A couple of years ago I was baptising a baby at our usual time for baptisms, Sunday morning around 10.30.

One of the godparents, the godmother, was in London, which would not be a problem as a proxy could be arranged. But the family went one better—the whole ceremony was Skyped to London, and the godmother was able to answer personally to the questions via Skype. At the end of the ceremony I concluded, ‘We can now let the folk in London get to bed while the rest of you go and party!’

This is one early experience for me of the new possibilities of world communications that are on offer and which we need to use skilfully and intelligently for building Christian community and telling the Good News.

As I write we are preparing for Pentecost. Pentecost was all about communication. It is presented as the antidote to the disaster of Babel when—as punishment for human arrogance—people lost the ability they had since the creation to ‘speak the same language, with the same vocabulary’ (Gen. 11:1) and God confused their language so that they could no longer understand each other, and they were scattered over the whole face of the earth. The Spirit at Pentecost enabled the apostles to tell the Good News in ways that all peoples could understand.

The new possibilities for communication—the new ‘social networks’—are the product of human ingenuity, but they offer powerful equipment for communicating the Good News. Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI saw very clearly the possibilities and challenges of the new digital age. It is significant that the papal message for this year’s World Communications Day, ‘Social Networks: Portals of Truth and Faith; New spaces for Evangelization’ was written by Pope Benedict XVI as one of the last things he wrote before his resignation. And his message was quickly spread around the world on Facebook and Twitter and other social media. Pope Francis, too, has quickly adopted the new means of communication for his messages.

These new means of communication open up a space for more people to become more involved in telling the Good News to the ends of the earth—maximising the possibilities of using the new social networks towards that end would be a challenge they could be expected to delight in.

We are being encouraged to rise to that challenge. As Emeritus Pope Benedict wrote in his message:

As the 2013 World Communications Day draws near, I would like to offer you some reflections on an increasingly important reality regarding the way in which people today communicate among themselves. I wish to consider the development of digital social networks which are helping to create a new ‘agora’, an open public square in which people share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and forms of community can come into being.

An abundance of resources has been made available for the 47th World Day of Communication (12th May 2013) on www.catholic.org.au, including an eBook: ‘Word Made Flesh and “Shared” Among Us’. As is stated in the Introduction of the eBook: ‘Social networks invite a whole new realm of engagement: with images, ideas, words, media, film, video, cartoons, phrases, tweets, statuses and blogs.’

We are being encouraged to use the new means of communication in our efforts to follow the directive given to us at the end of Mass: ‘Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord’.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor
THE YEAR OF GRACE inaugurated by the Australian Episcopal Conference has surely been an event of the Spirit in our land. Extending from Pentecost 2012 until Pentecost 2013, it has indeed become a ‘slow motion retreat’ for Australian Catholics to ‘start afresh from Christ’. Under the impulse of the Spirit it has enabled us to ‘contemplate the face of Christ’ revealed in mysterious and unexpected ways in whatever experiences comprise the context of one’s daily life. Throughout our dioceses, parishes, schools, among individuals and ‘wherever two or three have gathered in Christ’s name’, we have been invited to renew our faith personally and to take up the challenge of the Gospel to ‘Go out to all the world and tell the Good News’ (Mark 16:15).

This reflection will gather together certain aspects of our understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in our midst—aspects to be held in our collective memory beyond the immediacy of the Church’s liturgical feast of Pentecost as we continue to pray:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your Faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and they shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen

**The ‘Great South Land of the Spirit’: an Australian connection?**

It was at sunrise on Pentecost Sunday, May 14th in the year 1606 that the Portugese mariner-adventurer-explorer-missionary, Pedro Fernandez de Quiros, claimed what was long imagined to exist as *Terra Australis Incognita*, as *Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo*, the South Land of the Holy Spirit. Following solemn Mass celebrated by Franciscan friars who were among de Quiros’ crew of sailors and soldiers, rousing shouts of ‘Long live the faith of Christ!’ reverberated as rockets and firewheels were discharged in jubilation.

James McAuley’s poem, *Captain Quiros*, captures the sincere hope expressed in de Quiros’ last will and testament that this South Land would be graced ‘with ‘braziers of love’ and ‘pots and pans of piety and pity’, whence are savoured the fruits of justice…’ And so may it be…Although cartographers may question the precise site of landfall of de Quiros’ daring expedition on the eve of Pentecost, conventional Australian wisdom treasures a conviction that our nation was in the ‘mind’ of the Holy Spirit on the first antipodean solemnity of Pentecost.

**Jesus, Bearer of the Holy Spirit**

Within the synoptic tradition of the New Testament, the *Gospel according to Luke* constantly alerts his own community, and every other Christian community throughout the ages, to the role of the Holy Spirit in the earthly life of Jesus.²

Let us recall Lukan Spirit-references concerning the early life of Jesus. At the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel of his conception, Mary was assured that ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God’ (Lk 1:35). Having fulfilled the rituals required by the Law at the birth of a son, Mary and Joseph returned to their home at Nazareth. There we are told how ‘The child grew and became strong and the favour of God’ was upon him’ (Lk 2:40). Following the incident of his being found in the Temple among the doctors of the Law, we read how Jesus returned...
with his parents to Nazareth and ‘increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour’ (Lk 2: 41-52).

We recall also significant Lukan Spirit-references in Jesus’ adult life. Confronted by crowds seeking his baptism at the River Jordan, John the Baptist strongly disclaimed any question of his own messiahship asserting unequivocally that ‘I baptize you with water, but one more powerful than I is coming…He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ (Lk 3:16). When Jesus was at prayer after his own baptism by John, we read how ‘the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove’. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased’ (Lk 3:21). In preparation for Jesus’ ministry, Luke tells how he was ‘driven’ by the Spirit into the wilderness, and how after his time of temptation, he returned to Galilee ‘filled with the power of the Spirit’ (Lk 4: 1-14). The public ministry of Jesus began formally in the synagogue of Nazareth with his reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah (Is 61:1):

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, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

Then rolling up the scripture and handing it to the attendant, Jesus sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were upon him as Jesus began to say to them, ‘Behold, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’ (Lk 4:20-21).

There is a wonderful moment of elation recorded at the return of ‘the seventy’ disciples from an arduous and dangerous mission when ‘at that same hour, Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit’ (Lk 10:21). We too share in the joy of the Spirit in knowing of Jesus’ assurance that perseverance in prayer means that for ‘everyone who asks, receives, and every-one who searches, finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened…’ and ‘If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’ (Lk 11: 5-12).

**Receive the Holy Spirit**

The gift of the Spirit to the Church is the gift of the Risen and glorified Jesus. The great hope of Israel had been that with the coming of the Messiah, God’s spirit would be poured out upon all flesh, that ‘in those days’ the nations of the earth would be gathered, and that all who would call upon the name of the Lord would be saved… (Joel 2: 28ff). The ancient hope has been realized in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; his promise to send another Advocate to be forever with his Church has been fulfilled (Jn 16:1-15; Lk 24: 36-49).

The legacy of Luke’s grasp of the significance of the gift of the Spirit in the life of Christ and for the life of the Church has continued to be developed in the Acts of the Apostles (2: 1-11). The events of the first Christian Pentecost proclaim the ‘newness’ of Christ’s ‘release’ of the Spirit in the world as the Church is born. The phenomena of wind, fire and the miracle of tongues all testify to the fact that the old order has passed away, so that a new and eternal covenant may prevail. This new dominion celebrated still on the fiftieth day after Easter, far surpasses the former Jewish harvest Festival of Weeks (Leviticus 23: 15-21); the mighty wind filling the whole house...
ushers in a new creation (Genesis 1:1-2); fiery tongues signify that the covenant of Sinai (Exodus 19) has been fulfilled, and that the dispersion of the nations at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) has been abolished. As the Good News will henceforth spread to the ends of the earth, all people will hear of the wonderful works of God in their own tongue. Would that space permit citation here of the full account of Peter’s address to the crowd on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-36)! Suffice it to quote the concluding lines:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear… Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2: 32-36).

In contemplating Christ’s gift of the Spirit as illustrated throughout the Acts of the Apostles, Christians encounter exemplary faith-friends among that multitude of men and women who received the Spirit of Christ and who witnessed to his mission even unto martyrdom. A gift becomes a gift only when it is received and treasured—and so the stories told of those many named and un-named members of ‘The Way’, encourage one to respond to the Church’s present call to a ‘new’ evangelization with commitment, zeal and courage.

It is in the fourth Gospel that we meet the sacramental sign of ‘living water’ for the Spirit. The Johannine motif of being born into Christ through water and Spirit begins with Jesus’ baptism by John who testified that ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit’ (Jn 1: 33-34). The motif develops as Jesus explains to Nicodemus, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit …’ (Jn 3: 1-7); it gains further emphasis from Jesus’ request for a drink from the woman he encountered at the well of Jacob. Being a Samaritan, she was taken aback at such a request from a Jew whose response to her dismay was to explain, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you ‘Give me a drink’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’ Moreover, Jesus declared, ‘Everyone who drinks from this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life…’ (Jn 4: 1-13).

With tension gathering among the Pharisees and the ‘crowds’ over the identity of Jesus, the theme of ‘living water’ takes a dramatic turn during the ceremony of Water Libation on the final day of Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7: 37-39). The nightly drawing of water from the Pool of Siloam was accompanied by joyous singing, dancing and the playing of trumpets, cymbals and musical instruments. Boys and men carrying burning torches would dance before the immense golden candlesticks spreading their light to the whole of Jerusalem. The daily ritual of the pouring a jug of the water into a bowl that drained on to the altar was an act symbolic of the future outpouring of the Spirit by the Messiah (Ezek: 36: 24-27). It was at this climactic moment that Jesus stood up and proclaimed in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’ (Jn 7: 37-38). The evangelist adds, ‘Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.’ The stunned crowd heard and knew what Jesus meant… (Jn 7: 40-44).

The ultimate meaning of these representative Johannine pericopes is revealed on Calvary when, with Jesus’ earthly mission finished, ‘he bowed his head and gave up (literally, ‘handed over’) his spirit’ (Jn 19: 30). There followed immediately the piercing of Jesus’ side and ‘at once there came out blood
and water’ (Jn 19:34). Thus, the Church was born from ‘spirit’ and the flowing of ‘water’ and ‘blood’.

**Spirit, Water and Blood: Sacramental Life of the Church**

Year by year, Paschal-tide celebrates the Church’s joyous re-reception of the great mysteries of Christ’s resurrection and his sending of the Spirit. With the post-Vatican II restoration of the Rite of the Christian Initiation of Adults, along with a recovered architectural creativity in the design and placement of the baptistery at the entrance of new Catholic churches, or with suitable adaptation in older churches, there is heightened symbolism of life’s Christian journey from ‘the womb of Mother Church’ to the altar of Eucharist.

From as early as the second century A.D., and through appropriation of Pauline theology of the Spirit of the Risen and glorified Christ in the early Christian communities, an obvious connection was made by Tertullian, and others, with respect to baptismal ‘birth in the Spirit’ with the ‘birth’ fluids of blood and water issuing from the pierced side of Christ. Famous baptismal homilies are now available in fine English translations. Besides being studied by RCIA candidates, they provide wonderful sources for contemporary Paschal-tide homilies. In keeping with the architectural development of baptisteries, theological focus was directed upon the baptismal bath/font as the ‘womb of mother Church’. The pierced side of Christ was interpreted as the ‘gate of life’ from which the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist enabled access to ‘the life that is true life’.

Modern Christian pilgrims visiting ancient baptisteries in Ravenna or Rome, for example, are surprised to learn how early Holy Spirit titles, ‘Mother of the Church’ or ‘Midwife’, have preceded that of ‘Mother Church’. An inscription in the Roman Lateran Baptistry reads:

> Here is born a noble people for heaven. The Spirit gives them life in the fecund waters. Sin...ner, descend into the sacred font to be washed from your sins. You go down old and return renewed in youth. Nothing can separate those who are reborn; they are one: One baptism, one Spirit, one Faith. In the waters Mother Church gives birth; she remains a virgin in her fecundity, delivering to the world by virtue of the Spirit...

Although the sacramental mysteries of the Church are symbolically embraced in an intensive way during Paschal-tide, this in no way implies that the Spirit of Christ is less present to the Faithful in ‘ordinary’ time. The Faithful are continuously sustained and embraced in the Spirit by virtue of the entire sacramental life of the Church. Every sacramental ritual embodies an epiclesis or prayerful ‘calling down’ of the Holy Spirit. This solemn invocation is expressed liturgically in the ‘laying on of hands’, by anointing with the oil of chrism in Baptism, Confirmation and priestly Ordination, and with oil especially blessed for the sacrament of the Sick. The gesture of extending of open hands over the head of the penitent in the sacrament of reconciliation and upon the elements of bread and wine to be consecrated in the Eucharist indicates prayer invoking the Holy Spirit.

The post-Vatican II restoration of a double epiclesis in the Sacrament of the Eucharist is particularly significant. The first epiclesis occurs when, for example, in Eucharistic Prayer II, the celebrant prays aloud: ‘You are indeed holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness’ and then, extending his hands over the bread and the wine, prays ‘Make holy, therefore, these gifts we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and...[the sign of the Cross is made over the elements] Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ’.

The second epiclesis calls upon the Holy Spirit to sanctify the ‘mystical’ Body of Christ which is the whole congregation: ‘Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit.’

St Ephraem the Syrian (306-373) has left...
a lasting appreciation of the meaning of *epiclesis* in the life of the Church:

> There is fire and Spirit in Mary’s womb; there is fire and Spirit in the river in which you were baptized.

Fire and Spirit in our own baptism, in the bread and in the cup, fire and the Holy Spirit.

In your bread is hidden the Spirit who is not eaten; in your wine dwells the Fire that cannot be drunk.

The Spirit in your bread, the Fire in your wine, a remarkable miracle that our lips have received.

The Eucharist is the ‘source and summit of all preaching of the Gospel’; it contains ‘the entire spiritual wealth of the Church’ inviting the Faithful to offer their daily lives of prophetic witness for truth and justice, their work, their charisms, and offer creation itself to the glory of the Father, in Christ and through the power of the Spirit.\(^{14}\)

*Veni Creator Spiritus*

Living as we do in times of secular and scientific advancement that is so often skeptical about ‘eternal life’, the urgent prayer of the Church calls upon the Creator-Spirit to make all things ‘new’—to heal the trials and sufferings of the present in order to allow the Reign of God to break into a future of grace already given mysteriously in Christ. As Christians, we cannot but rely in faith upon Christ’s promise that:

> When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth... he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that [the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16: 12-16).

Amen! So may it be...

NOTES


2  The Lukan tradition is supported by other synoptic references e.g. Mt 1: 18-25; 3:11; 12: 28-32; 28:19 & Mk 1:9-11, 27:13:11.

3  ‘Favour of God’ or ‘grace’ is attributed theologically to the work of the Holy Spirit.

4  Re the biblical symbol of ‘dove’ for the Spirit see e.g. Gen: 8-12 (reliability); Cant 2: (enduring love, fidelity); Gen 15:9; Lk 2:24 (sacrifice); Hos 11:11 (peace & reconciliation in the messianic age).

5  We note here the forceful use of verbs in the present tense.

6. ‘Advocate’ (L. *consolator*) is variously translated as ‘Comforter’, ‘Helper’ & ‘Paraclete’ (G. *paracletos*).

7  For historical and biblical significance (Exek 36:24-27; Is 12:3, 44:3; ! Sam 16:13) of the Pool of Siloam see [http://jewishroots.net/library/holiday-articles/water_libation_ceremony.htm](http://jewishroots.net/library/holiday-articles/water_libation_ceremony.htm).


9  For the present context, see especially *The Letter of St Paul to the Romans*.


11  Jn 3: 5-7; 16: 20-22 (re. anguish of labour in childbirth & joy of delivery).


IS VOWED RELIGIOUS LIFE RELEVANT TODAY?

CLAIRE CONDON SGS

I WRITE THESE musings from the Philippines. I am in Bacolod on Negros Island, to receive the commitment of our Sister of the Good Samaritan, Germia Tocama, to the Benedictine vows of conversion, stability and obedience for the rest of her life. In religious life we call this commitment the act of perpetual profession, the lifelong choice to live religious life within a particular community.

I ask myself again: What relevance does such a commitment to vowed life have in our twenty-first century world of globalisation, consumerism and secularisation? Isn’t the prevailing paradigm one of self-advancement, immediate gratification and attention to the here and now, on what can life give me now? For many in our world, even in Catholic Philippines, where a recent survey showed that one in eleven Catholics is leaving the Church, God is dead—or at least ailing badly—and God is not deemed to be so relevant in the daily activities that fill up the airspace between people. The din of the world around them blocks out any capacity to know God. In my own country of Australia, the faith of many people is sorely tested by the sexual abuse crisis.

My reflected response to this question of relevance is that perhaps such a commitment to vowed life have in our twenty-first century world of globalisation, consumerism and secularisation? Isnt the prevailing paradigm one of self-advancement, immediate gratification and attention to the here and now, on what can life give me now? For many in our world, even in Catholic Philippines, where a recent survey showed that one in eleven Catholics is leaving the Church, God is dead—or at least ailing badly—and God is not deemed to be so relevant in the daily activities that fill up the airspace between people. The din of the world around them blocks out any capacity to know God. In my own country of Australia, the faith of many people is sorely tested by the sexual abuse crisis.

My reflected response to this question of relevance is that perhaps such a commitment is more significant than ever before. There is still an underlying yearning in people for an authentic spirituality. On a universal scale this has been evident in the global interest in the election of Pope Francis. The desire for spiritual leadership has been articulated strongly.

On a personal level, as a perpetually professed Sister of the Good Samaritan, Germia is dedicating her life to the ongoing seeking of God, as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. For her, God is not dead. God is indeed alive and active in her life and in the lives of all people. In fact, she sees that God is alive in all of creation. Her daily search for God is evident in the living out of the values found in the Gospel stories. She encounters God in her daily prayer, in lectio, the sacred reading of Scripture, in participating in the prayer of the Church—the Work of God—by allowing the psalms, God’s poetry, to wash over her morning and evening, every day.

Germia witnesses to the perennial values of life-long conversion. It is a journey of spiritual and personal growth. She places her trust in God’s forgiveness and compassion so that she can grow more fully as a human person. Her life is a counterbalance to those who believe that one can only achieve happiness by self-assertion and dominance of others.

Her vow of stability seems anomalous in a world that is changing by the minute. How can one be stable in such a dynamic universe? Yet, this is not a vow by which one stands still. It invites her to remain in relationship—in relationship with her sisters and her God within this unstable world. She is called to ‘hang in there’ when it would be easier to run away from herself and from others.

And finally, there is that very unfashionable and misunderstood word—obedience. In popular parlance, to be obedient is to be weak, incapable of deciding for oneself, to be subservient to another. However, this is far from its true meaning. This vow of obedience invites Germia to listen—to listen deeply with a unity of heart, mind and spirit. It is to listen wholeheartedly to all of life and to make decisions from a thoughtful and discerned position.
Obedience is a counterbalance to individualism. It invites one to decide in collaboration with others for the good of all—for the common good. Such an approach to life requires a depth of maturity and of humility.

This act of perpetual profession is an act of faith, of love and of trust. It is an act which recognises God as the author of life. It is an act which identifies one’s own human strengths and limitations as gift from God. It is an act which affirms God as God. It states that God does matter. It is a ‘yes’ to God with all the inherent risks that life will bring, with all the uncertainties about one’s future. It is an act of courage, because it declares that one can live a life full of meaning and that one can be happy living a life contrary to the prevailing paradigm.

A vow is a sacred promise or commitment made publicly with the approval of the Church. Through her vows, a Sister responds with her whole life to God’s invitation to love Him completely and without reserve. This free response is a fuller expression of her baptismal call and is, for one who is genuinely called to the consecrated life, a means to greater holiness. All Christians are called to live the virtues of chastity, poverty and obedience; these vows provide for a purification of heart and spiritual freedom that uniquely mark the life of the consecrated woman religious. Living these vows enables her to focus her entire being on God and His people.

While all women religious profess the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, some communities take an additional vow. Some monastic communities profess a fourth vow of stability by which the monastery they enter remains their home for life unless they are called to be part of a new foundation. Other communities take a fourth vow of hospitality or service to the poor.

The vows of consecrated life are means by which a woman religious seeks to be more closely configured to the One she loves. Living these vows draws her into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. She embraces a transforming love who gives meaning to all suffering and sacrifice.

—From the website of the United States Conference of Bishops
In the early months of 2005, Pope John Paul II—confronted by the limitations of his debilitating illness—used the modern means of communication to maintain his pastoral presence. In the year of his death he released two important statements on the evangelical potential of the modern communication culture.

In the most recent statement—the Apostolic Letter on the ‘Rapid Development of Technology’—he makes this perceptive observation:

The communications media have acquired such importance as to be the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial, and social behavior. We are dealing with a complex problem, because the culture itself, prescinding from its content, arises from the very existence of new ways to communicate with hitherto unknown techniques and vocabulary. (3)

Communication and mission

In our contemporary world, the technology of communication has expanded exponentially. Ours is truly as never before a ‘communication society’. But, have we—missionaries of the Gospel—kept up with these extraordinary developments that are, in effect, redefining the human condition and the meaning of human society, even in the more remote parts of the planet? The wonders of modern communication have made universal communion and communication realistically achievable for the first time in history, although it cannot be said that this has already happened! Rather than talking from ‘on high’, from a position of absolute and unengaged authority, the Church today wants to enter into a dialogue with its surroundings. Paul VI wrote in his first encyclical: ‘The Church should enter into dialogue with the world in which it exists and labours. The Church has something to say; the Church has a message to deliver; the Church has a communication to offer’ (Ecclesiam suam 65). The pope’s words still challenge us to re-think the fundamentals of our mission in the light of modern technology.

The world today is a world not only of mass communication technology but also of profound cultural and social change, a change effected by the globalization and diversification of the means of communication. This calls for a ‘radical change of mentality and attitude’ if we are to effectively ‘apply evangelical commitment to the concrete and often disturbing problems of human promotion’ today (Introduction, Religious and Human Promotion, 1978).

Pope John Paul II has referred to the ‘new’ world of media and mass communication as ‘a new and emerging cultural world and as a series of means serving communication’, ‘like any culture, the mass media needs to be evangelized’ (Ecclesia in Africa 71). Modern communication is shaping and creating quite a radically different world culture. The first messengers of the Gospel used the communication technology of their day to best advantage: the Roman communication system, Greek language and ideas, letter writing etc. The Protestant reformers were greatly advantaged in the spreading of their ‘new’ faith by the in-
vention of mass printing. The best examples of evangelization have always been culturally sensitive and conditioned to the means of communication, making use of the strengths and techniques of different cultures and civilizations as the medium for the message.

Today in fact the mass media constitute not only a world but a culture and a civilization. And it is also to this world that the Church is sent to bring the Good News of salvation. The heralds of the Gospel must therefore enter this world in order to allow themselves to be permeated by this new civilization and culture for the purpose of learning how to make good use of them. (John Paul II, *ibid*, emphasis mine)

**Communication and the ‘way of the heart’**

We like to quote that passage from the First Letter of John about the experience at the heart of the message we want to communicate: ‘we have come to know and believe in the love God has for us’ (*1 John* 4, 16). But, how do we communicate this experience today, in creative and relevant dialogue with the modern world? For communication, I suggest, is central to the missionary vocation, its spirit and charism.

Paul VI’s insight remains valid: the way of communication is the way of dialogue. This is not a top-down process but a ‘you-me’ (us) process. ‘The world cannot be saved from the outside. As the word of God became a human person, so must human persons to a certain degree identify themselves with the forms of life of those to whom they wish to bring the message of Christ’ (*EN* 87). This is the ‘way of the heart’. The pope continues: ‘before speaking it is necessary to listen, not only to the person’s voice, but to their heart…. The spirit of dialogue is friendship and, even more, is service. All this we must remember and strive to put into practice according to the example and commandment that Christ left us’.

In his encyclical, *Redemptoris missio* (37), John Paul II recalls the story of St Paul’s missionary adaptation of the ‘good news’ to the social and cultural milieu of the philosophers of Athens (*Acts* 17, 16 – 31). He says that the primary *areopagus* of the modern world is ‘the world of communication that is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a *global village*’. The world of communication is profoundly altering the behaviour of people. Then he goes on to ask whether, in fact, the challenges and possibilities of the modern *areopagus* of communication have been too much neglected by the missionaries of today, suggesting that we have not effectively undertaken the task of evangelizing modern culture.

Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message into the ‘new culture’ created by modern communication. This is a complex issue, since the ‘new culture’ originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Paul VI said that ‘the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our times’ and the field of communication fully confirms this judgment.

The pope’s observations are both profoundly challenging and deeply disturbing. He reminds us that culture is always the focus and the environment of the work of evangelization.
Are we neglecting to address the most powerful culture of our age—the one being shaped by mass communication?

The Trinity, contemplation and communication

The divine way of being and acting—communication—in the mystery of the Trinity, is at the very heart of the life and activity of the Church. And as the passage from 1 John 4 makes clear: the foundation of the activities of communication and dialogue always has to be the attitude called contemplation, ‘we have come to know’. Without an authentically contemplative attitude there can be no true listening or openness to the other: to God, to other human persons, to the world.

In his Message for World Communications Day 2012, ‘Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization’, Pope Benedict stressed the importance of silence in communication: ‘It concerns the relationship between silence and the word: two aspects of communication which need to be kept in balance, to integrate and to be integrated with one another if authentic dialogue and deep closeness between people are to be achieved. When word and silence become mutually exclusive, communication breaks down, either because it gives rise to confusion or because, on the contrary, it creates an atmosphere of coldness; when they complement one another, however, communication acquires value and meaning’. One of the dangers in the modern world of instant communication is that there is no time to pause and reflect. Silence, I would suggest, is integral to a spirituality of the heart; the transparent and open heart is one that listens and is vulnerable. It has been said that information is the work of the intellect, but communication is the work of the heart (contemplative).

The process of communication nowadays is largely fuelled by questions in search of answers. Search engines and social networks have become the starting point of communication for many people who are seeking advice, ideas, information and answers. In our time the internet is becoming more a forum for questions and answers—indeed, people today are frequently bombarded with answers to questions they have never asked and to needs of which they are unaware. (Benedict XVI, ibid)

In his message for 2013, ‘Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization’, Pope Benedict returned to the theme of dialogue, observing that ‘social networks are becoming part of the very fabric of human society’…‘nourished by aspirations rooted in the human heart’. Media can help ‘foster forms of dialogue and debate’ and so ‘reinforce the bonds of unity between individuals and effectively promote the harmony of the human family. The exchange of information can become true communication, links ripen into friendships, and connections facilitate communion’. Surely this is one of the aspirations of an authentic spirituality of the heart. ‘For those who have accepted the gift of faith with an open heart, the most radical response to mankind’s questions about love, truth and the meaning of life—questions certainly not absent from social networks—are found in the person of Jesus Christ’.

A contemplative attitude gives us the critical distance we need to judge and evaluate the information we experience. Rowan Williams writes, in an essay on the integrity of theological language:

Contemplation is a deeper appropriation of the vulnerability of the self in the midst of the language and transactions of the world; it identifies the real damaging pathologies of human life, our violent obsessions with privilege, control and achievement, as arising from the refusal to know and love oneself as a creature, a body.

The contemplative attitude is an integral dimension of the spiritual life and of its way of dialogue and communication. Such an attitude enables us – or should enable us – to filter out the ‘spin’ and superficiality that is so much a part of modern communication. The contemplative heart gives us the ‘distance’ needed for an authentic communication and contextualization in a world overwhelmed by the ‘information super-highway’.
Manipulation of communication technology

The tragic enigma of modern communication technology is that it can be manipulated precisely to impair and obscure authentic communication. In the field of commerce we have the ubiquity of advertising which seeks to ‘shape’ our needs and responses. In contemporary politics we have the use of what is called ‘spin’: the manicuring of information to suit a particular political agenda or self-interest. In such ways, communication can be used to manipulate a social culture, to be in fact ‘anti-communication’. In the same paper Williams argues that authentic language (verbal, visual etc) has to be, of its nature, open, open to dialogue. All communication is a form of discourse: each side in an authentic discourse remains open to correction, to learn, to listen. In our modern culture language, discourse, takes many different forms: it is not simply a matter of ‘words’: there are many different forms of communicative action, verbal, visual, symbolic, aural, plastic, pictorial etc.

There is an unfinished quality to all communication (even divine)—this quality is, in fact, of the very nature of communication. It is a movement as yet unfinished. The various forms of communicative language or discourse have a fundamentally social origin and intention: all communication is ‘communicative action’. But the various forms of communicative language/action can be (and are) manipulated—especially more so, perhaps, the visual (such as TV news bulletins). Language of communication that is not ‘open’ is being used politically, as a manifestation of power (over the powerless). Communication becomes a means of control, of ideological bondage. Thus the beauty of communication becomes perverted, it is no longer a way that seeks the truth together. The same can apply to the language we use about God; it too can be used to manipulate the responses and attitudes of the hearers—as authoritarian non-communication. This, it must be said, is not God’s way of self-communicating; which is kenotic, self-sacrificing, dialogical. The Christian tradition is rich in images that speak to our hearts and shape our faith.

Media can, however, become manipulative in its methodology. This raises serious questions about social integrity, justice and integral human development – and about the nature of truth. Such manipulation of communication also serves to stress, once again, the importance of the contemplative attitude. Perhaps one major apostolic challenge facing us as missionaries of the truth about God, the great communicator, is that of helping people to develop a more critical and creative attitude towards their use of the media. ‘Learning to communicate is learning to listen and contemplate as well as speak. This is especially important for those engaged in evangelization: both silence and word are essential elements, integral to the Church’s work of communication for the sake of a renewed proclamation of Christ in today’s world’ (Benedict XVI, ‘Silence and Word’).

Communication and the religious life

This brings us to the critical question: how do we understand the relationship between mission and communication for us as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in our contemporary society? Our mission is communication: May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved! But how do we communicate this today?

The foundation of any religious community and its spirituality, is always to be found at the intersection of the twin personal experiences of Spirit and culture. In its best days the religious life has always been about the evangelisation of culture through communication, inculturation and kenosis (self-giving). God’s way of communicating is self-giving. The genius of religious life is not to be found in reaction but in creation. Its creativity has been
expressed in the development of new ways of communicating the central message of God’s self-giving love for the world. The great founders and foundresses have been extraordinarily creative communicators (think of Francis’ use of imagery and gesture). This creativity has always been experienced and expressed in relation to the model of God’s self-communication in Jesus and shaped by the charisms (communications) of the Spirit given to the founders.

**Contemporary challenge of mass media**

Surely the culture that most challenges religious and the Church today is that of mass communications: the media in all of its varieties. The men and women of today are being formed—for good or ill—by the modern media, especially by the visual media (film, TV) and the world of the Internet (the ‘information super highway’). As Pope John Paul II has said, the modern media are creating ‘new languages, new techniques’ and, perhaps most importantly for the work of evangelization, ‘a new psychology’. There is a goodness and a search for truth in media with which we must dialogue. But, we need to be able to dialogue with this new areopagus in its own language.

An opinion piece by Susan Greenfield, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 7th August 2012, argues that modern digital culture is ‘re-wiring our brains’! Is this an element of the ‘new psychology’ of which John Paul speaks?

Eye contact is pivotal and sophisticated component of human interaction, as is the subconscious monitoring of body language and, most powerful of all, physical contact, yet none of these experiences is available on social networking sites. It follows that if a young brain with the evolutionary mandate to adapt to the environment is establishing relationships through the medium of screen, the skills essential for empathy may not be acquired as naturally as in the past.

The many forms of mass media offer immense opportunities for human solidarity, compassionate information, understanding and dialogue—activities of the heart.

But because of their very ‘massiveness’, anonimity and diversity they can easily ‘swamp’ individuality, personality and creativity. Is communication becoming ‘screen-based’ rather than inter-personal? People speak today of ‘compassion fatigue’ because they just cannot cope with any more exposure to tragedy. So, our hearts can be dulled, our sense of common humanity crushed by the weight of information. And we have already mentioned the ubiquity of the use of ‘spin’: political, ideological or commercial which is shaping the desires of our hearts.

A spirituality of the heart will seek to nourish a contemplative heart. Thomas Merton once wrote:

> Our being is silent, but our existence is noisy. Our actions tend to be noisy, but when they stop there is a ground of silence which is always there. Our job as contemplatives is to be in contact with that ground and to communicate from that level, and not just to be in contact with a stream of activities which are constantly moving. We have to keep silence alive for other people, as well as for ourselves ... because no one else is doing it... (from *Silence and the Word*)

This is our challenge. How, first of all, do we react, respond, to our own personal use of and exposure to mass media? How do we help others to react and respond in creative and compassionate ways? How do we bring into the interactive world of media the message of the Gospel of love and communion? How can we creatively facilitate and help shape the process of globalized inculturation so that it nourishes and strengthens faith, hope, charity and human dialogue and communion while respecting the integrity of differences? One of the realities that is under ‘attack’ from some aspects of the globalized mass media today is that of (cultural and social) differences. Such differences, however, are an essential part of the evangelical life; without difference there can be no real communion, simply homogenization.

These are some of the challenges facing
our ministry today. Like our ancestors in the faith, we too have to discover creative ways in which to communicate Christ’s message of love and hope. We need to find ways that build up the dignity of people that respect their human integrity and their cultural uniqueness. But we cannot do this from ‘outside’ or from above, as if we have the answer! We need to reflect on and ‘test’ our own involvement in, and dialogue with, the world of mass communication. It will only be from within this experience and the intersection of this media-experience with our personal gospel-experience that we will be able to find new creative ways in which to communicate the Gospel today and enter into dialogue with the ‘mentality’ of the modern age.

**Reaction and creativity**

Not all of this experience will be of Chevalier’s ‘mal moderne’ (modern evil). The wonderful thing about modern communication technology is its immense capacity for good. Certainly we can ‘react’ but we also need to ‘create’. Father Chevalier, as we know, was concerned about the ‘mal moderne’ of post-revolutionary France, especially religious indifference and egoism. In some ways he was typically ‘reactionary’ at this level. But his fundamental insight and charismatic belief was positive and creative: find the best ways to communicate the story of God’s wonderful outpouring of love in the Heart of Jesus. If his movement had only been one of reaction it would have died long ago. Chevalier had the breadth of vision necessary to be creative, and the simplicity of faith to take the big risks of communication (such as the mission to New Guinea).

One of the beautiful things about Paul VI’s *Evangelii nuntiandi* is its positive and visionary hopefulness. This hopefulness had its roots in his conviction that he, or the Church, did not have all the answers; that the Church needed to dialogue with the modern world—on a level playing field. It is from such dialogue that creativity will come. ‘The dialogue will make us wise; it will make us teachers’ (*EN* 81).

We are called to be missionaries of the Great Communicator, the Great Lover, who did not hesitate to give of God’s own intimate self for the life of the world. In this mission we cannot afford to be ‘old-fashioned’ in our techniques. At the heart of the ministry of communication lies the mystery of the Incarnation: in order to best communicate God’s love to us, God fully became a human being, taking on the ‘fashion’ of communication in his time. Modern media has a great capacity to portray and challenge our humanity, our values, our faith—just as Jesus did in his person and in his works in his own day. The contemporary technology of mass communication invites and challenges us to interact with it, in order to incarnate and inculturate the eternal Gospel for the people of our time for ‘a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived’ (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* 78)

**Spirituality of the heart and communication**

Many aspects of the media are about ‘spirituality’ and ‘values’ (we see this search reflected in a number of modern movies). In many ways the media world is a world of values and ‘spiritualities’ (ideologies) – however, it is not morally or spiritually neutral and can be profoundly influential in peoples’ lives. We have a message that can assuage spiritual hungers: how do we convey it to people who are looking for answers in so many places of information? Today there are many conflicting messages and panaceas on offer. If we are to communicate our message, our experience, then we must do it in ways relevant to the experiences of contemporary culture. Let us not forget that an essential element in any life-giving spirituality is a *discerning heart*. If we are to recognize and focus upon the truly important questions, then silence is a pre-
cious commodity that enables us to exercise proper discernment in the face of the surcharge of stimuli and data we receive. Amid the complexity and diversity of the world of communications, however, many people find themselves confronted with the ultimate questions of human existence: Who am I? What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope? It is important to affirm those who ask these questions, and to open up the possibility of a profound dialogue, by means of words and interchange, but also through the call to silent reflection, something that is often more eloquent than a hasty answer and permits seekers to reach into the very depths of their being and open themselves to the path toward knowledge that God has transcribed in human hearts. (Benedict XVI, ‘Silence and Word’).

Knowledge is more than simply the acquiring of information. It is a work of the heart as well as of the mind. The spirituality of the heart is a spirituality of integration, of critical evaluation, of seeking truth. The spirituality of the heart is a spirituality of inculturation: it gives us a context in which to dialogue and communicate. Its model is God’s heart-felt way of communicating. Hence, it is also a spirituality of ‘distance’, a spirituality that offers ‘perspective’.

Culturally—especially in the Judaeo-Christian tradition—the ‘heart’ has always symbolized the centrality of inter-personal relationships of respect and intimacy in the identity of the human person and society. The ‘heart’ stands for openness to communion and unrestricted-ness in inter-personal communication. The modern media provides us with numerous possibilities for building up and strengthening the bonds of human solidarity and mutual understanding in a spirit of justice, freedom and compassion. Perhaps nothing in our modern world has a greater capacity to ‘mould’ the feelings and wisdom of the human heart. But, this same medium equally has potential for evil: for the distortion of truth and the manipulation of emotions, for the promotion of division, misunderstanding and values that are false to the true heart of our humanity.

The struggle between good and evil is being fought out today through the media of communication. Human values and attitudes have always been influenced by the ‘symbolic world’ of culture. Modern communications—especially visual communications—are reshaping our symbolic world, providing us with new ways of looking at and responding to our environment. A ‘new world’ is in the making. And we are being challenged, because of our consecration to the centrality of relationships of the heart (of God and of men and women), to participate in the making and shaping of modern humanity’s new ‘symbolic world’.

Father Chevalier dreamt of a ‘new world’ in the making, a world and a mentality that would be shaped by God’s way of communicating with us. The world of mass communication offers us both a challenge and a way for humanity and God to meet in creative dialogue. It is in the Heart of Jesus that communication becomes creative.

The Heart of God descends in haste to his creation, with the weight of infinite love, and the heart of creation rises towards God drawn by an attraction that dominates all others in it. It is in Jesus that these two hearts meet, and they unite so profoundly that the two hearts become one. (Jules Chevalier)

Throughout the world—especially in what are sometimes called the ‘developing’ churches—members of our ‘Chevalier Family’ are involved in various ‘media ministries’ such as radio, publication, video production and the world of film. But too often this initiative has been ‘left to the initiative of individuals or small groups’ and has entered ‘into pastoral planning only in a secondary way’ (RM 37). Surely it is now time for us to seriously evaluate the potential and the challenges offered by the culture of globalised communications for an intelligent and creative international ministry based on the spirituality of the Heart of a God whose life and love is communication, of the Heart of a Jesus who totally
embraced and identified himself with the historical human condition. Are we prepared simply to remain only ‘consumers’ of the media, and the technology of the computer generation? As Paul VI said at the beginning of his pontificate: we have a ‘message to deliver’, we have ‘a communication to offer’. Mark Zuckerman sees the facilitation of communication (Facebook) as a ‘mission’: ‘The thing I really care about is the mission, making the world open’. How do we see our mission today?

To effectively carry out our mission today we must, as a community, enter radically into the modern world of communications, just as some one hundred years ago Father Chevalier recognized and exploited the potential of cheap print media to spread his message and to publicize his works. This was the means he used to put a ‘new heart’ into a confused and searching world. He was absolutely convinced that God wanted that message spread everywhere and by every means to bring about a ‘new world’. Pope John Paul II addressed this challenge to the members of the 1987 MSC General Chapter: ‘People today all over the world desperately long for a new world and for a new heart to animate and guide it’.

NOTES
1 ‘The challenge facing social networks is how to be truly inclusive: thus they will benefit from the full participation of believers who desire to share the message of Jesus and the values of human dignity which his teaching promotes.’ (Benedict XVI: ‘Social Networks’)
2 Redemptoris missio, # 37.

The agent for transmitting the faith is the universal Church, which ‘is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful’ (Lumen Gentium, n. 26). In past decades, the local Churches have done their utmost in this field. It is enough to think of the number of Christians, priests, lay people, catechists, families and communities, groups and ecclesial movements that are spontaneously and freely committed to the proclamation and transmission of the faith. Yet, ‘the cultural climate and the general state of fatigue in many Christian communities in our local Churches is endangering the proclamation of the faith, its transmission to others and instruction in the faith’ (n. 15).

Such a situation requires renewed efforts, fresh zeal, a gift of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the Good News anew joyfully and vigorously. This is a task for the whole Church and all her members. It is becoming even more urgent, given the challenges of contemporary society.

Today too Christians are called to account for the hope that is in them (cf. 1 Pt 3:15) with a new personal and community style, responding ‘in gentleness and reverence and a clear conscience’ (1 Pt 3:16), with the gentle strength which comes from union with Christ in the Spirit and with the conviction that our goal is a personal encounter with God the Father in his Kingdom’ (n. 16).

Christian witness must be private and public, must embrace thought and action, the internal life of Christian communities and their missionary drive, their educational action, their charitable activity and their presence in contemporary society in order to communicate to them the gift of Christian hope.

JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

Focus on the Student

VINCENT HUNT

In Albert Camus’ novel, The Outsider, Meursault, the title character, goes to the vigil and funeral of his mother in a rest-home. But while physically present he is totally detached from and indifferent to the occasion. Then we find that while all the formalities of such an event are well observed under the director of the rest-home, it remains the obsequies of a rest-home resident; there is no indication that it is specifically the funeral of Meursault’s mother. She has in effect been ignored. Camus’ great principle is that nothing makes a difference, and he illustrates how our social forms often suffer from a depersonalised emptiness as in the case of the funeral, in support of this principle.

This seems to me to have an important bearing on at least one form of justice and through this, on religious education.

Justice can be seen in a number of ways. It can, for instance, be seen as the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens among the members of a particular society. But there is another question that is more basic than this and deserves prior attention. For one can focus on the individual human being as such, and ask how justice can and should be done to the unique human person. Mere distribution does not adequately deal with this issue.

Granted that we can speak of justice being done to the dead, we can say that the Director of Camus’ rest-home was irreproachable in going through the procedure appropriate for a resident of the rest-home, but showed no regard for the particular woman whose obsequies were being celebrated. The due recognition of the unique person is a basic demand of justice, and this is of crucial importance in education.

* * *

The Two Dimensions

There are two dimensions of the human being and of human life. These can and should be distinguished but cannot be separated; they combine and interact in a pervasive way in our lives. The first is that which is shared with all other human beings; this has its basis in reason and in the fruits of reason; for reason is the guiding, integrating factor which we have in common and which makes common life possible. The factors produced by reason, or which are dependent on it, include organisation and system, law and order, security, skills of all kinds, competition and career, justice understood as the equitable distribution of burdens and benefits, the massive achievement of science and technology, and our world-wide economic system. And we look to it for ever-increasing control over our environment and over our lives. Because it may seem to embrace everything that is important or interesting in life, it will be important to show that this is not so, in the interests of education. For the method and content of the prevailing system of education at the secondary level support this impression.

There is another dimension which involves the human person at a deeper level and makes a still bigger difference to our lives. This is the distinctively personal sphere based on knowledge of self and of others as persons. Since awareness of self is activated and mediated through dealings with others, a person’s existence is closely bound up with that of other people. Personal life and social life are inextricably intertwined. This dimension of the personal has to do with self-possession, self-commitment and self-giving. Inherent in it is an existential concern with origin and with destiny; with origin, because this holds the key to a person’s identity; with destiny as the goal...
of existence.

I shall contend that a priority must be accorded to the personal dimension, since this is the dimension at which human dignity is centrally at stake; it is the dimension in which one is aware of self, enters into relationships and makes decisions. I hope to show briefly how the shared dimension gained undue strength, but also to show that the tide is turning, so that we can lend support to an active movement which is already correcting the bias in favour of the former. Reason has been lauded as the universally recognised justification for our judgments and basis for our actions. It is this claim that is under discussion. For reason is beyond its depth in the sphere of the distinctively personal.

The Greek Contribution

As is well known, we are indebted to the classical Greeks for the ability to think in a systematic way, to make reason our general guide in life. For our purpose, and without prejudice to the complexity of the topic, we can say that reason consists in relating together concepts so as to reach a reliable conclusion or outcome. A consequence of accepting conceptual reason as our only guide—it is this that is the problem—is that it treats a particular thing or person as a member of a type and not as this particular in its own right. (Here I am dealing with what comes within our human range without appeal to Divine Revelation.) It is not surprising that what, over the centuries, has promised so wide a range of knowledge and such control over our lives and environment, should enthral peoples’ minds. The above is the version of reason that has dominated in the West in both Church and civil society. It has to be remembered that the classical Greek philosophers knew nothing of the concept of person or of the difficulties it presents for their method, and though St. Thomas gave his mind to the topic his contribution had little subsequent influence. A good indication of how tenacious the tradition has been can be gathered from a short quotation from the early Karl Rahner, who saw himself as faithful to St. Thomas. ‘We can,’ he says, ‘comprehend a particular thing by bringing it under a concept.’ And he proceeds to contrast this grasp with seeing particulars ‘in their unrelated, dead “thisness”’. The reference to ‘dead thisness’ makes clear that it is regarded as below the level of knowledge.

The other contribution of the Greeks which I should like to mention briefly is a key one of Plato. Plato, in sketching the form of the ideal republic, sees intelligence as the key to its governance. He places the rule in the hands of the supremely-intelligent philosopher-king, who sits, as it were, atop the social pyramid and directs the whole life and functioning of the society. The ruler assigns each person a role and form of work in keeping with their ability. He insists on each one minding exclusively his, or her, own business. Again, Plato did not have the concept of person. For him the individual is identified with the function. He is clear that the citizen serves the state, not the other way about. That the person might be greater than the role that he or she fills, or indeed any role, is not considered. And there is no room for dialogue. A weakness of the philosopher-ruler is that he is a social isolate, he has no one with whom to converse; he is beyond dialogue, and, like his subjects, is imprisoned in his own world. The whole modern emphasis on communication is foreign to Plato. A little over two thousand years later we find Adam Smith making his great ‘discovery’, thus founding modern economics.
held that if people looked after their own interests exclusively, the welfare of all would be better served. For Smith, those who engage in altruism and take an interest in their neighbour do more harm than good. If we see Smith’s mechanism as replacing the intelligence of the philosopher-king there is a remarkable similarity between Smith’s system and that of Plato. In both there is a basic individualism and a restricted recognition of human relatedness and conscious cooperation.

**Levinas and the Epiphany of the Face**

The strongest challenge to these and to Rahner, and indeed to the whole tradition, comes from a Lithuanian Jewish scholar, Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas distinguishes between the spontaneous approach and the authentic approach to social reality. He would see Plato and Smith as representing the spontaneous approach; they are guilty of social imperialism at the intellectual level, on a par with the *Pax Romana* at the political level imposed by the Roman emperor; in doing this they misrepresent human reality. For Levinas on the other hand we enter the world of reality when we take seriously the other and enter into a respectful relationship with them. An authentic relationship with the other grows out of contemplation of the other’s face where the person is manifested beyond any outside control, shines through and expresses self. The face overflows all concepts and mental schemes. Through it the moral call comes to us. Far from thinking of ourselves as monarchs of all we survey, we are to enter into respectful dialogue with the other, engage in a shared life in a shared world. Levinas contrasts this approach with the ‘I think the world’ approach of philosopher after philosopher in the West. The primary demand inscribed on the face of the other is for hospitality in the wider sense of the word, for neediness as well as dignity is to be found there. The priority accorded to the guest in our contemporary world is an indication that the spirit of hospitality is not quite dead.

It may be true that in our present existence we shall remain far from implementing fully the vision of Levinas, that it is much too early to dispense with the carrot and the stick. Yet it opens up an horizon which we cannot ignore, especially in the communion of the Church. That communion arises from our oneness in Christ; it calls for the mutual respect, interest in one another’s welfare, shared responsibility and is implemented by dialogue.

**The Distinctively Personal**

A man to whom it was suggested that he join Alcoholics Anonymous replied, ‘I may be an alcoholic, but I am not anonymous’. He was not being disparaging towards that fine organisation, but was affirming the tight bond between his personal name and his dignity. For the Christian, the personal name is given in Baptism to mark the person’s Christian-human identity, particularly within the communion of the Church. To use the Christian name is to acknowledge that identity, to show respect for it, and to encourage its development; it is the most direct and obvious way of doing this. The historical fact is that the use of personal names of any kind has been very restricted up to our own time; until recently, it was confined mainly to family situations. This shows the limited appreciation of the Christian name in the Church. Indeed, in some Catholic colleges, staff members were forbidden to address students by their Christian names, an extraordinary anomaly in the name of Christian education. However, there has been a significant development in civil society and in the Church in regard to personal names in recent decades. They are now commonplace in business and education and in professional relationships. Their use represents a triumph for personal dignity; it means that the person does not get lost in the role.

A comparable development has taken place within the Church where the understanding of conscience is concerned. Conscience is the
innate guide we must trust in all our moral decisions. It derives from the person’s deepest sense of identity and indicates the way of truth and love that is to be followed by the person in the particular situation. So it not only relates exclusively to the particular person, but relates the person to a unique concrete situation. The Catholic tradition has insisted on the special role of reason in our decision-making; it is essential for objectivity in an area which is especially open to subjective influences. However this has often resulted in a depersonalisation of conscience through a one-sided appeal to general principles. For instance, the text-book on ethics used in our national seminary in the 1970’s assured the reader that a judgment of conscience is on a par with the conclusion of a syllogism, the only difference being that the judgment of conscience prescribes something to be done. The whole personal dimension is ignored; there is nothing as impersonal as a syllogism and nothing so closely related to the person as conscience. That a person must often struggle to overcome personal bias and to discern the way in difficult situations is not recognised. Further, the simple clarity of a syllogism leaves little room for an appeal of conscience against the undue pretensions of authority.

Vatican II gives a very different account of conscience. There the conscience is a function of the heart where the person is alone with God. The heart is, of course, the centre of the person in Sacred Scripture. The law which guides the heart is the law of love, which draws us to God and to others in all the situations of life. Love is more subtle and more challenging than any principle in the traditional sense.

This has a direct bearing on education in the faith. Firstly, there is a problem in making education in the faith part of the standard curriculum. This reduces the sense of Church as the environment in which education in the faith necessarily takes place. It is uncongenial for the sense of faith and reverence which the subject matter demands; for these reasons it increases significantly the challenge to the teacher. Religious education engages the conscience of the student. Conscience is a function of the heart, an exercise of the whole integrated person. What reaches the conscience of the student must come from the same level in the teacher. There will be, indeed, a use of reason, but of reason conscious of its limitations. The atmosphere generated by the teacher and the style of teaching will be of quite crucial importance. Of its nature the teaching is Christian witness. Since conscience is guided by the student’s sense of identity, this will be in play the whole of the process. The old question, ‘What must teacher know in order to teach Johnny French?’ is very much to the point. The teacher must know the student. The heart-to-heart level is the strictly interpersonal one and the one that is normal in the communion of the Church.

The parable of the Good Samaritan throws further light on this. Jesus tells the parable in response to the lawyer’s question, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ This aims at distinguishing those who are neighbours from those who are not. It remains at the theoretical level. But this is not the question that Jesus was concerned with and puts to the lawyer. That question asked who proved himself to be a neighbour in the concrete situation. It was obviously the Samaritan. Jesus tells the lawyer to go and do likewise. Jesus puts before him a concrete instance which serves as a concrete universal to be followed. The good deed of one person becomes a guide and inspiration for others in dealing with a particular type of situation. But because it emerges from a person and not merely from a mind, and is of significance for that person, it has his emotional stamp on it. The emotional element is both inevitable and necessary; it would be out of place in a purely rational education. The Samaritan’s pity led him to care for the injured man. This positive role of emotion contrasts with the generally negative attitude to it in writing on moral theology and spirituality in the past when the emphasis was on the way in which it could cloud reason.

As well, the parable can function as a con-
crete universal only with the use of imagination, another faculty which has received less than its due in our tradition. When Jesus told the lawyer to do likewise, he did not intend that he should stand on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, waiting for people to be beaten up. Each person spends each day travelling along the highway of life; the use of metaphors is essential to present the matter. The parable calls us to notice and attend to those who are maltreated along the road in a vast variety of ways. The more agile the person’s imagination, the more of such people will come to their attention; an active imagination is part of the disposition of the would-be Good Samaritan. Again, reason as usually understood is transcended. The general principles of natural law are important; they outline aspects of human conduct important to preserve. But in themselves they do not dispose people to follow them, or to see beyond the fixed range which they indicate. Here we have another limitation of the pure reasoning approach.

One outcome of what has been said is that the individual person as such is the subject of education and it is the individual who is the focus of attention even when it is not only necessary but desirable to work with groups. This becomes very clear when one remembers the importance of memory in a person’s life. It is memory that holds an individual’s experience together, and enables a person to discern and follow key threads in life. Only through it can a sense of personal identity be achieved or maintained. Every move in education is a move in the development of that sense; it is being constantly appealed to and challenged in religious education. It is essential that both teacher and student have a shared awareness of how it has developed and where it is directed, and of the relevance of what they are engaged in together.

Only the most unorthodox scientist would venture to suggest that our physical world will be governed by different laws in the future from those by which it has been governed in the past. Some of those laws may need to be discovered or refined, but the general principle remains. So when the alert young students in our culture wonder why unusual phenomena present themselves, they know that it is a question of finding the relevant causes at work. When these are found the wonder disappears. This wonder is a very valid preliminary to progress in science. But there is another form of wonder that is essential for the reception of Christian revelation. It is wonder sparked by the sheer existence of the world, and more striking still, by one’s own existence. The sheer fact that we appear on the scene at a particular time and place and shall depart from here in due time, together with our direct experience of the human situation, opens us to the doctrines of Creation and Redemption. It is very important that this second kind of wonder grows in the student’s mind, and with it a sense of the mystery that surrounds our existence. It can grow alongside the other form of wonder, but must not be overwhelmed by it. Again we are distinguishing what remains within the sphere of reason from what leads us beyond that.

Conclusion

Finally, we may note how the parable of the prodigal relates to our topic. The older son sees an ethics of obedience as the only relevant one, an ethics that not only permits but invites comparisons. In accordance with this he refuses to take part in the welcoming celebration. But the love of the father for the younger son leaves far behind all rational estimation and all comparison. The father expected the older son to understand this.

NOTES

2. Ibid.
3. Emmanuel Levinas, 1906-1995: Born in Kaunas, Lithuania; a phenomenologist and Talmudic scholar, his academic career was spent in France.
4. Right and Reason, by Austin Fagothey S.J. St. Louis: C. V. Mosby Co. 1966, p.41
THE TITLE OF my paper suggests a potentially controversial idea. Controversy apart, listening to what a theologian has to say about common ground between science and theology rates probably among the rarer moments in the life of scientists these days. So, I am all the more grateful to the Emeritus Faculty of ANU for the opportunity to explore this topic as part of its 2011 annual lecture series.\(^1\)

Once there was a time when theologians pursued science and scientists studied theology because they were convinced that the underlying reality was one. But ever since the medieval synthesis of faith and culture fell apart in the tumultuous centuries between 1300 and 1650 CE, things have never been the same between these disciplines. As Western civilization began to chart a new and different course, the thrust of European thought was no longer going to arise within the Church. Historian Thomas Bokenkotter writes:

The thinkers who participated in this movement, known as the Enlightenment, covered the whole field of knowledge that was heretofore considered the exclusive province of the Church and offered a different view of the cosmos, of society, of history, of morals, and of religion … [giving] rise to a largely secular culture.\(^2\)

Under the onslaught of critical rationalism, liberalism and radical doubt, the Church was placed in a state of siege as a new rationality challenged not only the then predominant epistemology of Aristotle, but also the validity of Biblical revelation and its traditional interpretation by the Church.

Against this unpromising historical backdrop it is surprising that we can speak today of a ‘dialogue’ between science and theology. Perhaps more surprising still, this conversation has grown in recent decades into a highly focused cross-disciplinary venture.

Scientists, theologians and philosophers all over the world participate in this complex enterprise.\(^3\) If present trends are indicative, this dialogue may even become one of the dynamic and transforming forces that will shape the future of Western culture.

Yet, misconceptions continue to abound, often upheld by the prestige of the natural sciences and the general belief in the intellectual superiority of scientific rationality. Scientists (and a good part of the general public) tend to believe that a scientific explanation renders any other explanation superfluous.\(^4\) On the other hand, it is encouraging to note that the old combat model that characterized the relation between science and theology for so long is on the way out. One of the cultural developments that brought this about was the post-modern rejection of a reigning paradigm. The resultant cognitive pluralism now confronts every academic discipline.\(^5\) New forms of crossconnectivity between different cognitive approaches are needed and interdisciplinary communication becomes unavoidable. Not only must new pathways to knowledge be found that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, but also synergetic ways whereby the intellectual resources of the disciplines

A THEOLOGIAN AMONG SCIENTISTS

‘Wisdom’ as Interdisciplinary Space for Science and Theology

PETER STORK
enrich each other. The dialogue between the natural sciences and theology is part of this larger movement.

Among the theologians, Jürgen Moltmann appears as a particularly suitable partner in my exploration. His theology develops in open dialogue with the world around him, including other academic disciplines. At the same time, he believes that all theology is necessarily provisional and hopes that his readers will engage with his thoughts in a dialogical manner. Besides, Moltmann recognized early the growing need for interdisciplinary work. How he envisages the unfolding of this search for new connectivity between science and theology is the main focus of this paper.

So, let me first introduce Jürgen Moltmann briefly. Then, I will outline the intellectual-historical background of his sapiential proposal before exploring ‘wisdom’ as interdisciplinary space between the two disciplines.

**Introducing Jürgen Moltmann**

Jürgen Moltmann is a Protestant theologian, Emeritus Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen. He was born in 1926 in Hamburg. He is known as the foremost progenitor of the ‘theology of hope’ and was the first to incorporate the struggle of the oppressed and the urgent need to care for the ecology into the mainstream of theological thought.

As a high school student he aimed at a career in science; mathematics and physics were special interests. These plans were disrupted in 1944 when he was drafted into the German army. He became a Prisoner of War in 1945 and spent the next three years in PoW Camps in England and Scotland. This experience proved to be life changing. The devastation wrought by the Second World War together with images of Nazi death camps caused a deep sense of remorse. He lost all hope in German culture. When he was given a New Testament to read, he encountered the Christian message of salvation and ultimate hope for the first time.

Gradually he identified more and more with the Christian faith and later claimed, ‘I did not find Christ, he found me.’ In a camp near Nottingham run by the YMCA he had opportunity, along with others, to begin theological studies and came to see a connection between suffering and hope which left a lasting impression on his later theology.

Returning to Germany in 1948, he gave up his earlier career plan without losing his deep interest in science. He studied theology in Göttingen where he received his doctorate at the age of twenty-six. After four years as a pastor in a rural community and six years as lecturer at the Confessing Church Seminary in Wuppertal, he became professor of theology first in Bonn, then, since 1967, in Tübingen where he remained until his retirement.

In Moltmann’s view, theology should be done with the end in mind. Such a theology looks forward to the day when ‘all things will be made new’ according to God’s promise in Christ. In other words, a proper theology would have to be constructed in the light of its future eschatological goal. By focusing attention toward the future, this theology brings future events into the here-and-now so that the hope of the ultimate future becomes hope for today. He writes, ‘in the medium of hope our theological concepts become not judgments which nail reality down to what it is, but [they are] anticipations which show reality its prospects and its future possibilities.’ In a comment on Moltmann’s approach Trevor Hart observes: ‘hope thus forces a radical re-interpretation of the present … [because] the
Moltmann has explored the interrelationship between theology and scientific reason at length in a major work *God in Creation* (1985). In his later book *Science and Wisdom* (2003), he returns to the subject but from another angle. Here he distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge. One reduces scientific discoveries to mere instrumentalities for the manipulation and exploitation of the physical world. The other leads to wisdom, that is, to an understanding that moral and spiritual limits exist beyond which humans, in their use of the physical world, venture at their peril.

Moltmann is highly critical of the bifurcation of knowledge that separates the sciences from the humanities. This split deprives the sciences of basic moral commitments and, since theology has ceased to study ‘the book of nature’, it has lost access to the physical world as it is. This ‘double track of the Western mind’ also deprived the world of access to wisdom.

As mentioned, Moltmann’s theology is characterized by its openness to dialogue and is open to input from other academic disciplines. Because his work is grounded in the eschatological perspective of his theology of hope, it is inherently ‘open’ in a structural sense. Such a theology relates to the world for the sake of its future as Richard Baulkham comments:

> The genuine openness of this future ensures that theology does not already know all the answers but can learn from others and from other approaches to reality. At the same time the Christological starting point, in the light of which the future is in Jesus Christ, keeps Christian theology faithful to its own truth and so allows it to question other approaches and enter into critical dialogue with them.

This brief summary of pertinent aspects of Moltmann’s theology provides us with signposts for an engagement with him. It also forewarns what one might expect from the proposal that science and theology have more in common than commonly believed.

### Historical-Intellectual Background

As intimated in the introduction, Moltmann’s proposal for a joint exploration of *wisdom* as interdisciplinary space between science and theology has its roots in his theology of hope. This hope projects eschatological wholeness into a fragmented historical process. The shattering of the medieval synthesis that drove the sciences and the humanities apart is encompassed in this hope for a re-cognition of the unity that underlies all existence.

Placing Moltmann’s proposal in its historical-intellectual context will allow us to see both the urgency for this interdisciplinary work as well as some of the obstacles that stand in the way.

Today, most people are content that the sciences are free to arrive at their own world of knowledge based on their own theoretical horizons, untrammeled by religious dogma. If this has not always been the case, the cause lay in the clash between religion and rationalism at the beginning of modernity. However, historian Arnold Toynbee reminds us that the modern collision between ‘heart and head’ was not the first of its kind in world history. Earlier clashes had occurred when Hellenic and Indic philosophies met pagan religions that were inherited from earlier, more primitive civilizations. Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism each in their own history collided with solidified versions of older forms of rationalism. What emerged as ‘orthodox’ theology was a product of ‘accommodation.’ The rising religion could not ignore pre-existing systems of ideas so that eventually Hindu theology was presented in terms of Hindic philosophy, and Christian and Islamic theology in terms of Hellenic philosophy.

However, later collisions differed from earlier ones in several ways. These so-called ‘higher religions’ exhibited a new distinctive feature: the rival truth of revelation received by their prophets. Since these truth claims where presented in terms of philosophical propositions—now in the name of deity—revelation truth claimed superiority and called for
unwavering personal commitment. Toynbee writes:

Truth became disputed mental territory; henceforward there were two independent authorities, prophetic Revelation and philosophical Reason, each of which claimed sovereign jurisdiction over the intellect’s whole field of action.16

As ‘revelation’ and ‘reason’ laid claim to overriding validity, the stage was set for only two options: compromise or combat, a position that has persisted until this day.

In Western culture, especially since Galileo and Descartes,17 the advance of scientific knowledge was accompanied by an unfortunate reductionism that excluded the Bible and theology from all non-religious considerations. At the same time, under the pressure of rationalism, theology, particularly in the Protestant tradition, surrendered the traditional conception of the unity of truth and has barely shifted its position since.

According to Moltmann, this reductionism exerted a twofold effect on Western thought. It separated the scientific mind and thus the physical world from the framework of Christian hope and it denied theology any insights into the world as it is.18 Thus the physical world was cut off from the notion of salvation which increasingly became a matter of indifference, even of irrelevance. Once the world was abstracted into an ‘objective world’, the separation of the sciences from the humanities was inevitable.

As nature became abstracted from history, humans became self-assured subjects that ruled nature no longer in need of divine wisdom. After all, after Descartes there was no longer room for a spiritual understanding of reality resulting ‘in a view of the mind and spirit without nature, and a view of mind, spirit and nature without God.’19 This denial of the spiritual dimension of reality is still in vogue as a recent proposal in practical philosophy shows. Although its author laments the absence of wisdom in society defined as ‘learning how to become civilized,’ he nonetheless insists that this ‘seriously defective form’ of the Enlightenment program can be rectified with the tools of the Enlightenment.20

Another philosopher, Robert Sternberg, is concerned that, in the light of massive global conflicts, increases in IQ do not translate into better relationships. He presents wisdom as a desirable cognitive skill (among others) for the achievement of the common good, especially among the young. Here, too, we note the absence of reference to the spiritual dimension of reality in general and of human nature in particular. Nonetheless, aware of the fragmentation of the disciplines, both authors call for a deeper integration of learning across the disciplines.21

Developments towards abstraction and objectification also affected the sciences as well as the worldview they spawned. Positively, science replaced the mythological interpretation of the world. The world was understood as being subject to laws, and its phenomena were open to investigation. This appreciation led, however, to the conception of a close congruity between scientific findings and reality. With this move, science became the final arbiter for the development of knowledge and truth finding. It gave rise to the idea that the relation between human beings related to nature in a subject-to-object relationship. At the same time, this objectification of nature led to the unfortunate pattern of domination and exploitation.

These developments were costly for theology. Separated from nature it could no longer speak of God and salvation in reference to the whole. Moltmann writes: ‘A retreat into the inwardness of the human heart leads faith into a ghetto in which it spoils and decays.’ Yet the vision of the whole was not entirely lost as Enlightenment philosopher Friedrich Hegel affirmed. Such a dichotomy was impossible to maintain, he argued, for neither side can be silenced at the expense of the other: subjectivity and objectivity, spontaneity and rationality were interdependent and mutually conditioned in their historical existence.22

Two other effects must be mentioned be-
fore we move on. Christian theology was once—along with philosophy—able to bring universal problems to the center of academic attention. Because theology asks questions of ultimacy, it can still play such a role potentially. Whether theology will qualify (again) depends on its ability to rise to the level of a genuine, constructive dialogue with the sciences and other academic disciplines. In addition, theology must earn its credibility with a disenchanted public and with the other religions without compromising the apostolic witness to the Christ-event. This is the so-called ‘crisis of theology’ today.23

Despite much public confidence in the superiority of scientific rationality, the sciences too face a crisis of credibility. In the light of global challenges, the public fears that under the influence of relentless scientific specialization the disciplines move further and further apart. As a result, chances are diminishing of integrating our vast knowledge for the benefit of global solutions. In addition, science is meaningless without civilization. Since humanity has not yet learned to become civilized, only a revolution in interdisciplinary and life-oriented inquiry has a chance of rectifying it, as Maxwell has well argued.24

There are other factors that contribute the so-called ‘crisis of science’ today. The forces of nature were once considered mysterious, divine, and even demonic, have become scientifically intelligible. Yet, this intelligible world also displays a high degree of ambiguity. While it yields answers to the question ‘how does it work?’ it does not tell us whether the world has a purpose and where it is going. No doubt, science and technology promise vast potential for human flourishing, but their extraordinary achievements also pose serious threats to human existence. Moreover, in recent decades, modern physics has shown us a world that appears to be less and less real as the sciences record ongoing and accelerating processes in vastness of the unseen. This changing character of physical reality raises new questions even in the scientific community about the philosophical implications of their discoveries. There are signs that these questions may lead scientists to exchange views with theologians.25 Even now scientists realize that reality is bigger than us, that knowledge is personal, and that truth-seeking involves a commitment to truth not unlike that of religious faith, as Michael Polanyi has noted.26 In other words, today both scientists and theologian have solid professional reasons to talk to each other.

As scientists and theologian continue to work in the shadow of the historical schism, they face nonetheless the common question of the future. From what we know about the world, the future will demand the setting of new priorities and a commitment to tackle this interdisciplinary project with greater seriousness and on a broad scale. At the same time, we must not close our eyes to the obstacles that stand in the way of a broadbased science-theology dialogue. Few scientists believe that theology can contribute to their work, while few theologians are competent to engage creatively with scientific findings and incorporate them in their theology.27 As a solution on the theological side, Moltmann suggests an important shift in theological concerns. Theology must move away from private religious considerations to broad existential questions.

Theology must step out of its ‘confinement to church, belief, and ... inwardness’ and embark on an experimental quest along with others ‘for the truth of the whole and the salvation of a torn and disrupted world.’28 With this shift theology would again affirm the unity of truth, which the medieval synthesis took for granted. Only then this unity was based on tradition. Today, it must be rediscovered through interdisciplinary scientific inquiry out of sheer necessity in the face of unavoidable pressures for the sake of human survival.29

**Wisdom as Interdisciplinary Space**

As noted earlier, in the quest for discovering
the laws of nature the scientific method gained in credibility while the realm of theology was confined to matters of ‘salvation’ and moral values. I also pointed out that this separation entails dangers for both disciplines.

When science is deprived of its interaction with theological doctrine, especially with the doctrine of creation, it is reduced to a soulless instrumentality, while theology when disconnected from science loses its vision and concern for the whole of the created order.

But theology to be true to its vocation ‘asks about the future of the whole – its salvation or its doom.’ In other words, theology has a role to play in the scientific enterprise: to provide a moral base for the sciences and to fulfill its own calling within the world. This implies the existence of a genuine and purposeful dialogue between theologians and scientists. Such an endeavor would be rewarded by the discovery of practical wisdom about the place of humanity and its future within an evolving cosmos. The link with ethics is obvious. In Moltmann’s words, ‘Without abstraction from world history, we cannot learn anything scientifically; but this detachment must be continually absorbed into responsibility of human beings for the whole.’

There are other reasons why this joint search is necessary. When science answers questions about the ‘what?’ and the ‘how?’ it operates within its competencies, but it steps outside when it tries to answer questions about the ‘why?’ and about ‘purpose.’ Yet it is the mere existence of such questions that points to a human need for cohesion and meaning in our comprehension of the world, which science cannot confidently provide. At the same time, we note that the development of knowledge in science and in theology is not linear but subject to discontinuities arising from within a contingent (and fundamentally open) historical process. According to his theology of hope, Moltmann holds that ‘the future of history can [provide meaning] only in the mode of expectation.’

In the philosophical key, as Nicholas Rescher has concluded, we must be content in all our theorizing with provisional findings, with best estimates of plausibility, even with conjecture. And it is in these provisional and open horizons of our knowledge where Moltmann sees a rich space for interdisciplinary reflection.

The vista of the open future in the process of differentiation between subjectivity and objectivity, leads to a new state of reflection. Human beings no longer stand *over against* nature, as the determining subject of knowledge and endeavour … they are also part of a history *with* nature.

Here human solidarity with nature becomes the starting point of the new theological and scientific reflection that would take into account on the one hand the intelligibility of the universe and its correlation with human intelligence. On the other, it would consider the experience that any genuine pursuit of truth in the natural sciences always leads to questions of ultimacy. Taken together, the emerging focus would make feasible the conception of a systematic exploration of links between the ‘world as we know it’ and another, transcendent reality. Such an approach runs certainly against the grain of purely instrumental inquiries that are merely concerned with questions of how to manipulate nature. But provided the new research agenda was guided by ‘the predetermined intention to search for human wisdom about life … a dialogue emerges between the natural wisdom that has been discovered and the human wisdom that has been learnt.’

In other words there are theoretical and practical benefits to be gained from Moltmann’s sapiential approach. After all, ‘not all knowledge furthers life—not every perception makes us wise.’ But there is more. ‘In seeking wisdom we discover and learn. We discover an already given wisdom present in the build-up of matter and the stages of organic life.’ When therefore the sciences investigate the build-up of matter and of life, Moltmann argues, they read ‘stored primordial memory’ and this ‘stored memory’
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deserves the name wisdom. Therefore, scientific observations and experiments are needed ‘not just for the purposes of gathering information, but also in order to learn the wisdom which is inherent in them.’

Interestingly, a Jewish scientist, Gerald Schroeder, formerly with MIT and now with the Weizmann Institute in Israel, writes independently along similar lines:

The discoveries of science, those that explore the molecular complexity of biology, and those who probe the brain/mind interface, have moved us to the brink of a startling realization: all existence is the expression of an all-encompassing wisdom that pervades the universe. Every particle, every being, from atom to human, appears to have within it a level of information, of conscious wisdom. The information just appears as given, with no causal agent evident, as if it were an intrinsic facet of nature.

Schroeder’s key theme is wisdom. Throughout his book, Schroeder shows evidence that wisdom was built into the system, arguing that wisdom is the basis of information and that our universe may be the manifestation of information.

Both Moltmann and Schroeder are intimating that the amazing, often illogical discoveries in physics and biology have given us, in Schroeder’s words, ‘tools to gain scientific insights into the metaphysical underpinnings of our world, and in return, to acquire spiritual insight into scientific empirical fact.’ Schroeder continues: ‘By realizing the interwoven complexity of existence, we experience the oneness both by revelation and by reason.’ Reading this language in the light of Moltmann’s proposal, we detect a theme that allows us to draw some contours of the interdisciplinary space that opens up:

1. The universe may be understood as the expression of a metaphysical idea, as information, or wisdom.

2. We can know much about a putative creator within the physical universe, but without theology we cannot derive meaning from this knowledge.

3. While we may conceive of a science without theology, a theology without reference to science is out of step with reality; if (1) is affirmed, the same must be said of science without reference to theology.

In other words, the perception of classical science that divided the world by subject and object is no longer a fitting starting point for our understanding of theology and of modern science. Science today must focus on networks of interdependent relationships including the relationship between nature and humans. As it is, science itself has become ‘an actor’ in the interplay between humans and nature. Moreover, we now understand the world better in terms of open systems. This understanding emphasizes ‘communication and co-operation’, a development that clearly plays into the hands of a joint search for wisdom. What Moltmann suggests is a return to the Hebrew tradition of ‘participative knowing’, ‘in which the knower opens himself or herself up to the other in receptivity, love and wonder and perceives himself or herself in mutual relationship with the other.’

Such knowing becomes a life-saving issue in the context of the ecological crisis. According to Moltmann, the aim of our searching should be a ‘symbiosis between human and nonhuman systems … capable of survival.’ However, unless grounded in a deep reverence for life, such an abstract formulation would be insufficient to guide the new search agenda.

But how are we to find that interdisciplinary space? The short answer is, ‘in an attitude of wonder.’ We enter it, when we return to the intuitive perception of awe that is awakened when we see something for the very first time. In such a state of mind we no longer speak as if we ‘have discovered something’ but as if ‘something has disclosed itself to us.’ In that place, we suddenly realize that we are in the presence of something that belongs to the nature of things and are prompted to acknowledge its beauty despite our technical sophistication that allowed us to detect it in the first place. We have encountered something
that has been given to us to know. ‘The discovery corresponds to the revelation.’
Judging from my own experience, both scientists and theologians are familiar with this experience. When we are awed by what we have been allowed to see, when our perception is wrapped in wonder over the ‘new’, when we break out in spontaneous applause of a greater reality, we have entered the space where wisdom may be found.

But there is more. As researchers, we are part of the universe that is seeking itself—held in tension between the material and the emotional-spiritual dimension we all feel at times. Then we cannot help asking whether that which we see on the surface as diversity may not be, on closer study, unity; whether the material side of things is not merely a dress, a camouflage of a profounder reality. In those moments a deeply satisfying, joyful surge sweeps through our entire being and we know that we ourselves have been touched by a strange yet thoroughly familiar reality. If all of this sounds too subjective for the ears of scientists, let me call Albert Einstein as a witness:

This most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness.

Lastly, we must consider the question how to work in this space. If this search for wisdom is for the sake of the whole truth (wherever it may be found) and for the sake of human survival and wholeness, we understand why Moltmann calls to mind the Biblical tradition which affirms that ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,’ (Ps 111:10; Prov. 9:10). This is not the dread of the numinous, but the deep personal reverence and humility humans experience in the presence of immeasurable goodness. We are thus reminded that the aim of this enterprise can never be a trifle, but must always be something to be held in the highest esteem and reverently sought after. Reference to ‘the fear of the Lord’ also shows us our limits and delivers us from an inflated self-concept that so easily is content with the physical side of life alone. Lastly, it saves us from the obsession with power as well as from ‘the delusion of total feasibility.’ In other words, the Biblical tradition suggests a dimension of experience that points to an ethical wisdom allowing us to live prudently with science and technology. In this context let me quote Moltmann for the last time in this paper:

The last fifty years have brought us such an enormous increase in our knowledge that what we need in the immediate future is a still greater increase of wisdom, and of wise dealing with what we know. For the future belongs, to put it provocatively, not to science but to wisdom—if humanity wants a future at all.

Werner Heisenberg, too, speaks in those terms in his Physics and Beyond referring to ‘a ‘central order,’ the ‘one’ with which we communicate in the language of religion,’ because for him the very idea of truth was bound up with the reality of religious experience. Perhaps, and this is my hope at the end of these thoughts, we have sensed something of the wholeness and givenness of the reality behind all our searching. Perhaps we have even sensed an unspoken condition for exploring this new interdisciplinary space: neither to tear this fabric of reality apart out of unwarranted fear of each other nor turn it into an object of rivalistic desire, for it does not belong to us.

NOTES

1 In this paper ‘science(s)’ means the methods, discoveries and descriptions of the natural sciences.
3 I am thinking particularly of the groundbreaking
work of Ian Barbour, Philip Clayton, Celia Dean-Drummond, Denis Edwards, George Ellis, Owen Gregersen, Malcolm Jeeves, Philip Hefner, Alister McGrath, Jürgen Moltmann, Nancey Murphy, Ted Peters, Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Polkinghorne, Robert John Russell, Howard Van Till, and many, many others.


5 For instance, in the world of science studies, all that theorists seem to agree on are their disagreements with each other as the following anthology of conference papers shows (Stanford University, 1991): Peter Galison and David J. Stump (eds.), *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Contexts, and Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).


7 For further biographical details see his autobiography, *A Broad Place* (London: SMC, 2007).


12 Moltmann, *SW*, 1-29.

13 Baulkham, *TJM*, 7 (original emphasis).

14 Although others too have written on this issue, for instance Celia Dean-Drummond on the interrelationship of biological reality with spiritual experience and the intersection with faith, for reasons of space I have limited this paper to an exploration of Moltmann’s work.

15 ‘Modern’ does not mean contemporary, but refers to the period in the history of ideas since the Enlightenment.


18 Moltmann, *SW*, 3. For instance, the second law of thermo-dynamics predicts the dissipation of energy, that is, an increase of entropy in the cosmos. Such a destiny conflicts with Christian eschatology that looks forward to a transformed creation because Christ was raised from the dead. Should no such transformation occur, this scientific prediction has theoretically the power of falsifying Christian beliefs.


22 Moltmann, *SW*, 5.


24 Maxwell, ‘Can Humanity Learn to be Civilized?’, 29.


30 Moltmann, *SW*, 6 (original emphasis).

31 Moltmann, *SW*, 22.


34 Moltmann, *SW*, 15 (original emphasis); see. also Moltmann, *SW*, 69.


36 Moltmann, *SW*, 28 (emphasis added). Evolution itself may be regarded as a complex process of learning exemplified by molecular combinations of the genetic code and its way of transmission.

Both theology and science are seeking to make sense of the world that they experience, and their methodologies are not totally different. In each case, the search for a rational understanding is motivated by belief and a desire for truth. As such there must be a common ground for dialogue. Science is able to investigate the universe because human beings have a measure of transcendence over the world, and theology is able to bring a greater degree of understanding because it recognizes the transcendence of God, who reveals his purposes to humankind. Understanding the world in which we live is an undertaking that unites science and theology, and the search for truth will not succeed without a commitment to belief and a readiness for testing, confirmation and correction.

SCIENTISTS SPECULATE on the possibility of life on other planets. Surely, they argue, given the billions of stars and planets throughout the universe, there must be some, like earth, with conditions favourable to the emergence of life. This is a statistical argument for probability based on the one known occurrence, namely that on earth.

It seems to me to be erroneous to reason this way from a singularity. It should first be applied to earth itself, which has enjoyed such favourable conditions, in many habitats, for four billion years. Why has life not broken out in many different places and different times on earth? It is known that all living species are related one to another in a family tree of life, so that it appears, as far as we know, that all life on earth stems from one common ancestor and from one occurrence. The emergence of life on earth, the breakthrough from inanimate to animate, is truly singular and as astonishing as the emergence of the cosmos itself or of self-consciousness in humans. These three breakthroughs, each emerging from the one before, are baffling to scientists in their nature and genesis. They are the presage of the further breakthrough in history, the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ leading us through death to new life.

Biologists, working from empirical data and scientific method, are not comfortable in trying to comprehend life, or the living being, as a whole. Did life simply emerge from chaos, by chance? Leave such questions to philosophers! Biology works well in analysis, by breaking down the living entity into successively smaller parts and smaller processes. The reductionist habit of mind is uncomfortable with the sum being greater than the parts. It readily finds the answer to ‘what’ and even ‘how’, but balks at ‘why’. Unwittingly the language of science often resorts to anthropomorphisms in describing processes. For example, ‘cause and effect’ is an extrapolation from the human experience of causality (‘I know I am the cause because I intended it’), so that when B is constantly found to follow A, A is said to cause B.

Again ‘natural selection’ derives from the human experience of freely exercising choice. In analysing a living being into its body parts, the instinctive question at each step is ‘What is it for?’. Supposing that something has a purpose implies a prior intention. By whom, by what? Would it not be more scientific to suppose they occur by chance, with no purpose or reason? But then why do they occur constantly? It is no wonder biologists are often accused by other scientists of excessive reductionism, as if they are trying to skirt the big question of life, or of the living being, as a whole. A great exception, in my experience, was biologist Charles Birch, who readily reached out to philosophy and theology in his grand synthesis. Some of his opinions are reproduced in what follows.

Another anthropomorphism which might be introduced into the biology lexicon is ‘strategy’. In the evolution of the species, each species can be seen to develop according to a certain line of strategy: some go after speed, some look to protectiveness, some depend on prolific reproduction etc. Each tends to maximise its own speciality (‘natural selection’). Again in its natural activity each individual tends to maximise its inherent advantage, as for example in hunting prey predators might use speed, or stealth or ambush. Strategy in hunting is strikingly apparent when a sudden change in circumstances occasions a switch in strategy. Strategy in species development or in a course of action may be put down to
one’s DNA which stores and passes on the necessary information. But the wonder is how a particular genome translates into action, which is akin to the wonder how the organic complexity of the human brain translates into lofty thoughts or masterpieces of art. As I understand it, DNA is not solely activated automatically or by self-generation, but in response to stimuli, *i.e.* inputs from the external environment (as the brain responds to sense perceptions, including those which carry information).

In any process or activity of a living creature there is an interplay of three factors: the laws of nature, chance, intent. As in a football match we have:

a) The rules of the game (determinism)

b) Chance situations, opening up windows of opportunity

c) The players aiming to win a goal.

So, in nature, the course of action is not purely deterministic, nor is it chaotic or haphazard. The strategy of a living being or species is in seizing its window of opportunity to pursue its aim or intent. When the human observer stands back from nature he cannot help noticing that all living things, and even life itself, have a certain inexorable thrust, what Charles Birch called ‘anticipation’. One can see this in the growing tips of a plant, the scrambling insect, the prowling lion, the injured bird—there is a common thrust throughout the whole of nature. It is the thrust to have life and to have it to the full. This we experience in ourselves, self-conscious living beings, and we readily project it onto other living beings, which are behaving in ways similar to our own. It is to admit, again with Charles Birch, a basic rudimentary subjectivity in all things ‘from protons to persons’, or at least in all living things. This subjectivity, however limited, makes each amenable to the outreach, or appeal, of another subject. As each being is drawn to transcend itself, to reach out to become what it was not before, it is responding to the lure of another.

Now turning from science to theology, we have the Christian revelation that all things were created by God. Science has shown how wonderful is that creation in its understanding of evolution, both the evolution of the universe and the evolution of life from its most primitive forms to the diversity and complexity we know now. Modern Christians can now speak confidently of God’s *continuing creation*. But earlier in the heated controversy between direct creation and evolution by natural selection, little notice was then paid to the formula proposed by Charles Kingsley ‘God made things to make themselves’. Creatures, lured to transcend themselves, are co-creators with God.

This raises the question of the role of the Word in creation. St John’s Gospel opens with the Hymn of the Word:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was embracing God and godly was the Word. He was in the beginning embracing God. All things through him came to be (Jn 1:1-3)

‘The Word’, *ho Logos*, was an expression much in vogue in the Hellenistic world of the time. For Jewish Christians it was an allusion to the biblical *Sophia*, the Wisdom of God, who played a key role in the creation of the world (Prov. 8:22-31). For Gentile Christians, familiar with the Greek philosophers, it suggested the divine principle of reason, responsible for the intelligibility and order of the universe. So this Divine Person was seen as God’s blue-print of creation, a kind of template, or one might say ‘the divine strategy’. It is the Word who appeals to whatever
is subjective in creatures to break out and become what they were not before. The Word, the summation of ‘Truth, places before each living being the truth of its kind to be unerringly pursued. The Word offers to each a plan or model of emergence. It is a call to the thrust found in all living things, to their urge to live and live more fully. Jesus, the Incarnate Word, has said ‘I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly’ (Jn 10:10). It is he who imparts his own Spirit, for according to the biblical dictum ‘It is the Spirit who gives life’ (Jn 6:63).

What is true of all living things is pre-eminently true of human beings, whose subjectivity rises to the heights of reflecting on their consciousness (self-consciousness). To the woman by the well Jesus offered:

The Gift of God…the living water (that) will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (Jn 4:10-14).
The Gift of the Spirit is assured to the one who approaches with yearning faith.

If anyone thirst, let him come to me
And let him drink, who believes in me.
As scripture has said
Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.
This he said of the Holy Spirit that they would receive who believed in him (Jn 7:37-39)
The Word of God does not appeal to our reasoning and rational conceptualisation, but implants himself as the Seed of the Sower and communicates his Spirit to the depths of our consciousness in a spiritual experience. The Spirit moves our deepest feelings, which become articulate in archetypal forms and wordless prayer, as the Word draws us to himself and to the light of the True, the Good and the Beautiful shining in the Word. So the Hymn of the Word continues to celebrate the creative Word.

All things through him came to be
and what has come to be in him was life
and the life was the light of men
and the light shines in the darkness
and the darkness failed to master it (Jn 1:3-5).

Here is a biblical sense of ‘life’, which, bypassing distinctions of natural and supernatural or of a state here or hereafter, reads more like a verb than a noun, as it expresses ‘becoming alive’. It can be translated as ‘liveliness’, sparkling with light that reveals the life-giving Spirit.

The one, in whom has germinated the Seed of the Word and who has been enlivened and enlightened by the Spirit of the Word, radiates a special splendour, the Fruit of the Spirit, the ensemble of the qualities of Jesus:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22).

This Fruit, first blessed in the womb of Mary (Lk 1:42), is now borne on the Branches of the Vine (Jn 15:1-11), as they persist in their liveliness to glorify the Father (Jn 15:8, 16)

As the fathers of the Church used to say: ‘The Glory of God is the human fully alive’.

NOTES
1. C. Birch, On Purpose, New South Wales University Press, Kensington 1990
3. E. Stockton, The Deep Within 2011 pp. 84-9

The Glory of God is the human fully alive.
THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The unidentified man who fell among robbers on the Jericho road

Paul Stenhouse MSC

The Parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’ is one of the best known of the numerous parables of Jesus contained in the Christian Gospels. Most commentators see it as a ‘call for merciful behaviour which is not limited by any boundaries’. Some, like Geraint Vaughan Jones deplore the sentimentalising of what he perceives to be ‘the devastating and drastically challenging character of the tale in its original context’.2

As I will attempt to show, there is more to the Samaritan than meets the scholarly eye. I am encouraged to offer the following reflections because I can find little evidence of New Testament scholars drawing on the remarkable progress made in the field of Samaritana over the past fifty years; or much evidence (apart from ground-breaking studies on Samaritans and the Fourth Gospel by Purvis and others, and general reliance on certain Patristic sources) of interest in New Testament allusions to the Samaritans shown by those of us who work in the field of Samaritan studies.

Parables in general

The Parable genre has exercised a fascination for modern New Testament scholars—liberal and so-called neo-conservative alike—that is akin to the fascination exercised on some by the Book of the Apocalypse, and apocalyptic literature in general.

They have argued endlessly, back and forth, about basic questions like how many parables there are, what a parable really is, and the relative merits of Alexandrian allegory and the subtleties of modern scriptural exegesis. We have been regaled with the differences between legends, myths, proverbs, riddles, parables and similitudes; between historisch and geschichtlich, between Mashal and parabole, between Form Criticism and textual Revisionism.

I barely touch the fringes of this minefield of genuine insights, fragile suppositions, old prejudices and religious politics. My concern is with the Greek text of St Luke’s Gospel 10:25-37 as it stands. Certain ideas suggest themselves to someone who has spent a great deal of his academic life grappling with doctrine, text and metaphor central to Samaritan culture.

The Status Quaestionis

Because what I am going to present will implicitly call into question assumptions dear to the hearts of Form Critics and others it is only right that I preface my remarks with some comments on the status quaestionis regarding the parable of the ‘certain man’ who was half-alive [semivivo relicto] according to St Jerome, and half-dead [emithane] according to the Greek text, and of the Samaritan who came to his aid.

All commentators—ancient and modern—agree that a parable is figurative speech. This is stating the obvious. What is not immediately obvious is the reason for modern scholars wanting to deny apodictically that as well as similes (the kingdom of God is like a net6), and metaphors (you are the salt of the earth,7 the eye is the lamp of the body8), the term

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‘figurative’ covers allegories. This despite the fact that the denial flies in the face of allegory found passim in Hebrew literature, and even in the parables of Jesus: e.g. the wicked vinedressers: Mark 12:1-9.

See also Mark 4:13 where the narrator, Jesus explains in allegorical terms the meaning of the parable of the Sower. The ‘seed,’ Jesus explains to the disciples, is the word, and the ‘birds of the air’ are Satan who carries away the word that was sown in them.

Allegory forces itself upon the reader of the New Testament. Granted the context, isn’t the ‘fortis armatus’—the ‘strong man’ described in Luke 11:21—meant to be understood as Satan? Isn’t the ‘fortior’—the stronger man—isn’t he to be understood as God? What is the parable of the servants being encouraged to have their ‘loins girt,’ and their ‘lamps burning’ in Luke 12:35-40 if not an allegory of the Church awaiting its Lord’s return?

Broadminded Allegorists

The favoured method of interpreting the parables in the early centuries of Christianity was allegorical. And while the allegorical method didn’t please everyone [Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote against it] none of those who interpreted the parables allegorically seems to have excluded simile or metaphor, or denied that some parables might be straightforward narrative stories.

Origen’s allegorical interpretation of our parable is well-known: the man who was robbed was Adam; the robbers were the devil and his aids; the priest stands for the Law, the levite for the Prophets and the Good Samaritan is Jesus, and the inn is the Church.

St Augustine [354-430] saw the victim as the human race [genus humanum] half-alive through knowledge of God, and half-dead through sin. The Samaritan is Jesus himself, and the inn keeper is St Paul.

Clement of Alexandria [c.150-c.215], St Ambrose of Milan [c.339-397], St Irenaeus of Lyons [c.130-c.200]—all, like Augustine, offered allegorical interpretations without excluding other possibilities.

St John Chrysostom [c.347-407] and what is called the Antiochean ‘school’, on the other hand, favoured a less allegorical interpretation, and took what some moderns who reject allegory regard as a hard-headed, practical view that was less concerned with detail than with the overall purpose of the story.

An end to allegory

Claims that allegorical interpretation runs contrary to the nature of the parable were first made by Luther [1483-1546] and Calvin [1509-1564]. The former dismissed fifteen centuries of Christian allegories as ‘monkey tricks,’ and valued Origen’s interpretation of the scripture as ‘worth less than dirt’. The latter, thought the allegorising of the Fathers of the Church to be ‘idle fooleries’.

The nineteenth and early twentieth century Marburg writer Adolf Jülicher [1857-1938] set the tone for much of modern writing on the parables. Following the Protestant Reformers, Jülicher dismissed allegory and the concept of riddles out of hand, declaring that parables ‘were designed for immediate effect, products of the moment, and deeply rooted in the particularity of the moment’.

Well and good. But, pace Jülicher, the very sitz-im-leben of the parable of the Good Samaritan leads us to quite a different opinion: and to favour a less narrow assessment of the nature of parables in general, as we will at-
What follows in this brief paper is offered in the conviction that allegory was as much embraced by the word *Mashal* in Hebrew literary usage, as was straight parable, or fable, or the analogy and comparison that some authors call, vaguely, ‘similitude’.¹³

In the opinion of the writer, modern scholarship has been impoverished by the rigidity of the views of those who in rejecting their Christian past, felt obliged to reject allegory along with it. The Reformers were not alone in this. Even the Spanish Jesuit Juan Maldonado [1533-1583] seems to have been swayed too easily into rejecting allegory from the New Testament and particularly from the parables.

*Unwelcoming Samaritans*

The context of the story of ‘The Good Samaritan’ begins a few §§ before our parable commences. Luke recounts that Jesus sent messengers into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him [presumably to spend the evening there] ‘but the people would not receive him because he was making for Jerusalem’.¹⁴

This seems an unpromising preamble to what is to follow, for James and John took offence at this rebuff and wanted Jesus ‘to call down fire from heaven to burn them up’—an allusion to the well-known story of Elijah who called down fire from heaven on the two captains and their fifties who were sent by Ahaziah the king of Israel to fetch him.¹⁵

Jesus—contrary to their expectations—rebuked them and said, ‘You don’t know what spirit you are made of. The Son of Man did not come to destroy souls, but to save them’.¹⁶

After going with his companions to another, presumably nearby, village, Jesus then sent the seventy-two disciples to all the other villages he was going to visit, instructing them how to comport themselves, and telling his disciples on their return, ‘Happy the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see and never saw it; to hear what you hear and never heard it’.¹⁷

*The Law and Eternal Life*

Luke then describes how a ‘certain lawyer’ [nomikos tis] i.e. a man skilled in Jewish law, in order to test [ekpeirazon] Jesus asked him how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him, ‘What is written in the Law [en to nomo]? The lawyer replied by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, too well known to need repeating here.

To this Jesus said, as if it had been he who set the test, ‘You have answered correctly [orthos]: act thus, and you will live’. But the ‘lawyer’ wanting to prove himself ‘law-abiding’ [thelon dikaiosai] asked, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ As he was a person versed in points of Law, and as he had already used the term ‘neighbour’ in quoting from Leviticus, it is difficult not to see this as yet another ‘test’ for Jesus. It was debated amongst the Scribes whether a gentile or Samaritan was a ‘neighbour’ [Ger: plesion] in the sense that Leviticus 19:18 intended. That this was how Jesus took the question will become clear from the remarkable tale that follows.

*What befell four travellers*

Unlike Jesus and his disciples who were going from Samaria up to Jerusalem, the parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’ describes a ‘man of some importance’ [anthropos tis—I take the latter word to mean ‘important,’ not just the usual ‘certain,’ or *quidam*] who was travelling, apparently alone, down the dangerous and lonely road from Jerusalem towards Jericho.

Despite the fact that neither åéò nor the latin ‘in’ necessarily mean ‘to,’ the phrase ‘*ab Jerusalem in Jericho*’ is invariably translated ‘from Jerusalem to Jericho’. The text in no way implies that Jericho was his final destination. He may even have been going via Jericho into or through some other region: possibly
assumed that the Samaritan who stopped to help was not coming from Jerusalem, though the implication is that like the priest and the levite, he was coming down the same road, behind the unfortunate traveller whom the robbers attacked. Joachim Jeremias assumes, curiously, that the levite was ascending the mountain road, ‘on his way to perform Temple service’.18

The listeners are told nothing of the profession or nationality of the mugged man. Most commentators assume that he was a Jew. He could also have been a Gentile or even a Samaritan who had some reason for being in the region of Jerusalem.19 If the parable is about charity, mercy, kindness to foreigners [the leper who was a Samaritan in Luke 17:11-19 is called by Jesus ‘a foreigner’—allogenes] then these details are not inconsequential: they could help explain the reasons for what transpired.

Robbers waylaid this unwary traveller and left him stripped and bleeding and half-dead [according to the Greek] and ‘half-alive’ [according to St Jerome’s Vulgate]. As the Greek text is silent about where he was left, we assume that he was left on the side of the road that he was walking down, so that passers could hardly avoid seeing him, and would have to walk around him if they didn’t want to help him. In a moment, the priest and levite are going to be described as passing by on the other side [antiparelthen—from anti-parerkomai: ‘to pass by on the opposite side’].

The lawyer must have been wondering where the story was leading. But then Jesus introduces the next two characters in the drama: two travellers. These are officials with whom the lawyer was very familiar—a priest and a levite.

Was he expecting to hear that the priest and levite came to the aid of the traveller? Probably; but instead, in this parable which is being narrated in response to the lawyer’s question, the priest notices the stricken man and walks around him, taking the opposite side of the road. The levite does likewise.

At this stage in the narrative the listeners could have been forgiven for expecting to hear that an Israelite was the next to come by, for the Mishnah lists the precedence amongst the Jewish people as follows:

A priest precedes a levite, a levite an Israelite, an Israelite a bastard, a bastard a Nathin, a Nathin a proselyte and a proselyte a freed-slave. This applies when all are (otherwise) equal; but if a bastard is learned in the Law and a High priest is ignorant of the Law the bastard that is learned in the Law precedes the High Priest that is ignorant of the Law.22

**Why the priest and levite went the other way**

Commentators are ingenious in their efforts to explain the reluctance of the priest and levite to come to the aid of the distressed man. A common reason is their alleged fear of becoming unclean through contact with a dead body. But ritual uncleanness came about from contact, or from being under the same roof as a corpse. And a man conveys uncleanness only after his soul has left his body.23

A corpse lying on the road would not cast a wide shadow, and could hardly overshadow a passer-by. An injured person did not convey uncleanness per se. Unless the priest and levite took their prudent evasive action quite some distance from the fallen victim, they would have been able to see that he wasn’t dead, and would have been free to render aid without fear of uncleanness; even if he were a gentile, or Samaritan.

Whatever their reasons for not rendering aid, the priest and levite passed by another way, avoiding confronting the needy man. We know from the text that they were also coming from Jerusalem, so their taking ‘the other side’ of the road was a deliberate if reflex action to avoid contact.

The listeners would have been debating amongst themselves by now ‘what will happen next?’ None could have predicted the se-
A certain Samaritan who was travelling, came upon him, was moved with compassion for him...carried him to the inn and looked after him'.

A chill would have fallen on the lawyer at this point. Even sharing the bread of a Samaritan, according to R. Eliezer, was equated to eating the flesh of swine. And ‘whoever receives a Samaritan hospitably in his house deserves that his children go into exile’. Jewish Samaritan relations had been at a low ebb since the incident described by Josephus that occurred when Jesus was a child and Coponius was procurator in Judaea. At the Passover, some Samaritans entered the temple precincts and strewn dead men’s bones around.

To Jesus’ question, ‘which of these three proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ the lawyer could not bring himself even to utter the name ‘Samaritan’. Instead he said, ‘the one who took pity on him’. Jesus replied, ‘Go and do likewise yourself’.

The Samaritan Enigma

The appearance of a Samaritan at this stage in the wake of the unhelpful priest and levite, and the grave risk to himself that Jesus took by introducing a Samaritan into the tale—he had, after all, been accused of being himself a Samaritan—calls for some explanation.

Had the intention of Jesus been merely to highlight the need for charity or philanthropy, then any passing Jew could have shown the mercy the situation of the stricken traveller called for, and served as an example for the lawyer.

If the story were merely ‘a damning indictment of social, racial and religious superiority’ then would not a gentile, and specifically a Roman citizen or official have been sufficient to show up the lack of compassion on the part of the temple officials?

Jeremias suggests that a Samaritan is used by Jesus ‘to teach [the lawyer] that no human being was beyond the range of his charity’. Bernard Scott thinks that the Samaritan is introduced to challenge the listener to identify with a member of a despised minority within the community. Or with the victim, and suffer the compassion of the despised Samaritan. I have a third option to put before the interested reader.

An alternative view of the parable

I agree with St John Chrysostom and the Antiochene school that the details should not blind us to the main message. And I see the clue to the point behind the parable, and to the identity of the stricken man, and the reason for the inclusion of the Samaritan, in the sequence followed by the parable of Jesus as recorded by Luke:

Lawyer [10:25];
Law [10:26];
Law-abiding [10:29];
Priest [10:31];
Levite [10:32];
Samaritan [10:33].

The lawyer had asked a question of Jesus to ‘test’ him. Jesus countered with a question of his own, and in reply the lawyer quoted the Torah [Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18] and was told by Jesus: ‘Do this [toute poiei] and live’. But then the lawyer persisted in asking another question. The parable follows.

In the spirit of the Alexandrian school, I suggest that the ‘certain important man’ who fell among robbers was the Torah itself which went down from Jerusalem through Jericho to Samaria and Galilee and beyond. As Isaiah put it almost eight centuries before, the Law had fallen into the hands of robbers, i.e. those who, by omission or commission, ‘despise the word of the Holy One of Israel’.

The priest whose principal responsibility it was to rectify this neglect, passed by on the ‘opposite’ side—not just on the ‘other’ side—i.e. ignored the parlous state observance of the Torah was in, and by implication followed a different path; levites who were the servants of the priests in their ritual role, did no better.
A Samaritan however, was ‘moved by pity’ and ‘cared for it,’ *i.e.* ‘observed’ the Torah; and told others to ‘look after it,’ *i.e.* to observe it.

Following on the comment above about the ‘opposite’ rather than the ‘other’ side, it may not be out of place to recall here that the word ‘Torah’ [from *yarah* ‘to cast lots,’ or more specifically, to throw little arrows of varying lengths to learn the will of God] means the ‘Way’ divined by casting lots. The *Moreh* is the teacher of the ‘Way’. Is it fanciful to see the priest and levite taking ‘another way’ as they turn away from the Torah? Curiously, the Arabic word for the totality of Islamic law—Shari’a—also means ‘a Way’.

Considered purely as drama, the Samaritan’s appearance in the parable effects the ‘catastrophe’—the *kata-strophe*—the ‘coup de théâtre’—the reversal of fortune that the ancients and the not so ancients admired and still admire in theatre.

What word for ‘Samaritan’ did Jesus use when he said, ‘But a Samaritan traveller came up...’. If he used *shomer* then the lawyer would have had a hint of the direction the story was taking. A hint that unfortunately we are denied through our having to rely on a Greek translation of the original tradition, however well it may be written by Luke whose mother tongue it was.

The Hebrew/Aramaic text that lies behind the Synoptics, and that Papias, Origen, St Irenaeus, St Cyril of Jerusalem, St Epiphanius and St Jerome all refer to, would be a boon for those of us wishing to have a window on the meaning of this and other ancient texts.

I suggest that the ‘catastrophe’ in this parable, is introduced by the very name ‘Samaritan’. In my view, Jesus is alluding to the name the Samaritans gave themselves, the ‘observant ones’—*shemarim*—in contradistinction to the name given to them in 2Kings 17:29 and commonly thereafter by their Judaean rivals—‘Shomronim’. From the context of the parable, I suggest that this is the earliest allusion to *shomer* as an epithet for a Samaritan.

Moreover, the Samaritans regard themselves as the Israelites. Purvis has shown that the Fourth Gospel relates the Galilean Jews to the Samaritans more closely than to the Judean Jews to whom one would expect them to be connected. ‘This may account,’ Purvis writes, ‘for the use of the word ‘Israelite’ rather than ‘Jew,’ in Jesus’s statement concerning the Galilean Nathaniel’ in John 1:47: ‘An Israelite in whom there is no guile’. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus is not rejected by Judeans to be accepted by Gentiles, but accepted by Galileans and Samaritans to be rejected by his fellow Judeans.33

In the light of this, instead of the lawyer’s—and, I should add, most commentators’—wondering why Jesus had not introduced an Israelite instead of a Samaritan after the priest and the levite had passed by, he and they would have been struck by his including a Samaritan/Israelite. Could this be the earliest allusion to Samaritans as Israelites?

If allegory is to be excluded from the interpretation of this parable, we are left with the question that no one seems to have asked: assuming the stricken man to be a Jew, why did he submit to the ministrations of the Samaritan? Shouldn’t he have observed A. Zar. 2:2 which laid down that [a Jew] ‘may accept healing from [Gentiles] for his goods [*i.e.* his possessions] but not for his person.’ Would not this stricture have applied to Samaritans as well as to Gentiles?

**The meaning of the parable**

Put simply, the message of the parable, intended for the lawyer and the bystanders, would run something like this: ‘You ask questions about the meaning of the Torah. Then, when they are answered you ask yet another question. Instead of talking about the Torah, dissecting it and weakening its effects on people’s lives, observe it, as the Samaritan does. Be like the shomer. Do this and you shall live.’

One recalls the equally radical and politically incorrect statement by Jesus addressed to Capharnaum: ‘It will be more bearable for
Sodom on the Day of Judgement than for you,’ where Sodom was [and still is, at the time of writing] synonymous in genteel circles with dockside vice and corruption, and Capharnaum, a real-estate agent’s dream of an irreproachably respectable lake-side city.

Is it any wonder that Luke, himself a ‘foreigner,’ and the only gentile evangelist, the friend and ‘beloved physician’ of Paul the Pharisee, should alone among the evangelists have preserved this gem of a tale that radiically calls into doubt the presuppositions of much contemporary religious and social practice in Judaea?

Jesus does this by casting a despised Samaritan, a ‘foreigner’ in an heroic role, and upturning contemporary judgements about who was observant of the Law and who wasn’t.

The Greek-educated doctor from Syria would have empathised with the Samaritan hero, and would have relished the dramatic effect of the story elicited from the young rabbi from Galilee by the lawyer from Jerusalem. Charity and mercy are at the heart of the parable; but they are not its kernel. Jesus has thrown down the gauntlet to those who would dispute the Samaritans’ right to be called ‘observers of the Law,’ and true Israelites.

NOTES

2 The Art and Truth of the Parables, SPCK London 1964, p.115.
6 Mt 13:47.
7 Mt 5:13.
8 Mt 6:22.
9 Affenspiel.
10 Sermons by Martin Luther, [James Kerr translation] pp.207-223.
12 Geraint Jones, *op. cit.* p.17.
13 L E Browne’s *Parables of the Gospels in the light of Modern Criticism*. Quoted in Geraint Jones, *op.cit.* p.17.
15 2Kings 1:10ff.
18 *The Parables of Jesus*, SCM London 1955, p.141.
19 See Ned.3:10 where a Samaritan is, by definition, one that does not ‘go up to Jerusalem,’ i.e. for the festivals.
20 For ‘Israelite’ understand ‘lay-man’.
21 A descendant of the Gibeonites. See Joshua 9:27 and 3 Macc,1. Also Yeb.78b regarding the exclusion of the Gibeonites and bastards from the Israelite community where intermarriage was concerned.
22 Mishnah, Hor.3.8 [Danby, 466].
23 See Mishnah, Ohol. passim esp.i,1,3,6.
24 Sheb. 8:10.
25 Synh. 114:1.
26 Antiquities, 18:2,2 [Whiston’s translation, Edinburgh, William P. Nimmo and Co. undated].
27 Jn 8:48.
29 Jones, *op. cit.* p.115.
30 op.cit. p.142.
31 Hear Then the Parable, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1989, pp.198,199.
32 Isaiah 5:24.

Jesus casts a despised Samaritan, a ‘foreigner’ in an heroic role, and upturns contemporary judgements about who was observant of the Law and who wasn’t.
FRIENDS—one and all in Christ: Monsignor John has suggested that before I commence I might offer a word of explanation as to why I have been given this honour. The reasons are mainly circumstantial. I am one of the priests ordained from this Parish. Though not born here, I have come to call Wangaratta home. My family first came here in 1945, as a boy I personally shook hands with Ned Kelly’s brother Jim and as a pupil at St Pat’s School I was here in the Church for the burial of Father Maurice Byrne. Later I would be part of a working bee that cleaned bricks from the old presbytery to be used in the building of this current one. I worshipped, played tennis, football and danced here at St Pats. For a time I worked down the street at the Council Offices and regularly met up with the lovely Patricia outside the Church after work! On the occasion of the centenary of the Parish in 1963, and as the opening celebration of that occasion, Kevin Howarth and I prostrated here before the altar and were ordained priests. From mid 1993 through 1994 I was blessed to serve as assistant to Frank Jones, and God willing I will be buried here along with my mother and father—my grave awaits me with only the date of death to be added to the headstone!

Having said all that I feel I can now ask you to be kind to me as I humbly attempt to do some justice to this privilege of presenting what must surely be something of a mixture between a homily and an address.

* * *

These moments when we gather to celebrate a Jubilee belong to special time, not like normal time when moments move onwards, one after another creating in their turn past, present and future. That kind of time is commonly known as chronos time and it is what our watches measure. Our time here is different because here we are striving to lock into our presence the whole hundred and fifty year story of our Parish; we know it as kairos time!

Flowing before us today is a muster of people, living and dead, family and friends, strangers known and unknown, young and old, rich and poor and colored, successful and not, good and bad, happy and sad—yet all of them somehow united with us as brothers and sisters under the loving fatherhood of our God. Moving with this parade are a series of events joyful and sorrowful, some challenging, others enlivening from the start, winding us with them into an overall pattern of dying and rising which envelops the whole of any human history, especially this history of our Parish. We are so grateful to Peter Murray who has marvelously recorded so much of this for us in his magnificent history—As The Spirit Leads.

Through this history that prophecy of Ezekiel has been struggling to unfold as our graves have been opened and we have strained to correspond to what St Paul has just described as the Spirit of Christ within us seeking to raise us to life. Through our history that same story of Jesus and his involvement with the family of Lazarus has been lived out anew rendering death to be ultimately inoperative for whosoever lives and believes in Him.

Before delving further into this history of our parish, let me pause to share with you a story of a man who lived his life within our time frame from 1905 until 1961 and whom I will suggest has much to offer us as we gather
to celebrate our Jubilee.

Dag Hammarskjold was a Swedish diplomat, lawyer, economist and author who served as the second Secretary-General of the United Nations from April 1953 until his death in a highly suspicious plane crash while on a peace mission in the Congo in September 1961. He is the only person to have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize posthumously; and something of his greatness can be gleaned from President John F. Kennedy’s description of him as ‘the greatest statesman of our century.’ ‘In comparison with him’, said Kennedy, ‘I am a small man’.

Though born into a devout Lutheran family, Dag as an adult abandoned his Lutheran faith and entered upon his own search for meaning. While outwardly successful, decent and impressive in everything he undertook he was not seen as particularly religious, and when after his death a diary recording his spiritual search was found, many were surprised.

Like all who undertake the search for the answer to the question of what constitutes a life well-lived Dag’s journey took him through many different insights. Was life about eliminating one’s vices and pursuing virtues, or was it about doing one’s best to advance the health and happiness of one’s fellow man; maybe it was pursuing a cause that one was willing to die for or being as conformed to the image of Jesus as one could be. All of these are good and to be recommended but none of them had for him the feel of being a key or a final answer, a point towards which our life is ultimately heading!

It was in 1952, at age forty-eight, almost on cue to be the fruit of a mid-life crisis, that he wrote: ‘Goodness is something so simple: always to live for others, never to seek one’s own advantage; night is drawing nigh—For all that has been—Thanks! To all that shall be—Yes!’

That statement of gratitude for all that has been and resignation to all that will be has captured the attention of seekers everywhere and found its way onto posters and into books of quotations worldwide. From the very beginning it presented itself to me as the context within which to situate this Jubilee reflection.

In attempting to explain this I must return to our history and visualize again with you the countless thousands who have preceded us as parishioners in this place. I see them coming together at various times and progressing in various ways towards a goal that draws them forward. True, as they come together they are motivated differently. For some they are gathering anxiously and in fear of missing out on salvation, for others it is part of their inheritance, their culture, something that their clan has always done. Others still see life as a parishioner as the only sane way to live both for themselves and their neighbors. Over the one hundred and fifty years it is a motley bunch with many and differing reasons for being who they claim to be and doing what they see themselves doing. Beyond their various motivations, what ultimately brings them together is a call, an invitation from their God, nothing more and nothing less.

That call goes back some two thousand years to a supper room where Jesus gathered with his disciples for a Jewish Passover Meal at a very special time in his life. That meal like Passover Meals before it was a ritual celebration in which the participants united with one another in reaching out to God for his blessing upon them, for acceptance, care and fellowship for now and into the future.

They did this taking their food and their
togetherness as symbols of their life through which they offered themselves in praise and worship to God, as I said, seeking his ongoing blessing and presence with them. All this was done in the context of thanksgiving for his call and care of them in the past. Thanksgiving!

On that particular night Jesus transformed the regular ritual by adding his life, and his about-to-happen death, to the offering telling the disciples to continue this new ritual in memory of him and as often as they did so he would be there with them so that from now on their prayer to the Father would be with him, in him and through him. It was to become a new prayer of thanksgiving in which they offered themselves in union with the offering of Jesus to their God.

Interestingly, this new ritual that also incorporated praise, worship and sought for blessing, would come to be known as ‘Thanksgiving’ or ‘Eucharist’. It was to become both the source and summit of the new relationship with our Father God that Jesus had come to share with us.

Forever now we are called to it solemnly with the words ‘let us give thanks to the Lord Our God’ and then immediately reminded that giving thanks is right and just, our duty and our salvation. The Parish is at the service of the Eucharist and the Eucharist at the service of the Parish. Today we celebrate the fact that in this place for one hundred and fifty years our brothers and sisters have been marching towards and out from this special meal that determines and empowers them to be who they are and who they are to be.

And who are we to be? Clearly a people who give thanks for all the blessings we have received. From the teaching of the Eucharist and the genius of seekers such as Dag Hammarskjold, it would seem that it is only in gratitude that we can be open to receive the promised gifts we desire and pray for. Only a grateful soul can fully receive the grace of God! Well might we ask, ‘Does the Lord join us in Eucharist if the words of thankfulness are not offered?’

If, as often happens, in a particular situation or circumstance in life we are not experiencing the presence of Jesus with us, the invitation would seem to be to search to find a way to pray over it a prayer of thanksgiving!

True—at any one time we are unable to embrace all of our reality within our thankfulness or offering, and so we repeat again and again the ritual until we can truly say, ‘for all that has been thanks’, and then the journey will be finished and we will be all together united with one another and with our God.

However we might see it the facts are that our Eucharist is a call to partake in a gathering in the form of a thanksgiving meal, something like what we are experiencing here in the entirety of today’s celebration.

Let us prepare now for this Eucharist and let our special focus be to give thanks for all that has been given to us through this Parish especially since its founding in 1863. As we stand alongside our ancestors and look forward to the future, at least part of our ‘Yes’ must be a commitment to do all that we can to restore our Eucharistic gatherings to what they are meant to be. This imagery of a meal and thanksgiving can give us the way forward to return our parishes to the robust realities they have been in the past.

For all that has been then, let us give thanks and for all that will be—Yes.

Keen that you would have something concrete to take home with you from this reflection, I decided to share with you this song. That it is in Italian I see as a special tribute to one of the major ethnic groups that have been part of our family since its inception.

Grazie, Signore, rendiamo grazie a Te che regni nei secoli eterni.

We will invite our choir to sing it for us a couple of times and then, please God, we will be able to join in with them.
PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE READINGS

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

1. The First readings have been collated with the theme of the Gospel in mind. While this might lock these readings into a particular interpretation, the power of these important readings should not be forgotten, especially as the Christian community and its homilist draws on their unique, ancient insights always needing to be celebrated. Two themes from these readings over this period concern wisdom and wealth.
   • During this time of the year (August—October), several readings are drawn from that body of Old Testament literature called ‘Wisdom.’ These are found in our readings from Ecclesiastes, the Book of Wisdom, and Sirach—also called ‘Ecclesiasticus’. Wisdom was a central gift for the Israelite people, and reflected God’s wisdom and presence among them. These readings focus on several features of God’s wisdom reflected in creation and among human beings: The gift of wisdom itself (OT 18), communion with God (OT 19), the need for discernment (OT 22), interiority (OT 23) and God’s concern for the poor (OT 30).
   • A second insight comes from the prophetic literature (beginning in the 8th cent BCE with Amos, OT 19 & 26) which invites us to consider the use of wealth and how the poor are exploited. This theme dovetails with appropriate passages from Luke’s Gospel.

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

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

PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS

July 7—Ordinary Time 14. Is 66:10-14. God’s desire to comfort the disconsolate is tangibly and powerfully expressed in this beautiful hymn. Gal 6:14-18. Paul expresses his desire for total union with Jesus, even in suffering. Lk 10:1-12, 17-20. Jesus sends his disciples on a difficult and, at times, unappreciated mission. Theme—Union with Jesus. Paul exemplifies the meaning of Christian living—union with Jesus that permeates his whole life to the point that it becomes a reflection of Jesus’ own life. There are many examples of those who live this kind of life today. These might be named and celebrated today.

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

July 21—Ordinary Time 16: Gen 18:1-10. Abraham offers hospitality to unexpected and unrecognised angelic visitors, and is blessed. Col 1:24-28. The writer encourages a disposition to make God’s Word fully known, to teach through Jesus in all wisdom and bring others to genuine maturity. Lk 10:38-42. Luke offers us a snapshot of ministerial tension: either get all the work done or focus on Jesus. The encouragement is to focus on Jesus in the midst of life’s concerns. Theme—Hospitality. A life of busyness and time of upheaval can leave us diving for self-survival. The readings (First Reading and Gospel) encourage a disposition of hospitality practically open to others and essentially focussed on God.

July 28—Ordinary Time 17: Gen 18:20-32. God is revealed as compassionate, forgiving and conversational. Col 2:6-14. The writer celebrates the communion that the baptised disciple shares with Jesus. Lk 11:1-13. Jesus teaches about prayer. Theme—Communion with God. Two readings (First Reading and Gospel) invite reflection on the centrality of prayer in our lives, as conversation with a God who is open. In a NT highpoint, Colossians presents Jesus as God’s tangible expression in bodily form. Both themes are important and complementary. They invite us into communion with God through Jesus.

August 4—Ordinary Time 18: Eccl 1:2; 2:21-23. The ancient wisdom-poet asks: ‘What is true Wisdom after all our labouring?’ Col 3:1-5, 9-11. The writer encourages us to focus on Jesus. This focus will renew us. Lk 12:13-21. Jesus warns against forms of greed that make one oblivious to what is most important, true life. Theme—Wisdom: We celebrate the
gift of wisdom which God offers us, through this community and our union with Jesus. Wisdom is a gift necessary at a time when we seem preoccupied with issues of justice, peace and well-being. What is the wisdom that this community needs today?

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

**August 18—Ordinary Time 20:**
Jer 38:4-6,8-10. The prophet suffers for his commitment to God and is imprisoned in a sewer. Heb 12:1-4. We are encouraged in life by those faithful witnesses of faith who have gone before us; we are encouraged to focus on Jesus the ‘pioneer’ of what it means to believe. Lk 12:49-53. Commitment to Jesus comes at a cost, which sometimes is difficult. Theme—The cost of Fidelity: Jeremiah and Luke offer us two insights into commitment: Jeremiah finds himself in the local city sewer and Jesus teaches how commitment will even cause tension within families. The gospel does not predict what will happen, but is naming what is happening in Lk’s Greco-Roman world where commitment to the one God is costly. Lk’s world expects total allegiance to the god-king Caesar. Many examples abound in our local community of lived faithful commitment that give heart and strengthen us in the face of difficult odds.

**August 25—Ordinary Time 21:**

**September 1—Ordinary Time 22:**
Sirach 3:17-20, 28-29. The writer encourages humble living with a focus on God and others, rather than from living arrogantly. Heb 12:18-19,22-24. We are ‘citizens’ of the ‘city of the living God. Lk 14:1.7-14. A story about honour and inclusive hospitality set in Lk’s Greco-Roman world of social etiquette and status. Theme—Eucharistic Hospitality. The Gospel offers an opportunity to celebrate the way our local faith community is inclusive, and expresses this liturgically. Who are those touched by this Eucharist? How does this Eucharist touch the local community, the nation, the world and cosmos?

**September 8—Ordinary Time 23:**
Wis 9:13-18. This song celebrates Wisdom; God’s gift is revealed in the world and known by human beings. Philemon 9-10,12-17. Paul encourages Philemon to welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus, as ‘a beloved brother.’ Lk 14:25-33. The disciple is focussed on Jesus and nothing compromises this relationship. Theme—Riches and Poverty. Luke challenges a world that sees possessions as a sign of divine blessing or favour. The gospel invites us to know a deeper wisdom celebrated in the first reading. Can we celebrate those local heroes, perhaps unnamed or unrecognised, who live by wisdom with a sense of total commitment to God and God’s community?

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

**September 22—Ordinary Time 25: Amos 8:4-7.** The prophet names unjust practices that target the poor. *1Tim 2:1-8.* The writer urges prayers for civic leaders and identifies the centrality of Jesus in the act of intercession with God. *Lk 16:1-13.* The steward acts to ensure that he will always be welcomed into village life. Acting judiciously brings acclaim to his master and a new appraisal. **Theme—Acting Justly.** The weak, poor and marginalised are victims of exploitation in our nation. We are invited to name those victimised and become advocates of the exploited. This Eucharist joins us to Jesus and the wider community of the just; we are in communion with all who suffer.

**September 29—Ordinary Time 26: Amos 6:1a,4-7** The prophet targets those who benefit from the exploitation of the poor. *1Tim 6:11-16.* A late first century NT summary about Jesus’ ministry and exaltation. *Lk 16:19-31.* Jesus’ challenging parable about how wealth must be used to alleviate the needs of the poor. **Theme—Use of Wealth.** In Luke’s day, a wealthy person was a greedy person. The readings encourage us not to be possessed by our possessions but to use them for others.

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

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

**October 20—Ordinary Time 29. Ex 17:8-13.** Moses’ prayer for victory is effective. *2 Tim 3:14-4:2.* The minister is encouraged to be faithful to what has been taught, to Scripture, and to the task of courageous proclamation. *Lk 18:1-8.* An unnamed widow’s persistence gains justice and response from an elite judge. **Theme—Prayer:** The Eucharist is the local church’s moment of prayer for and union with all humanity and creation. What are the current situations and events that could be the focus of our Eucharist celebration and intercession today?

**October 27—Ordinary Time 30. Sirach 35:15-17,20-22.** According to this wisdom writer, God shows deference to the poor whose prayer ‘pierces’ the clouds. *2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18.* The writer affirms God’s fidelity in a time of suffering and trial. *Lk 18:9-14.* Jesus’ God subverts the social expectation of favour and privilege. **Theme—God Listens.** God responds to our cries in times of difficulty, loneliness and distress. God seeks to be with all who struggle. What makes us sad? What is difficult?

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