writings of Fr Dan Donovan in the area of spirituality and theological history; of the Josephite and Mercy Sisters as they laboured to help the people find the New Way in the East Kimberley and wrote about it; of Fr Noel McMaster’s densely conceived sociological analysis of the religious situation after the style of Liberation Theology; of Fr Kevin McKelson’s search for meaning embedded in custom and story; and of Fr Worms’ magisterial presentation of the lineaments of Aboriginal religion in the book some of us labored hard to make available to the English-speaking part of the Australian church.

—Martin Wilson MSC

PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

July—October 2011

From the Fourteenth to the Thirty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time

Prepared by Michael Trainor

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the readings for Sundays between July and October, from the Fourteenth to the Thirty First Sunday of Ordinary Time. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

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

political and religious lives. They invite us to identify God's action in our world.

The Second Readings allow us to follow Paul's theological message to three of his Jesus households, either ones for which he was responsible (Philippians, Thessalonians) or one that he was planning to visit (Romans). In the Sundays of Ordinary Time 14 to 24 we read Romans from chapter 9 to the end of the letter. Paul is writing from Corinth around 55CE and focuses on God's promises to Israel (OT 20, 21). He encourages the Roman disciples of Jesus to live authentically within their own culture, conscious of God's presence with them (OT 22, 23, 24). The readings from Philippians (OT 25-28), written around 56 CE from Ephesus, offer an opportunity to meditate on the power of life with God and the nature of this life that flows from communion with God. Paul models and encourages the qualities of a faith-filled life focussed on Jesus. On OT 29-31 (October 16-30) we turn our thoughts to the final weeks of the liturgical year and begin reading from the earliest writing of the New Testament, I Thessalonians. The letter written around 50CE from Corinth explores some of the most fundamental concerns of Christian living: our need for fidelity, openness with God and hospitality.

The Gospel readings continue from the Gospel of Matthew. This is a Jewish-Christian gospel, written in the late first century, to a Israelite followers of Jesus undergoing transition, struggle and searching for how to live in its own culture, faithful to the spirit of Je-

sus and engaging life. Our selection covers Mt 14-23. This part of the gospel is concerned with missionary endeavour, dealing with internal division and understanding religious history. The evangelist presents a portrait of Jesus concerned about disciples who want to know how to handle conflict and develop a form of leadership that is clear and embracing

of those who are excluded. The passages of Mt from OT 19-31 offer wonderful opportunities for contemporary Christian communities to reflect on their own issues: internal division, leadership and engagement with the wider society. These are perennial and ever relevant concerns for all communities throughout history.

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

July 3—Ordinary Time 14: *Zech 9:9-10.* God as King will come to deliver, protect and offer peace. *Rom 8:9.11-13* We possess God's Spirit who empowers our daily lives. *Mt 11:25-30* We are invited to come to Jesus who wants to be with us in our daily struggles. *Theme—God's Comfort.* Many today feel the burdens of life. Our faith community gathered in this Sunday Assembly reflects a gentle God who seeks to offer support and comfort to those who struggle. How is this happening practically at a local level?

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

July 1—Ordinary Time 16: *Wis 12:13.16-19.* God teaches, offers hope and wisdom. *Rom 8:26-27.* God's Spirit helps us in our weakness. *Mt 13:24-43.* This is the parable of good and evil... *Theme—Weakness.* The human experience of weakness and disaster invites us to draw close to a God who is present in our struggles. Mt's parables remind us of the realism of life's ambiguities which are part of discipleship and mysteriously reveal God's presence.

July 20—Ordinary Time 17: *1 Kings 3:5.7-*

12. Solomon is blessed for seeking a discerning wisdom rather than wealth. *Rom 8:28-30.* God invites us to live in the image of Jesus. *Mt 13:44-52.* The parable of the search for the pearl of great price. *Theme—Wisdom:* All of us desire deep, lingering wisdom to live in peace and happiness with ourselves, others and God. Many illustrations abound where such wisdom is practiced by unwitting disciples.

July 27—Ordinary Time 18: *Is 55:1-3.* God is the true source that nourishes the inner desires of the human heart. *Rom 8:35.37-39.* We can never be separated from God's love for us. *Mt 14:13-21.* Jesus' compassion moves him to feed the hungry crowd. *Theme—God's love.* The second reading could serve as the basis for a prolonged meditation on God's love for us. This theology needs to be reclaimed when voices around seem to speak contrary words.

August 7—Ordinary Time 19: *1 King 19:9, 11-13.* The prophet experiences God in the unexpected silence of nature. *Rom 9:1-5.* Paul affirms the role which the Jewish people play in God's plan of salvation. *Mt 14:22-3.* Jesus walks on the water and overcomes the powers that threaten to annihilate the disciplined community. Peter accompanies him. *Theme—God's Presence in difficult times:* Elijah experiences God's presence in the silence of nature after the natural violence that precedes it; Jesus overcomes the violence that attempts to destroy Mt's community (symbolised by the boat). God's presence never deserts faithful disciples.

August 14—Ordinary Time 20: *Is 56: 1, 6-7.* Justice lies at the heart of being open to God

and acting religiously. It is the source of unity. *Rom 11:13-15,29-32*. Paul continues to acknowledge the role which the Jewish people play in God's plan. *Mt 15:21-28* A non-Jewish woman's persistence pays off. Jesus blesses her and heals her daughter *Theme—God's Attraction*. Many faith communities show the attraction which God has for people; everyone is on the search for God. It is revealed in people's commitment to justice (1st reading) or their search to deal with seemingly insurmountable problems (Gospel).

August 21—Ordinary Time 21: *Is 22:15,19-23*. Shebna, a royal official, is removed from office and Eliakim is given authority ('the key') over the royal household. *Rom 11:33-36*. Paul celebrates God and God's wisdom. *Mt 16:13-20*. Jesus is acknowledged as God's Messiah; Peter is commissioned with leadership. *Theme—Leadership and Authority*: Examples abound of political and religious leadership that empowers and includes those who are conventionally excluded. This is the kind of authority envisaged in Isaiah and Mt. **August 28—Ordinary Time 22:** *Jer 20:7-9*. The prophet recognises the struggle of the prophetic vocation and mission. *Rom 12:1-2*. Paul encourages a spiritual renewal that is total, personal and social. *Mt 16:21-27*. Jesus prepares his disciples for suffering that awaits. Peter commissioned last week as 'rock' this week becomes a 'stumbling rock' to Jesus. *Theme—Struggle*: The liturgy today offers a moment to name the many ways that faithful Christians struggle in our local communities. Their fidelity to God in this struggle reveals a contemporary form of prophetic witness and discipleship.

September 4—Ordinary Time 23: *Ez 33:7-9*. The prophet is entrusted with the task of speaking God's truth, even though this may be unpopular. *Rom 13:8-10*. Love of neighbour is the summary of the commandments. *Mt 18:15-20*. Jesus offers practical advice for dealing with internal tension. Ultimately, he is always present. *Theme—Tensions*: Faith communities will always experience difficul-

ties and tensions. They are part of living out of God's truth (first reading) and the human reality of faith communities (Gospel). What are some present difficulties being encountered today?

September 11—Ordinary Time 24: *Sirach 27:30-28:7*. Wise advice for dealing with anger. *Rom 14:7-9*. Our lives are to be totally centred on God; Jesus is the model of this. *Mt 18:21-35*. We hear the parable that invites disciples to ponder and demonstrate their spirit of forgiveness. *Theme—Anger and Forgiveness*: Today's readings are very relevant: How do we deal with anger that paralyses and destroys? Mt's teaching invites reflection on how to forgive and live out this forgiveness.

September 18—Ordinary Time 25: *Is 55:6-9* The Prophet's invitation to seek out and experience the surprising and mysterious God. *Phil 1:20-24,27*. Paul acknowledges his deep desire to die and be with God, and his commitment for his people. *Mt 20:1-16*. The parable about God's surprising generosity and the reversal of fortune. *Theme—A Surprising God*. Today's readings invite us into a meditation and celebration on the surprising nature of God: God's generosity, love and unfathomableness. What are our dominant images of God? How do these shape our actions and influence contemporary disciples?

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

October 2—Ordinary Time 27. *Is 5:1-7*. God's people are like a cared-for vineyard,

sometimes fruitless. *Phil 4:6-9*. Paul's encourages the Philippians not to worry, and live faithfully and confidently in peace. *Mt 21:33-43*. The parable of what happens to the servants and son of a vineyard owner is an allegory of Mt's gospel audience as they struggle and suffer. *Theme—Suffering*. Mt's Israelite followers of Jesus see their own story reflected in today's Gospel. To live with integrity and authenticity is costly. Are their local and pertinent examples of this?

October 9—Ordinary Time 28: *Is 25:6-10a*. Isaiah present Paradise and life with God as a mountain feast with choice foods and wines. *Phil 4:10-14, 19-20*. In all that happens to him, no matter his physical or financial resources, Paul's ultimate focus is God. *Mt 22:1-14*. God's lavish banquet is for all, 'good and bad.' *Theme—Eucharistic Inclusivity*. Our local Eucharistic celebration is a reflection of the Universal Church: How do we celebrate inclusivity in our faith communities in a world of cultural diversity?

October 16—Ordinary Time 29: *Is 45:1, 4-6*. An unexpected non-Israelite military emperor becomes God's agent of salvation. *1 Thes 1:1-5*. Paul addresses a community with faith and openness in God. *Mt 22:15-21*. Jesus avoids a trap set by the religious leaders. God is the true source of all life, even political. *Theme—God and Politics*. Today's readings

offer an opportunity to reflect on the way God and religion have been co-opted into contemporary politics and military affairs. They offer an alternative focus: The heart of life and human community is God (First Reading and Gospel), not the human whim for power or the seduction of privilege.

October 23—Ordinary Time 30: *Ex 22:21-27*. God encourages the Israelites to attend to the poor and not oppress the resident alien. *1 Thes 1:5-10*. Paul praises the Thessalonians for their hospitality and openness to God's preached word. *Mt 22:34-40*. Jesus' summary of the heart of ethical life: love of God and neighbour. *Theme—Hospitality to the Stranger*. The treatment of asylum seekers and the poor in our country is the touchstone of authentic religion. A number of positive examples from the local scene can illustrate the living out of authentic faith.

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

The Church, as the People of God, must develop a greater awareness among her members of the role of the Word of God and its power to reveal and manifest God's will for humanity and his plan of salvation. Greater care needs to be exercised in proclaiming the Word of God in liturgical assemblies and greater conviction and dedication given to the task of preaching. More attentiveness, conviction and trust is required in viewing the role of the Word of God in the Church's mission, in both the actual time allotted to proclaiming the message of salvation as well to the more reflective moments of listening and dialogue with cultures.

—The Synod of Bishops, *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, Lineamenta, 2011, Ch. 2.*