THE EASTER season is a joyful time, and joy is a pervasive theme in the liturgy of the season. There is ecstatic joy, as in the gospel of the third Sunday of Easter. Upon seeing Jesus the disciples were ecstatic: 'The joy of the disciples was so great that they could not believe it and they stood dumbfounded' (Lk 24:40). They were overwhelmed with joy on seeing Jesus again when they thought they had lost him.

There is also a quieter joy, an everyday joy, the joy that makes us an Easter people. Jesus' resurrection changes everything, and we rejoice at what that means for us. We rise with him to new life. Christ is risen to open the way for us to fuller life. The resurrection of Jesus sets the pattern of life for the Christian, the follower of Christ: we are following Christ by dying and rising to fuller life with him.

We have many reasons to live joyful lives. Christ is the light of the world—'light shines in darkness and darkness could not overpower it' (John 1:5). We rejoice at the power of God's love in Christ. God's mercy and forgiveness are causes for our joy. St Paul wrote: 'He loved me and delivered himself for me' (Gal. 2:20). There are no ends to which God will not go for us, and for us to know that is world-changing for us. We feel grounded: 'My God is a fortress and a rock; in Him I am safe'. We are freed from fear, and experience a deep peace. The power of God's love in Christ is cause for our hope, the promise of salvation and safety.

Joy is to characterise all our lives, it is not an experience that is reserved to the Easter season. St Paul tells us to 'Rejoice always' (1 Thess. 5:16). Joy is not a failure to appreciate evil, but a response to it. Our joy affirms that good is normal and evil is abnormal. Reality is good. Good is more fundamental than evil—good is primary, while evil is 'a privation of due good' (privatio boni debiti) as St Thomas Aquinas defined it. Reality is basically good: 'God saw all that he had made and found it very good' (Gen 1: …..) And so we are to rejoice always. Joy is fundamental, greater than the scandal of evil.

John-Henry Newman wrote:
Gloom is no Christian temper; that repentance is not real which has not love in it; that self-chastisement is not acceptable which is not sweetened by faith and cheerfulness. We must live in sunshine, even when we sorrow; we must live in God's presence, we must not shut ourselves up in our own hearts, even when we are reckoning up our past sins... We must look abroad into this fair world which God made 'very good', while we mourn over the evil which Adam brought into it. (Erich Przywara, The Heart of Newman. A Synthesis Arranged by Erich Przywara S.J. (San Francisco. Ignatius Press, 1997), p.317.

During the Easter season we are presented with readings that develop the theme of rising with Christ to fuller life. On the fifth Sunday of Easter we hear the Gospel on the vine and the branches and we reflect on Christ the source of life for us. We draw life from him, as branches from the vine. We are to remain in him. Cut off from him we cease to draw life from him, and we wither.

Jesus tells us to make our home in him as he makes his in us. We are to remain in Christ, stay with him, especially by participating in community worship where we are pruned by the word of God, so that we will bear much fruit—that is, we will live fruitful lives, giving thanks to God, following Jesus' way, and being a blessing for others.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor
OUR PATHWAY TO GOD:
TOUCH

TOM RYAN SM

In literature speaking of touch, prayer and God, the text most often used is one cited in the previous article on sight in this journal. In 1 John 1:1, the witnesses of the incarnation say how 'we...have touched with our hands...the Word, who is life.' This underlines what is more explicitly stated in the Prologue of John's Gospel: 'The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth' or in Paul's comment that 'the full content of divine nature lives in Christ, in his humanity' (Col. 2:9). These texts highlight how touch is immediately associated with embodiment, of God embodied in Jesus, and of the central role materiality plays in revealing the glory of God.

Similarly, recourse was earlier made to Augustine: 'you touched me, and I burned for your peace.' The response to God's touch, for Augustine, is marked by its affective quality. He is moved by the divine gesture. More importantly, once aroused his whole person feels impelled to respond with deepened desire and intense devotion.

In the light of these texts, touch, perhaps uniquely amongst our senses, engages us in our identity as embodied beings, in our vulnerability, in the relational aspect of personhood and in faith as a knowing of God. Let's explore these.

Traces of the Divine

There is something primordial, with touch. We resort to it when someone is lost for words—a reassuring hand, a gentle hug. Even in silence, something is still communicated. When words hit a wall, touch can open a door, even to a person's inner depths so that, perhaps in tears, they can be shared.

Again, with a couple, a touch of the fingers can signal a shift to another level in the relationship. Its growth can be measured by the various stages of physical intimacy. Alternatively, it is touch that suggests the space around our person. When we are hurt, we instinctively protect ourselves ('don't touch me'). Even (or especially) in emotional pain, it is through our bodies that our vulnerability is expressed.

Again, our body is a marker of who we are. We leave clues of our presence everywhere. Personal identity is captured in the uniqueness of the fingerprint or of DNA. As the burglar will cover the soles of his shoes or wear gloves so too will the detective at the crime scene so as not to 'contaminate' the crime scene.

We cannot hide from our bodies. Our bodies, especially touch, 'give us away' (an apt phrase, as we shall see later). It is in the sense of touch, in particular, that the mystery of our humanity is captured. In a way, all our senses can be reduced to touch - through light or sound waves for sight and hearing or through molecules for taste, smell and touch. What does this say about God and us? I will anchor these reflections in Mark 1:40-45 and John 20:24-9. We can gather insights from these texts about touch in relation to a) God, vulnerability and suffering; b) the knowing of faith.

What Jesus' Touch Reveals about God

In Mark 1: 40-45, notice how Jesus
spontaneously reaches out to make physical contact with the leper through touch. Think of other times when he does this. It is almost as if Jesus could not help himself. His deep compassion urges Him to reassure, to console, to heal, especially through physical contact.

Here, Jesus' physical contact is with the leper, namely, someone 'unclean.' In a close-living community, heightened sensitivity to communicable skin conditions that aren't understood is further compounded by a religious aura. The skin complaint is both contagious and a pointer to someone being at odds with God ('sinful'). In a sense, they are 'quarantined' but it takes the form of extreme religious and social exclusion.

There are two 'risks' here. The man ignores the Law's prescriptions and approaches Jesus and begs for help. He not only believes that Jesus has the power to make him clean, 'a power the biblical tradition attributes to God alone.' Like other desperate figures in Mark's Gospel (e.g., woman with the hemorrhage 5:25-34), 'he displays a faith prepared to break through barriers.'

There is also a risk for Jesus. Physical contact with the 'leper' renders Jesus ritually unclean, hence, socially and religiously excluded. Unable to attend the Synagogue, Jesus has to live temporarily on the fringes of the community. He is like an outcast, existing in a condition from which the healed man had been freed.

Here, we find God, in love and compassion, embracing our vulnerable humanity and, in the process, revealing a divine vulnerability to suffering. Jesus is open to rejection, to physical and emotional pain. From the start of his public life, Jesus shows, in his contact with others, his desire to be in solidarity with all humanity, especially with society's victims. This episode, then, is not an isolated act. Byrne points out that it 'anticipates the whole costly 'entrance' of the Son of God into the 'uncleanliness' and alienation of the human situation that will come to a climax as he dies on the cross.'

Touch, in this context, has two complementary aspects. Jesus, in touching the man in 'all his dehumanizing disfigurement, so in his Passion, he most radically '.touches' the whole human condition.' Alternatively, in subverting the unclean/clean boundary, being 'unclean' is not something that Jesus 'catches' from physical contact. The opposite is the case. All who, despite 'feelings of moral or physical disfigurement' approach Jesus in faith 'catch' healing and wholeness from him. Divine 'touch', in its vulnerability, is both inclusive and life-giving. Again, we see here how touch is inherently relational. We can see and hear from a distance. But touch is the sense that engages us most closely. It is related to the whole person as an embodied subject. To paraphrase Newton's Third Law of Motion: you cannot touch without being touched back. But more can be said about touch, compassion, vulnerability and suffering.

**A God Who Suffers**

In his study of kenotic theology, Oliver Davies argues that compassion exposes the other-orientated character of consciousness, hence, of existence as inter-subjective. To be moved by compassion is a feature of the structure of consciousness. He draws on Martha Nussbaum's defence of compassion as the basic social emotion. Aquinas is of the same view when, for instance, he cites St. Ambrose on the Good Samaritan (Luke
Jesus Christ is 'an epiphany of infinite being,' \(^7\) in the triadic structure: we are exposed to another's distress (cognition), we feel moved by what we see (affective) and we take active steps to try to remedy it (volitional). These elements are present in Jesus' encounter with the leper. Davies' aim is a phenomenological study on how the compassion of God accomplished in Jesus Christ is 'an epiphany of infinite being,' \(^7\) something again reflected in the same incident.

If Jesus is the fullest revelation of God, what can we learn here? There are two aspects for consideration.

First, we look to Aquinas and his treatment of compassion and mercy. He argues that misericordia (connoting alleviating distress and extending forgiveness) is most properly attributed to God such that God's power is revealed 'most of all' (maxime) in divine compassion and mercy. Aquinas appeals to the Church's worship to clinch his argument. \(^8\) He cites what is now the Collect for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time: 'O God, you manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy...'. In addition, Aquinas's fellow Dominican Meister Eckhart said, 'You may call God love; you may call God goodness; but the best name for God is Compassion. \(^9\)

Elsewhere, Aquinas says that compassion and mercy are the source of all God's works. In so doing, Aquinas uncovers in misericordia a third dimension, beyond relieving distress and offering forgiveness. It befits God to compensate for creaturely limitation, impelling it towards further self-transcendence. \(^10\) There is a certain convergence between Aquinas and Davies for whom, compassion, with love, shares a foundational character 'so that it is not so much a particular virtue as a self-dispossessive attitude of mind which makes the particular virtues possible.'\(^11\)

Second, if, as Aquinas argues, it is through misericordia that we can have some understanding of what is uniquely constitutive of the divine identity, we are still left with a question: in what way can we speak with any truth about the 'suffering' of God? How do we preserve divine perfection yet take seriously the divine vulnerability where the triune God is moved, as the Scripture says, to his very depths?

Aquinas observes that, because of the unity of divine and human natures in a single person, Jesus of Nazareth, it is possible to say that Jesus' suffering is itself the very suffering of God. \(^12\) Jacques Maritain points out that Aquinas's response, while true, 'leaves the mind unsatisfied.' \(^13\) How can we speak of divine distress at our distress, as an element in the perfection of the divine Being and also as an expression God's knowing and loving? Alternatively, as Maritain expresses it, '[S]hould we not say of mercy, then, that it exists in God according to what it is, and not only according to what it does?' \(^14\) Together Aquinas and Maritain offer an approach to this mystery.

If God is considered as the plenitude of Being, Aquinas says that all created goodness arises from divine loving. \(^15\) By viewing compassion or the 'pain of God' in terms of the depth of God's being and love, one can appeal, as does Maritain, to the notion of divine perfections that are nameless and implying no imperfection. He argues that compassion and mercy exist in God as a perfection of the divine being for which there is no name: a glory or splendor unnamed, implying no imperfection, unlike what we call suffering or sorrow, and for which we have no idea, no concept, and no name that would be applicable to God. \(^16\)

Maritain notes that the suffering of human love is a reality that is not totally negative. Together with its 'deprivation,' it carries something positive, noble, fertile and...
precious, in other words, a perfection. Its analogate in God, namely, its unnameable and deeply mysterious 'exemplar,' is the merciful suffering of God as a part of God's 'happiness and beyond what is humanly conceivable.' There is, undoubtedly, suffering that is not compatible with the absolute perfection of God. Nevertheless, Maritain argues, there is a 'hurt of God,' a reality beyond concepts and language, that is a pure perfection. The deep mystery of the unspeakable sorrow that evil, sin and suffering causes God brings, not divine disintegration, but rather reveals the 'unsuspected grandeur' of the Godhead. The human analogate of this unutterable 'hurt' or compassion as a perfection in the heart of God is magnanimity—'the nobility that sorrow carries with it when it is overcome by greatness of soul.'

In reflecting on touch as associated with vulnerability and suffering, both human and divine, the spotlight has fallen on compassion (co-suffering). In sharing in the divine life, we too are inescapably called to 'be compassionate as your Father is compassionate' (Lk. 6:36). Here, we can learn from the French School of Spirituality where the transformation wrought by the divine indwelling (deification) is seen in the context of Jesus and his earthly life.

In being united to Jesus, we can, now, unite ourselves to his interior 'states' that encapsulate, so to speak, the different moments of his life, death and resurrection. We can make our own—for our salvation and sanctification—the essence of the mysteries of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin, born at Bethlehem, hidden at Nazareth, preaching and healing in Galilee and Judea, suffering and dying in Jerusalem, risen and ascended into heaven. We can share both in the compassion of Jesus as he touches the leper and in His vulnerability in being a social outcast. By pondering prayerfully the details of the Gospel narratives, we are to penetrate beyond the event itself to the attitude of Jesus towards his Father and towards his fellow human-beings. We are called to share in divine magnanimity noted above—the 'nobility that sorrow carries with it when it is overcome by greatness of soul.' This brings us to another phase of the discussion.

**Touch and the Knowing of Faith**

Let's ponder John 20: 24-9 with the help of Francis J Moloney. Though surrounded by the signs of Easter faith (peace and joy), Thomas remains in the darkness of unfaith. Notice how Thomas' final step to faith in the Risen Jesus is by his Master's appeal to touch. This is consistent with the other scenes after Jesus had risen. Reassurance comes from something 'bodily'—eating fish, Mary Magdalene hearing her name, the disciples recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread. Thomas' first step towards faith is that he is 'only prepared to lay aside his unfaith if the risen Jesus meets his criteria', namely, that Jesus be 'touchable.' In the appearance eight days later, Jesus offers to 'fulfill Thomas's conditions' but also to go beyond faith based on certain conditions: 'put your finger here: look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas forgets the ritual he requested of touching Jesus' wounds. He responds to the challenge of faith with 'My Lord and My God.'

But this scene underlines two other points. First, It anticipates the words of 1 Peter 2:24-25 that allude to Isaiah 53:4-5: 'through his wounds you have been healed.' Or as another phrase says: 'Where he (Jesus) is most disfigured, there he is most glorified.' When is Jesus revealed as most fully human and most fully God? It is in the self-giving love in his death, at the point of being torn between abandonment and surrender. When Jesus is most helpless, he is most open in his humanity to receiving the 'utter fullness of God.' We image God...
and grow in divine likeness in same pattern—
in our flawed, wounded but loved and 
redeemed humanity.

Second, Thomas's faith journey, as with
that of Mary Magdalene, looks ahead to 
future generations, to the readers of the 
Gospel story. 'There is a 'quality of faith 
without sight surpassing the faith that 
generated Thomas's confession.' This faith 
is not dependent on the physical presence 
of Jesus (as in seeing and touching) but 
characterizes those who 'believe in the 
absence of Jesus'21 (to be discussed in the 
final section of this article).

**Touch and Relationships.**

We saw earlier how we can see and hear from 
a distance and that touch is the sense that 
engages us most closely in that it is related 
to the whole body. There is something 
especially relational about touch. Hosea 
uses the image of God as a parent who lifts 
Israel as 'an infant close against his cheek' 
(11.18). Touch can range from brushing 
against someone, to placing a reassuring 
hand briefly on another's, to holding, 
hugging, embracing, clinging or kissing. With 
touch, there is a trajectory towards 
increasing union and intimacy. There is also 
the regenerative and healing power of touch. 
Diarmuid O'Murchu reminds us that, through 
touch, we 'begin to experience both the 
complexity and the intimacy of the mystery 
within which we are held.'22

Touch is closely linked with our sexuality. 
Both are used as metaphors in God's 
relationship with us. God is the passionate and 
faithful Lover (see The Songs of Songs). 
Pope John Paul II notes how we can discover 
'in the body the anticipatory signs, the 
expression and promise of the gift of self.'23

Timothy Radcliffe says that sexual intimacy 
is saying through the body 'I give myself to 
you, without reserve, now and forever, and I 
receive all of you as a gift.'24 It is an act of 
'telling the truth' with our bodies in an act of 
mutual sharing of vulnerability. Our bodies 
truly 'give us away.'

This captures beautifully how our 
sexuality gives us a glimpse of the way God 
holds us in his arms and treasures us. It also 
reminds us that we are called to image God 
in our bodies and our sexuality. We are meant 
to delight in the other person, in their very 
existence, in their vulnerability, just as God 
delights in us.

It is through our bodies that we belong. 
Our bodiliness is the very site of worship. It 
mediates God's presence and action, as in 
the sacraments. It is in our bodies that are 
baptized. We are anointed on the skin with 
oil, nourished with consecrated bread and 
wine. Without our body, where do we 
belong? The early Christian author Tertullian 
said that 'the flesh is the hinge of salvation.' 
Without the gift of my body, I cannot be my 
true self. I cannot be an image of God. The 
Word Made Flesh is God's guarantee of this. 
It is summed up in 'this is my body, given 
for you.'

Touch and its suggestions of depth and 
belonging remind us that we do not pray 
alone. It is always in Jesus to the Father. It is 
always within the community of faith. Finally, 
in *Meeting Mystery*, Nathan Mitchell 
reminds us that prayer is about 'being 
connected and making connections'—to God, 
people, and the world around us.

A final thought in this section. Sometimes, 
we often struggle to accept that we are 
images of God precisely as embodied beings. 
Do we really believe that God's fullness is 
given and revealed in the humanity of Jesus?

There may be two reasons for our 
difficulty. First, bringing desires, body and 
spirit into harmony is a struggle. We can 
easily think that the body is the seat of sin. 
But, in fact, it is the will.

Second, 'body' and 'flesh' in Scripture need 
to be carefully understood. God loves the 
'body' in which, as we know, Jesus expresses 
the fullness of his divinity. The word 'flesh' 
(Greek *sarx*) for Paul denotes 'the whole
person from a particular aspect: the aspect of frailty, mortality, proneness to sin, hostility to God...it is in the flesh that sin gets its base of operations in human nature.25 The 'unspiritual' aspect of the total self is what pulls me away from God or opposes God. It describes radical selfishness and the desire to be completely autonomous—to set our own boundaries of the moral universe. Alternatively, pneuma denotes the whole person as open to God (as 'spiritual') and one can only persevere in the spiritual combat with the help and energy of the Spirit (Pneuma). This is the inward struggle Paul talks about in Romans Ch. 7. It is not a battle between 'spirit' (good) and body or 'flesh' (evil).

This brings us to our final consideration: how faith in God is expressed in terms of 'touching God' or 'being touched by God.' How is this understood figuratively and analogically in the Christian spiritual tradition?

**God: Touching and Being Touched**

It was noted in an earlier article that hearing best captures the receptive/reactive aspect of interpersonal relationships and, in particular, the call/response dynamic with God. But taste and touch seem best attuned to capturing the increasing sense of closeness in relationship and to their intimate and unitive aspects. This appears to be the approach of some writers in the tradition, particularly in relation to the knowing of faith as expressed by recourse to the language and imagery of the five senses. Our focus is on the sense of touch found in the knowing of faith in the Risen Lord who is present but also, in a physical sense, absent (as discussed above concerning John 20).

We have noted, in earlier discussions, that the practice of analogical recourse to the bodily senses for imagery to describe the soul and spiritual realities generally was common to all traditions in the patristic and medieval periods. Denys Turner observes that a distinct feature of voluntarist traditions of Medieval spirituality was that their imagery was derived by analogy from the senses of touch, taste and small rather than those of sight and hearing.26 For instance, twelfth and thirteenth century writers such as Alexander of Hales, Thomas Gallus, Bonaventure and Bernard of Clairvaux took the Song of Songs as their point of departure. For them, in the mystical ascent, spiritual sight and hearing 'were toppled by spiritual touch as the mode of perception implying a closer contact with the subject.' This insight is aligned with Augustine's dictum: 'touch is the end of knowing.'27 Where a more intellectual approach gave priority to sight and hearing in relation to those other three senses linked to the body's vital needs (as for Aristotle), this more affective approach follows the Dionysian principle: 'the higher a reality is on the scale of excellence the more appropriate it is to use images of lower things to describe it.' Hence, the higher forms of theological contemplation are 'best imaged by the lower senses of touch, taste and smell.'28

Alexander of Hales is illuminating on touch. He arranges the senses in terms of proximity to their object. Faith's vision and hearing of divine things as truth are the most distant. The most "intimate and certain knowledge of God" comes from the perception of divine goodness through scent, taste and especially touch. With touch, there is a form of direct and immediate contact such that, like taste, one cannot but be affected by what is apprehended. For Alexander (and Bonaventure), when describing intimacy with God, touch (and taste) have priority. Following 1 Cor 6: 17 ('But anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him'), touch belongs to charity and is an act of adhering, namely, when one perceives through experience that 'one is one spirit with God.' Coolman notes that, for Alexander, as for Thomas Gallus and Augustine, the goal and fulfillment of 'all spiritually sensuous knowledge' is to 'touch
God.  

Continuing this theme into the twentieth century, Mark McInroy points out that for Karl Rahner, in his reading of Bonaventure on the spiritual senses, 'spiritual touch confers an immediate experience of God that takes place in the *apex affectus*, the 'deepest' part of the human being. Through the touch of God at this deepest point, there arises a consciousness of this direct union of love without any active role of the intellect. The soul experiences God immediately in the ground of its being … all knowledge is left behind 'and the experience remains obscure … God is here the dark fire of love.'

**Conclusion**

The sense of touch, whether viewed physically or figuratively, has a unique role in prayer, in our relationship with God and in our spiritual journey. Its inherently bodily character captures both human vulnerability and the impulse towards union. Its expression, through hands and bodily contact, can follow a path from momentary contact through to caressing and embracing. Perhaps touch is the sense that is most associated with giving and receiving and is paradigmatic of the Trinity's image in our person and relationships. It finds it fullest human expression in sexual intimacy where we 'give ourselves away' in an expression of shared vulnerability. It is for good reason that being touched by God in spiritual ecstasy is portrayed in erotic form, as in Bernini's sculpture of St Teresa of Avila. Touch and being touched can lead to surrender and trusting abandonment into the hands of another, epitomized in Jesus' cry from the cross in handing himself into the hands of his Abba Father.

Let's leave the final word to Morris West from *The Shoes of the Fisherman*:

'It costs so much to be a full human being that there are very few who have the enlightenment or the courage to pay the price… One has to abandon altogether the search for security, and, reach out to the risk of living with both arms. One has to embrace the world like a lover. One has to accept pain as a condition of existence. One has to court doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing. One needs a will stubborn in conflict, but apt always to total acceptance of every consequence of living and dying.'

**NOTES**

2. Ibid., 51.
3. Ibid., 51.
8. *Summa Theologiae* 2.2.30. 4 (Henceforth ST).
10. 'If we consider every work of God at its primary source, we see that *misericordia* is present. This is because God, out of the abundance of His goodness, bestows on creatures what is due to them more generously than is demanded by what is fitting for a particular thing's nature' (ST 1.2. 21.4. Author's translation. Also, ST 1.25. 3, ad 3.
12. ST 3.16. 2 - 4
15. 'The love of God is actively infusive and creative of the goodness of things' (ST I 20. 2).
18. Cited in Emery, *Trinity, Church and the Human Person*, 256. In this section, I have drawn on ideas...
developed in an earlier article: 'Aquinas on Compassion: Has He Anything To Offer Today?' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75:2, May 2010, 157-174.

**Meditation as a Subversive Activity** by Sarah Coakley

A few years ago I had the opportunity to work for a semester as a chaplain at a Boston jail. My primary work was helping to lead a group of inmates in the practice of silent prayer...

...one of the most striking features of jail life is the continuous level of noise. Without carpets on the floor, with screams of command from the guards regularly punctuating the atmosphere, and with small three-men cells as the locus of ongoing physical tensions and arguments (homosexual rape is a scandalously regular form of violence), jail offers little opportunity for stillness and peace. Many men find it difficult even to close their eyes in the presence of others they fear. Privacy of a sort can be achieved only by demotion to solitary confinement...

...By the end of the term, my ‘class’ had grown from about 15 to over 40; all were African-American or Latino men between the ages of 17 and about 35, with the exception of two older white men (who always came together for mutual support)...  

...Shared silence in peace and solidarity in the context of a jail is possibly the most subversive act of resistance to the jail’s culture of terrorization and violence that one might devise. (Occasionally I would catch the eye of the guard who checked on us at regular intervals through the large picture window into the chapel; his look of sheer wonder and simultaneous suspicion was noteworthy.) I learned too that at least some of the men were profoundly interested in reimagining their ‘time’ as a process of trial and transformation...

... Fumbling to find them materials from the history of Christian spirituality that might fire their imagination, I took in a sheet of selected sayings from the desert fathers that stressed the efficacy of simply ‘remaining in one's cell’ as a purposive means of monastic self-knowledge. They were as intrigued by these sayings as they were to learn that Christian monasticism started in Africa....

Occasionally, as if by miracle, the straining and sweating and shifting of a hard shared silence would transmute into a few minutes of acute and focused stillness. After one such ‘miracle’ a prison social worker (not a Christian) who was with us that day asked: ‘Why is this so wonderful, and so different, when we do it together?’ An older African-American prisoner, Terry, replied, ‘I’ve only just become a Christian; but doesn’t it say somewhere in the New Testament that when two or three are gathered together Jesus promises to be with us?’ I learned that day that such scriptural texts can gain powerful new valency in the prison context.

A CONSISTENT VISION OF LOVE AND COMPASSION

HANS KWAKMAN MSC

Pope Francis: Towards a Compassionate Church

From the beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis has laid a strong emphasis on mercy and compassion. For the Pope, the service of compassion is central to the mission of the Church. He once stated 'that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful.'

Calling upon the church’s leaders to be 'ministers of mercy above all,' he laid out this vision for the church:

I dream of a Church that is a mother and a shepherdess. The Church ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the Good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel.

On another occasion, the Pope said: 'We need Christians who make God’s mercy and tenderness for every creature visible to the men and women of our day.' In his first Apostolic Exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel', Pope Francis restated this point: 'The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel' (EG n. 114).

Before Pope Francis, several Popes had already spoken about the virtues of mercy and compassion as central to the message of the Gospel. For example, Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical entitled 'Dives in Misericordia', which means, 'Rich in Compassion.' But Pope Francis appears to make the message and practice of 'Compassion' the fundamental inspiration of the way he carries out his Papal ministry. In its preaching, he said, the Church 'has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary' (EG n. 35). That means, the Church should concentrate on the core message of the Gospel:

To respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured! All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love (EG n. 39).

As retired Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane in Australia, shortly before his death in 1999, James Cuskelly MSC wrote a little book entitled, Walking the Way of Jesus, An Essay on Christian Spirituality. For Cuskelly, this Spirituality articulates the foundation of our Christian faith and mission. He writes, 'What makes us Christians is that we 'have learned to believe in the love that God has for us'.

This is a simple vision of faith, but it is essential and central. Starting with this truth, ours needs to be a 'consistent vision of love' ... A 'consistent vision of love' begins with the text from St. John: 'God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son' (John 3:16). Then it sees everything that God does in and through Jesus as totally motivated by love (p. 17-18).

Cuskelly admits that 'it is not easy for us to grasp the idea of an infinitely loving God, or to cling to the conviction that 'God is compassion and love' (Ps 102), but we need to do so' (p. 20), because it is the central message of Jesus himself.
**Cardinal Walter Kasper: 'Mercy, the Essence of the Gospel'**

This same 'consistent vision of love' has been elaborated by Cardinal Walter Kasper in his book, entitled 'Mercy, The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian life'. Before becoming Pope Francis, Cardinal Bergoglio had read the book and commented: 'This book has done me so much good'. Key elements in Pope Francis' vision of the Mission of the Church can be found in the central themes of this book of Walter Kasper'. Kasper himself describes his book as an attempt 'to connect theological reflection with spiritual, pastoral and also social considerations concerning a culture of mercy.

1. **How to understand the word 'compassion'?**

Cardinal Kasper notes that these days, to the ears of many people, the words 'compassion' and 'mercy' may sound sentimental. In today's society, people are expected to be strong, healthy and successful. If not, they belong to the losers, who are often even blamed for having failed in life, as if it is their own fault.

On the other hand, the Cardinal states that today there are also movements, which try to promote the values of empathy, compassion and solidarity. Thanks be to God, that victims of natural catastrophes, outbreaks of violence and structural poverty unleash again and again an impressive wave of compassion and readiness to help.

Also modern psychotherapy, pedagogy, sociology and pastoral work emphasize the importance of a compassionate or empathetic approach. Putting oneself into the feelings, thoughts and situation of another person or culture is considered to be a necessary requirement of interpersonal relationships and intercultural encounter.

Together with many other authors, Kasper understands compassion as empathetic feeling and merciful behavior, as well as alertness to the cry for justice. In the word 'compassion', he hears the word 'passion', which encourages us to make a passionate response to the appalling injustice in contemporary society.

2. **The Revelation of God's name: 'I will be there for you'**

Central to Cardinal Kasper's understanding of compassion is God's revelation of his name to Moses in the burning bush. This revelation was the beginning of Israel's exodus. God said to Moses: 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows' (Exodus 3:7-8). And when Moses then asks God for his name, he receives the mysterious answer: 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:14). According to Hebraic thinking, the word 'I am' does not refer to an abstract idea of 'being' in general, but to a dynamic and practical way of being present, here and now. By revealing his name as 'the One who is', God really says: 'I will be there for you. I will be with you in your suffering and accompany you on your life's journey'.

So, already the revelation of God's name in the Old Testament shows us that 'God is compassion', just as later on St. John will witness that 'God is love.' It is not the 'Almighty' or 'All-powerful' qualities, which express the core of God's divine being, but the words 'Love' and 'Compassion'. That means, as Bishop Cuskelly already noted, all God's works as Creator and Savior are...
motivated by love and compassion. It also means that, when defining the meaning of the word 'compassion' in relation to God, we should not rely upon our own superficial understanding of 'compassion', for example by only imagining God as 'Dear Lord', but we should pay careful attention to the way God reveals himself as 'the One who is compassionate' in the Old and New Testament.

That is what Walter Kasper is doing. Based on biblical witness, he shows us that without any doubt, God has a compassionate heart, which is merciful and forgiving, but that this heart also may flare up in anger, when God's children are treated unjustly; and that in his compassion, God is also wholeheartedly committed to the cause of justice in society.

3. Jesus' Heart as the Revelation of God's Compassion

God's name, 'I will be there for you' is definitively revealed in the person of Jesus that is, in his ministry, death, resurrection and outpouring of the Spirit. Jesus' words at the Last Supper express in summary fashion what was the core of Jesus' existence, namely Jesus' 'being for us and for all'. By allowing Jesus to die 'for all human beings', by raising him from the dead, and by pouring out the Spirit, God definitively proved 'to be there for us'. In the midst of darkness, suffering and death, God shows himself to be 'a God full of mercy, who makes possible for us a new beginning and gives us a new birth by his great mercy.'

Cardinal Kasper dedicates a special chapter to the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a particular expression of faith in God's 'being there for us'. In the Heart of Jesus, we recognize that God himself has a heart for us. From the pierced Heart of Jesus emerged blood and water as symbols of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In allowing his Son to die for us, and his heart to be pierced, God went to extremes in 'being there for us'. Sent by his Father, Jesus carried his suffering in solidarity with all human beings in their suffering. At the same time the Father empowered us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, emerging from the Heart of Jesus, enabling us to bear our own suffering and that of others.

4. God's Compassion and Justice.

Walter Kasper writes at length about the relationship between compassion and justice. He states: 'mercy is not opposed to justice'; rather mercy is the source of justice and the fulfilment of justice. But the question arises: how can God simultaneously be compassionate and just? How can a God, who is perfectly just, be merciful and forgive the perpetrators without being unjust to the victims, when the victims demand justice to be done?

In former days, we have been taught that God is first of all 'just'. God, it was said, rewards the good, and punishes the bad, while only as an afterthought, God will forgive the sinners who repent and ask for forgiveness. The picture of a punitive and avenging God was and is still widespread and, as Cardinal Kasper comments, 'has thrown many people into a state of anxiety about their eternal salvation.' The old image of God created an impression as if we need to deserve God's mercy by performing as many good works as possible.

However, imaging God as essentially being there for all of us, full of mercy and compassion, sheds a new light on God's justice. Kasper states: 'God's justice is his mercy.'

'Mercy does not abolish justice but fulfills it and exceeds it. Thomas (Aquinas) can even say: justice without mercy is cruelty; mercy without justice is the mother of disintegration; therefore, both must be bound together … Mercy wants to do justice to the other in his or her unique personal dignity.'

We are all sinners and we all need God's
merciful justice. St. Paul taught us that we are made 'just', not by our meritorious works, but by our faith, our trust in God. For a merciful God, 'justice' does not mean 'condemning' or 'punishing', but 'redeeming' and 'saving'. Without any merit on our part, out of pure grace, despite our shortcomings, God wants to make us just and holy people, by enabling us with the gifts of his Holy Spirit. St. Paul wrote, 'You cannot make God accept you because of something you do. God accepts sinners only because they have faith in him' (Romans 5:4). We only need to open our hearts to God and his Spirit and to trust in God's forgiveness and empowering compassion. Such an attitude of trust St. Paul calls faith (Romans 1:17; 3:21f.28; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:11).

5. Where is God when innocent people are suffering?21

The message of God's boundless mercy seems to be in total contradiction to so many atrocities for which people are responsible, as well as with the natural disasters, which make so many innocent victims. How can a merciful God permit all of this suffering? Where is God when good people are in deep sorrow and grief? The prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus show that in the midst of atrocities, suffering and grief, God remains faithful, by being the God who is always there for each of us. Jesus also promised to stay with us, always, until the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20). Thus St. Paul could write that nothing can separate us from God's love, no suffering or misery, no persecution or deprivation (Romans 8:35 ff.). In every situation, no matter how hopeless, in life and in death, God is there for us in Jesus. Moreover, according to the witness of the Prophets and the revelation of Jesus, God's heart turns angry when his sons and daughters are treated unjustly. God reacts in anger, not because of feeling personally offended, but because of compassionate love for his children, above all the weakest in society. God is the Holy One, who has to resist evil and injustice. God does not protect the wrongdoers, while abandoning the victims. On behalf of God, Jesus cares for the poor and strengthens the weakest in society. He expects all of God's children to be merciful as God himself is merciful (Luke 6:36).

6. Towards a Culture of Compassion22

Just like Jesus, we are sent to 'be there for others'. St. Paul said it in a few words: 'Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2). The Holy Spirit empowers us and enables us to carry out this mission. The mission to be compassionate applies also to the Church as a whole, as being the Body of Christ in the world. Pope Francis writes:

The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for humankind, hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might. She is 'working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter (EG 188).

She wants to carry out this mission in three ways: by proclaiming the mercy of God, by concretely offering people God's mercy, and by embodying God's mercy in its laws and structures.

Thanks to the Holy Spirit, who pours out her spiritual gifts everywhere, many works of love and compassion are also performed outside the Church. In this regard we can learn a lot from non-Catholics and non-believers.

We are all called to contribute 'a consistent vision of love' to the local Churches where we minister, and to help create 'a culture of compassion' in the society or community, in which we live.
We therefore call upon all men and women to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

—From the Charter for Compassion.
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS IN SEARCH OF A SPIRITUALITY
HANS KWAKMAN MSC

In 2003 the Pontifical Council for Culture and Interreligious Dialogue issued a discussion paper entitled Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life. Cardinal Poupard, president of this Council, wrote in the foreword to this document that ‘the success of New Age growth is a response for people's longing for peace, harmony and reconciliation within themselves, with others and with nature.’ The paper remarked that success of New Age thinking and practice offers the Church a challenge:

The search which often leads people to New Age is a genuine yearning for a deeper spirituality, for something that will touch their hearts and for a way of making sense of a confusing and often alienating world (Water of Life no. 1.5 see also no 3.3 Quoted by Jim Quillinan, ‘Shaping an Australian Spirituality’ in Compass, vol. 46, no. 4, 2012).

In November 2011, the American weekly newspaper National Catholic Reporter (NCR) published a survey that offered a portrait of US Catholics in the second decade of the 21st Century. One of the conclusions of the survey was that US Catholics ‘continue to maintain a strong foothold in the Church and to participate regularly in the sacraments’, while the same Catholics easily embrace new spiritual resources.

In the same issue of the NCR, in an article entitled ‘Old and New Spiritual Resources’, Michelle Dillon concludes that ‘large numbers of Catholics say that they believe in various aspects of New Age Spirituality. Forty-two percent believe that there is spiritual energy located in physical things such as mountains, trees or crystals; over one third (37 percent) believes in reincarnation…’

Linda Woodhead, a professor in the sociology of religion in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University in England, notes that in the UK, belief in a ‘personal God’ roughly halved between 1961 and 2000—from 57 percent of the British population to 26 percent, while over the same period, belief in a ‘spirit of life force’ doubled—from 22 percent in 1961 to 44 per cent in 2000.

In many parts of the world, Catholics try to feed their spiritual hunger by searching for resources different from Sunday worship. It seems that their spiritual appetite is not appeased only by regularly attending Mass and listening to sermons. They are in search of something more. Without being aware of it, they are in need of food for their hearts.

Many go shopping in a market which supplies all kinds of 'spiritualities'. However, because of the great variety of spiritualities on offer—the World Wide Web under ‘Christian Spirituality’ yields millions of sites—they most probably find it difficult to make the right choice. So, not surprisingly, some of them might be tempted to embrace certain spiritual views and convictions that in our Christian view do not lead toward spiritual fulfillment, and finally will not be able to appease spiritual hunger.

Even committed Catholics are often not aware of the existence of life-giving spiritual resources in our own Christian tradition. Some people assume that these resources are only accessible to men and women in religious life, who spend many hours in prayer and meditation. They are not aware of the fact that most Christian spiritualities, including those in the Catholic tradition, are at the
service of everyone, even of people with a busy daily schedule. People longing for a deeper spiritual life will be enriched by these spiritualities. A condition is that they should feel touched and attracted by the path shown by great men and women in the history of Christianity, more specifically also in the Catholic Church.

A Reflective Moment

*Human Development must include not just physical growth but also spiritual growth, since the human person is a unity of body and soul, born of God's creative love and destined for eternal life.*

We human beings develop when we grow in the spirit, when we begin to know ourselves and the truths that God has implanted deep within, when we enter into dialogue with ourselves and our Creator.  

(Liberal translation of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 76)

The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.  
For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within?  
So also no-one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.  
Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

(1Cor. 2:10-12)
THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN IN THE FAITH

BARRY BRUNDELL MSC

The education of children in the faith involves the family, the Church community and the Catholic school community. When we reflect on what has happened in our Catholic communities over the past sixty years, we realise that we face many challenges in the Church, in Catholic schools and in Catholic families.

In the 1950s our local Catholic Church communities were characterised by a strong sense of belonging. The parish, the families and the school all co-operated to evangelise and educate the children in the practice of their Catholic faith. All students in Catholic schools were from Catholic families. Being in the local Catholic school and practising one’s faith—family prayers, Mass and sacraments, including frequent Confession—was the accepted, the proper way of life for a Catholic child.

In the Catholic schools the staff were usually religious sisters or brothers—lay teachers were very rare. The sisters and brothers had little or no professional training to be teachers, but they were very committed to their faith and strove above all to inculcate a similar commitment in their students. The school was an evangelising community.

The burden for the building, maintenance and financing of schools was borne by the Church community. Catholic schools were not funded by the government—there was no ‘State aid’ for Catholic schools. The sisters and brothers received little income, so that fees were more affordable for families who were usually not well off. Meantime, education in state schools was free.

This was the Catholic school system set up in the late 19th century throughout Australia. It was the choice of Catholic parents, who wanted their children to get a Catholic education. Public school education was secular.

It meant, however, that by the 1960s this system was becoming an impossible burden on the Catholic community. The numbers of religious teachers, though still the majority, was diminishing in the post-Vatican II era, giving place to lay teachers. Vatican II had stressed the role of the laity in the mission of the Church. This was the time of the 'baby boom' and also of the arrival of many migrants. The demand for Catholic school education meant that the limited facilities and resources were more and more inadequate.

Eventually the situation led to strike action. The Canberra-Goulburn diocese, by an action that gained nation-wide attention, showed that without the catholic schools the state education system would be under considerable strain.

The action began in July 1962 in Goulburn when the NSW Department of Education required that the boys’ toilet facilities be upgraded at Our Lady of Mercy Primary School under threat of de-registration of the school if it did not comply. The local auxiliary bishop, Bishop John Cullinane, called a meeting of parents and informed them that the school did not have the funds. The meeting resolved that all the Catholic schools in Goulburn should close till the end of term and parents were urged to seek to have their children enrolled in the local state schools which, of course, could not cope with the influx of new students.

This 'strike' action demonstrated to the whole nation that the Catholic school system
was in a highly stressed state and was in need of assistance. And so the question of State aid for Catholic schools became a matter of public debate, though it was several years before such aid was forthcoming.

The lay teachers were now being trained in teachers' colleges run by religious congregations. In 1974 the Catholic Education Commission was established, to co-ordinate Catholic school education. Henceforward Catholic education became more organised and professional. Catholic universities were established.

Meanwhile, the Catholic community as a whole was losing its former cohesion and Catholics were becoming increasingly unchurched. Missing Mass on Sunday was no longer classed as a 'mortal sin'. At baptisms and funerals many Catholic adults are no longer able to make the appropriate responses during the ceremonies or to recite the most basic prayers, such as the 'Our Father'. Families are no longer functioning in bringing up their children in the practice of the faith.

And so the task of training our young people in the practice of the faith has largely devolved on the Catholic school and the parish. The school and the parish have to train the children to bless themselves correctly with the sign of the Cross—something that used to be learnt in the family long before they reached school age.

School Masses are usually the only experience the children have of celebrating the Eucharist. This is apparent when the children usually cannot make the responses during Mass without special urging that they find the correct words on the Mass cards.

How far the Catholic community has drifted from the norm can be seen by contrasting the way things are now with the following words in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II, par. 106 where we read:

By a tradition handed down from the apostles, which took its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every seventh day, which is appropriately called the Lord's Day or Sunday. For on this day Christ's faithful are bound to come together into one place. They should listen to the word of God and take part in the Eucharist, thus calling to mind the passion, resurrection and glory of the Lord Jesus and giving thanks to God who 'has begotten them again through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, unto a living hope' (1 Pet. 1:3). The Lord's Day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work.

Now, when parents bring their application form for their child to go to a Catholic secondary school for the parish priest to endorse, they receive a supportive reference when they can tick the 'occasionally' box concerning their attendance at Sunday Mass—we are doing well!

The school along with the parish must now more than ever become an evangelising community. Teachers must be not only professionally qualified to teach. They must also be people of faith and spirituality, people who give witness of their Catholic faith to the children. Hence the faith formation of teachers becomes an essential element of their 'in-service' training. When they teach Religious Education it must be teaching from the heart.

The school and the parish can co-operate, for instance through sacramental programs, and by conducting liturgies that are children-friendly.

Catholic schools are still answering the demand of parents for a Catholic education.
for their children. Catholic schools now are well-regarded, and record numbers of families are sending their children to Catholic schools. Parents want to send their children to Catholic schools because they maintain good discipline and provide quality teaching, and no doubt because they want their children to receive a Catholic education—so the Catholic identity of the school is important to them.

But we also have to communicate to parents that they have a responsibility in providing a Catholic education for their children. As they were told years ago at the baptismal ceremony: 'In having your child baptised, you are taking on the responsibility of training your child in the practice of the faith'. The family must become, as it was in the past, an evangelising community, along with the parish and the Catholic school.

We can anticipate that the Synod on the Family in October will provide some stimulus to families to accept that responsibility.

Catholic school enrolments are increasing. Catholic schools educate more than 20% of students in Australia. In the Archdiocese of Sydney enrolments are moving towards 70,000. It is anticipated that Catholic schools nation-wide will be required to accommodate a further 100,000 students over the next ten years.

New schools are planned to meet the demand. Without new schools there will not be places for new enrolments. And here again the need for funding arises. Catholic schools are facing the pain of rising costs. They rely on state and federal government funding, but governments, federal and state, provide very little capital funding to Catholic schools. The Catholic community must provide the remainder.

In the federal budget the situation is going to be worse still. The Australian of April 17th, 2015 reported that in a pre-budget submission to the government, the National Catholic Education Commission stated that its real funding will fall by 30% while costs are expected to rise by 54.7% by 2025, assuming that funding is indexed at the average CPI rate of 2.8%. Without sustainable funding, the NCEC stated that fees will increase, schools could close and the quality of education will be compromised.

This will impose additional pressure on government schools when students transfer out of Catholic schools to government schools because they are unable to afford higher fees.

We are again in the situation of July 1962 in the Canberra-Goulburn diocese, but now the problem is nation-wide.

Further reading:
Bishops of NSW and ACT (2007), Catholic Schools at the Crossroads,
Aengus Kavanagh and Leone Pallisier (2014), Will Catholic Schools be Still Catholic in 2030?

Changing circumstances have radically affected the role and composition of the Catholic school in recent years...Many of our young people now have little or no contact with the church outside of school...While our schools continue to embrace their traditional responsibility for religious and other education, they now have a different mix of students and less support for their specifically religious mission from outside the school than they had in the past.

THE EVANGELISATION OF YOUNGER CATHOLICS IN SECULAR CULTURES

Some Principles

RICHARD RYMARZ

The weakening of religious identity amongst young people from so-called mainstream Churches is a well-described phenomenon in a number of Western countries. As a way of explaining the disaffiliation process, the concept of a Catholic plateau was introduced. This was typified as reaching a level of maximum commitment relatively early and then experiencing a stabilization often followed by a gradual reduction in commitment. Whilst not hostile to religion many young people on the plateau do not seem to be very interested in increasing the strength of their religious affiliation or in exploring new spiritual paths.

Smith and Denton in their landmark study encapsulated this mentality well when they wrote:

The majority of U.S. youth appear to believe that it is okay for others to be eclectic seekers, but they themselves are not particularly interested. They seem happy being part of the tradition they were raised in, which to them looks largely satisfactory even if it is not terribly central or important.

This paper will not elaborate on or argue for the existence of the Catholic plateau. Instead it will focus on a pastoral response to it by elaborating on some of the principles for engagement with youth and young adults. In advancing this argument a case will be made that overcoming the Catholic plateau has many similarities with Pope John Paul II's concept of the ‘new evangelization’.

SOME GUIDING FACTORS

The new evangelization as envisaged by Pope John Paul II is a bold strategy in as much as it sets a clear benchmark for success, which is of course not guaranteed. Indeed Weigel, noting the legacy of Pope John Paul II, commented that despite his best efforts, at least in its initial stages, the new evangelization of Europe has floundered: ‘No pope since the Middle Ages had tried harder to arouse Europe's Christian spirit. The response, to be charitable, was tepid.’

The Church understood, however, as an agent of evangelization not by choice but by its very nature, must carry on its Pauline mission with an eye to more long-term goals and not be discouraged by apparent failure. The commitment to reaching out to young Catholics needs to be constant, realizing that the task ahead is difficult but can be mitigated by intelligence and resourcefulness. As Lonergan remarked, ‘Ours is a new age, and enormous tasks lie ahead. But we shall be all the more likely to surmount them, if we take the trouble to understand what is going forward and why.’

The interaction between the Church and the wider culture must be viewed as a dynamic, but not discontinuous, process. In this view it is legitimate to describe ebbs and flows in the vitality of the Church. In
increasingly secular countries such as Australia, the Church is not at a historically strong or powerful moment, although by no means is it facing an unprecedented crisis or low point. It does not, however, have limitless resources and energy. It must, therefore, give much thought to how best to deploy its energies, bearing in mind that not all activities and new initiatives can be supported, nor can all historic ministries and policies be maintained.

The first guiding factor then is that the Church must develop a strategic sense toward its pastoral ministry. Related to this, the second guiding factor is a sense of continuity which is not bound by the past. Expectations about the results of working with young adults and youth should not be set too high. The 'terrain' for engaging young people is difficult and there is no strong prospect that this will change significantly in the foreseeable future.

With this in mind the Church in the first decades of the third millennium must free itself from using the immediate pre-conciliar era as a constant reference point. The nineteen fifties, in many ways, were a unique set of circumstances. Levels of Catholic practice and solidarity in this time were unusually high and should not be seen as normative. This was the tail end of an era when religious socialization was strong and the prevailing culture often supported or did not challenge Christian norms.

In another sense the pre-conciliar era should not be regarded as a cultural prison from which Catholics emerged resolute never to return again. Any religious group, and certainly one with the ancient roots of Catholicism, needs to make its history a strong aspect of its claims for plausibility. As Wuthnow put it: 'The Church must ... be backward looking; it has a special mission to preserve the past, to carry on a tradition.'8

Reaching out to young adults in the future rests on a hermeneutic of continuity, where all eras have something to offer the contemporary Catholic.

SOME PRINCIPLES FOR EVANGELIZING CATHOLIC YOUNG ADULTS

1. Be Prepared to Give an Answer

Pope Paul VI in Evangelii Nuntiandi, quoting from the First Letter of Peter, captures well the need for Catholics to be able to give a cogent justification for their lives. This is especially important in a culture where choice and options abound and no one metanarrative is dominant.9 Catholics need to be able to provide an answer to why people today should be religious in a manner that moves well beyond the passive acceptance of vicarious religion in all its manifestations.10

This implies that Catholics have something to offer in a religious marketplace that is competitive and highly diverse.11 If many individuals can be described as religious consumers, a number of consequences follow. As consumers, in a fractured postmodern milieu, they have abundant choices, including the popular choice of becoming or remaining loosely religiously affiliated, and not easily compelled into changing this affiliation. Religious groups then can only rely on persuasion to communicate their message.12

One way of persuading people, moving them beyond weak association, is to provide them with cogent answers to the great issues of life and to convince them that their lives will be improved by what is being offered. As Weber pointed out humans have a need both
to see the world and their place in it as meaningful. Religions in general are well placed to provide what Bouma identified as one core driver of society, namely 'hope and meaning grounded in a connection with that which is more than passing, partial and broken.'

To have firm, ready and engaging answers is not to be a fundamentalist or to peddle simplistic nostrums. It is responding in a Pauline way to the task of evangelizing both individuals and culture. Today much of the developed world is a new Areopagus. Just as Paul was not only prepared to engage all, but to seek them out, Catholics in the early decades of the third millennium need to recapture the sense that they have something profoundly meaningful to offer. A message that is transformative and not 'an eclectic resource… but rather the unified vision of faith and hope the Church stands in need of.'

2. Celebrate the Distinctiveness of Catholicism

The previous principle sets out, among other things, an answer to the question, 'why should I be religious?' This principle addresses the question, 'why should I be Catholic?'

In this era Catholic identity needs to be strengthened, not in a triumphalistic way but in the sense of being proud of a culture and heritage. Many groups in contemporary society are quite rightly trying to recapture something of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Catholics should also be part of this movement. This is one way of establishing the boundaries that give any group its cohesiveness and purpose. Re-establishing boundaries is, however, difficult. In recognition of this a first step could be preserving those distinctive features of Catholicism which still exist. This would involve both core beliefs and finding new ways to animate what can be loosely called Catholic culture. To paraphrase Greeley's term, the Catholic rainforest of metaphor needs to be regrown. This is no easy task but a necessary one. Hoge and his colleagues made three suggestions in this area. They argued that Catholics need to reemphasize the importance of the sacraments, especially the Mass, the struggle for peace and justice and the promotion of the common good.

The challenge to maintain and establish boundaries that mark them as distinct from secular groups presents itself to all mainstream Christian Churches. This is especially evident in areas such as ethical teaching and social outreach. If people on the periphery of religious groups cannot distinguish between 'the Christian life and the life of good people' they have no compelling reason to make a profession of faith.

The boundaries which mark Catholic identity also need to be maintained. Catholic identity can be defined in comparatively broad, generic terms. In the current era, however, as opposed to the immediate post-conciliar time, a re-emphasis of distinctive features, over and above what the good person would recognize and identify with may be in order. This is in keeping with Moule's point 'At no point within the New Testament is there any evidence that the Christian stood for an original philosophy of life or an original ethic. Their sole function was to bear witness to what they claimed as an event—the rising of Jesus from the dead.'

At every opportunity the distinctiveness of Catholicism should be encouraged. An absolute necessity is to maintain the importance of Eucharistic worship. As Dulles remarked, 'Unless there was a Church, there would be no one to celebrate the Eucharist, but unless there were a Eucharist, the Church would lack the supreme source of her vitality.'

3. Remind People of God

Kasper argued that the best challenge to what he saw as pervasive contemporary practical
atmosphere a full and vigorous presentation of the Trinity. This argument reflects the need to bring God back into the centre of Catholic life and discourse.

Gallagher extended this idea, remarking that one of the features of contemporary Catholicism is a somewhat excessive acculturation. This results in an unbalanced emphasis on individual expression at the expense of a more genuine Christian anthropology. This anthropology stresses the transcendent, pre-eminently in symbol. Those working with young adults should, at every opportunity, engage with the transcendent. Flanagan speaks of this in terms of a need for the Church to move beyond a passive engagement with culture and be conscious of the need to actively create a space where the discernment of the sacred can be undertaken. In many places this will not occur spontaneously as many of the dominant cultural forces tend to accelerate the secularization of societies.

This is not to neglect the 'horizontal' dimension of faith but to acknowledge that what gives religious communities distinctiveness are their claims to have a special connection with the divine. A renewed emphasis on the transcendent takes religion out of the purely vicarious realm of providing a 'safety net' or serving as a type of civil concord. It also provides a much firmer rationale for those individuals who choose to be religious or to be Catholic in the absence of strong initial socialization.

4. Be Focused on Who to Reach Out To.

Increasingly parishes cater for those who are well past middle age, fulfilling what some have characterized as a maintenance model of ministry. But what of pastoral outreach to those in the critical younger years when lives are being shaped by great decisions? A commitment to expanding pastoral outreach to young adults is a crucial first step. It must be seen, however, in unison with practical plans to identify, nurture and develop those individuals who can best minister to young adults. These are young lay people who can act as effective peer ministers. The fundamental question is how to best assist these young ministers into becoming witnesses who manifest both a close relationship with Christ and a desire to evangelize others.

More thought must be given to who the initial targets of the new evangelization should be. Bibby argued that one key to the revival of mainline Churches is organized invitational outreach to what he calls affiliates. These are large groups who have remained affiliated to a home tradition and who are wary of alternative groups. D'Antonio and his colleagues extended this argument when they discuss ways of reaching out to less committed Catholics along lines of affinity.

A strong strategy is to utilize the natural links that people have with other like-minded individuals. The best human agents for evangelization are people who share much in common with those who are on the periphery of the church. People are unlikely to join a religious community or activity alone without some type of personal entrée. A much more likely scenario is if they are asked along by a friend or an associate. New or returning members can then build new relationships and extend their network.

5. Be Prepared to Respond to the Needs of the Community and Give Strong Affective Experiences.

Ongoing fellowship groups should be established that provide abundant strong affective and joyful experiences. Walker pointed out that joy is the 'fundamental trait of the Christian ethos. Joy should shape the Christian temperament and provide a bulwark against the scandal of evil and the temptation of forsakenness. Any group, certainly a religious community, flourishes when its
members are joyful and where they feel that their needs are being addressed. 36

A feature of many Evangelical churches is that they develop ministries that are aimed at different members of the faith community. With this type of conscious targeting the group is much more likely to be able to provide communal experiences which are affirming, positive and joyful. People are likely to come to, and then to increase their commitment to, a body where they frequently have a good experience. 37

To take one example, a group with specific needs in the postmodern milieu are young adults in their twenties. Many of these individuals come from unsettled familial and social backgrounds. They are faced with significant educational and financial challenges in establishing their lives. In terms of Christian commitment they may never have had a strong socialization into belief and practice. In many ways they are exhausted for choice in the number of activities that they can choose to give their time and energy to. A group which recognizes this cohort, which sets out to provide social and other opportunities for them to network will have some chance of providing a strong affective social experience of community. If this is coupled with effective mentoring and witnessing then a pathway to become more committed has been established even for those on the periphery of the group. Looking at this age cohort as coterminous with people twenty or so years older is to almost certainly overlook their legitimate and in some ways unique situation.

One possibility in providing experiences of supportive communities, which may augment more ongoing structures are intense, episodic experiences of community. These seem to be particularly well suited to groups who share some type of common interest or background. Gathering people together for a relatively short period of time even on a yearly basis seems to be a novel response to the challenges of post-modernity but in fact this type of Christian outreach is well established.

To give one example, one of the most significant aspects of Romano Guardini’s ministry was the time he spent as a leading figure in the Quickborn (wellsprings of life) youth movement in pre-war Germany. 38 A key part of this organization were summer camps held at Burg Rothenfels am Main. These attracted university students who were interested in deepening their Christian commitment. 39 As well as Guardini other prominent mentors attended and the participants experienced excellent preaching, innovative liturgy, a variety of cultural and spiritual pursuits and strong fellowship. 40 The camps ran in the summer beginning in early 1920’s until they were closed by the Nazi’s in 1939. Rather than being seen as competition to conventional parish life this type of focused ministry provides revitalization for the group who attend and then return to more conventional modes of faith expression. 41

In this context a number of activities seem to be a high priority in any program of the new evangelization. Ministry to younger adults in marriage preparation is one such area. Those young adults who wish to explore in more depth the Catholic perspective on married life could be at a particularly graced moment of their lives. The Catholic message here on the importance of fidelity, openness to family and permanence of the marital bond is a counter-cultural message which distinguishes itself from societal norms. It is a message, nonetheless, which resonates deeply with human aspirations. Many younger people in contemporary culture are uncomfortable with what has been described as the hook-up culture. 42 This is verified in much recent research on young adults. Regnerus and Uecker, for instance, note ten myths about sex and relationships amongst undergraduate university students. 43 Refutation of these myths equates very well with the Catholic view on sexuality,
relationships and marriage\textsuperscript{44}. Marriage education is also a very pertinent example of the potential of peer ministry, married couples witness and educating those about to be married.

Consideration could also be given to providing specialized pastoral ministry which recognizes the inherent difficulties associated with evangelization in the contemporary religious and spiritual marketplace. Here no particular worldview is privileged and all are in some sense in competition with each other. In light of these challenges a best practice methodology could be used when dealing with interested youth and young adults.

One example of this could be a regular program, organized in parishes or schools, that would expose youth in a systematic way to the best the tradition has to offer. This program could involve: those priests and religious best suited to dealing with young people; the speakers skilled at dealing with the questions of adolescents; the best peer ministers who could provide great witness; experiences of beautiful, reflective liturgy and other sacramental experiences such as penance.

At the very least such an ongoing program will let interested Catholic youth know that they are valued and something is being done in a very tangible way to foster and encourage them in their faith journeys. It would also provide a critical venue where those younger people on the periphery of the Church could find a place where they can see the faith as a lived reality, evident in the lives of people like them.

6. Don’t be Discouraged and be Prepared to Try New Strategies

The new evangelization is a difficult task. It is worthwhile to recall Ratzinger’s quote here about success not being one of the names of God. Those engaged in it, therefore, must be prepared to try new strategies to help promote it and to be aware that some of these may fail.

The new evangelization sets itself high goals and as a result can often lead to what seems to be disappointment. But with high goals comes the possibility of high returns and these are not always best measured in gross numbers. As Wilson points out, using Augustine as a model, conversion in the post-modern world is a dynamic process that engages the whole person and needs to be seen in individual terms and not as a mass movement.\textsuperscript{45} The key point is not to be overawed by numbers or lack of them. What are more important are the activity and the audience.

The new strategies that are anticipated by the new evangelization may not all be successful. This is not a reflection of the futility of the task, rather its difficulty. It is important to maintain a responsible consciousness in these endeavours. Implementers of the new evangelization need to be convinced that by being attentive, intelligent and rational that they can affect a course of action that will be fruitful at least on its own terms and in due course. As Lonergan puts it ‘concern for the future work itself out by human means, by drawing on human experience, human intelligence, human judgment, human decision but again this is quite compatible with a profoundly religious attitude.’\textsuperscript{46}

A CONCLUDING COMMENT

In contemporary culture those who work with youth or young adults must be in the ‘market square’ like Paul at the Areopagus. The task is not easy and requires persistent effort.\textsuperscript{37} In the first instance what is needed is a clear understanding of the concept, its origins and implications. Following on from this is a schema, set out here as a series of principles and guiding factors that can be translated into action or pastoral practice. Of importance also, and especially so, if contemporary evangelization is not to remain a concept rather
than an actuality are human factors. These include a resolve to bring about the not easily attainable goals. Pope John Paul II has set a high bar for success. Related to this is the need for perseverance in what it may seem to be a pathway strewn with difficulty.

The new evangelization in its practical dimension is not a vast undifferentiated agenda, much less a vision, but a series of initiatives, each of which may add to an incremental effect. The concept of the new evangelization can be understood on a cognitive level, but to bring it about often takes courage and persistence.

NOTES


6 For stylistic reasons, in this paper Church refers to the Catholic Church.


9 Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 22.


18 Smith strikes an optimistic note about this task, 'religious actors are quite capable of reclaiming and reinvigorating lost and dormant sacred themes, traditions, and practices; of generating new religious groups while relinquishing others,' Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 101.

19 Dean Hoge, William Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan Gonzales. *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in a Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 151-152.


THE EVANGELISATION OF YOUNGER CATHOLICS IN SECULAR CULTURES

Collection (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 156. Lonergan himself adds 'what distinguishes the Christian then is not God's grace, which he shares with others, but mediation of God's grace through Jesus Christ our Lord,' ibid.


29 Smith sees as one of the reasons Christianity can be successful is that it has the potential for 'transcendent worship.' Christian Smith, ‘Why Christianity Works: An Emotions-Focused Phenomenological Account,’ Sociology of Religion 68 (2007): 165-178.


31 The idea of searching out to affiliates is well illustrated by careful analysis of evangelical rallies such as those conducted in the 1950's by Billy Graham. These largely attracted individuals who had some connection either actual or historical with a Christian community. A similar finding was made among those who made public profession of faith at these rallies. The point here is not that these rallies were ineffective. Rather the task of reaching completely unconnected individuals is very difficult. For a discussion of the Graham campaigns see Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle, The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief and Experience (London: Routledge, 1997), 128-130.


33 The importance of networking in attracting new people into religious groups was established as early as the 1960's. John Lofland and Rodney Stark, 'Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective,' American Sociological Review 30 (1965): 862-875.


37 Many people, both adults and teenagers, already affiliated with Christian churches do not find them comparatively enjoyable. When asked to select sources of enjoyment both adults and teenagers rated their religious group as last in a nine category scale. Reginald Bibby, Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 213.


39 Karl Rahner was one of the many young adults deeply influenced by their attendance at these intensive summer camps. Fergus Kerr, Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism (Malden, Ma: Blackwell, 2007), 87.

40 The liturgical style at Burg Rothfels is worth noting. Krieg describes these as 'informal Masses at which they sang hymns in German instead of Latin, discussed the scriptural readings for the day, and stood around an altar at which the priest faced the people,' Krieg, Precursor, 23.

41 Dulles offers the idea of 'novitiates for life' as a basis for training lay leaders in the community of disciples. These are 'brief gatherings for spiritual renewal are a great help toward achieving authentic discipleship in the Church.' Avery Dulles, Models of the Church Exp. Ed. (New York: Image Books, 1987), 219.

42 Kathleen Bogle, Hooking Up: Sex, Dating and Relationships on Campus (New York: New York
Because of his strong pastoral background, Pope Francis is acutely aware of the need for reform in the church. His dream is of a church that has:

A missionary impulse capable of transforming everything so that the church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (Evangelii Gaudium no.27)

His observation to his brother bishops in Brazil is a further insight into his concern:

We need a church capable of restoring citizenship to her many children who are journeying, as it were, in an exodus.

This is a clarion call to all Catholics to assume greater responsibility in working towards a church whose mission is more obviously in alignment with Christ’s mission of justice, compassion, and love in the world.

—Will Catholic Schools be Catholic in 2030? p.145.
WYD—A SIGN IN OUR TIMES

AENGUS KAVANAGH FSP

WHAT HAS BECOME known in the Catholic world as WYD—World Youth Day—was an initiative of St John Paul II that commenced in 1984. Since its inception, the world gathering of Catholic youth has been held every three years in cities across the First World mainly.

Ballpark numbers for participation in WYD tell a story of popularity: Rome 1984, 300,000; Madrid 2011, 2 million; Rio de Janiero 2013, 3.7 million.

Of course, location and access impact significantly on crowds. Brazil in South America and the aura of newly elected Pope Francis no doubt contributed to the record gathering at Rio de Janiero.

In the light of development over the decades, the question may well be asked: Is WYD an appropriate name for the event? Given that in more recent times a week of catechesis and liturgy precedes the actual day of the WYD Eucharist, and given that pilgrim groups commonly visit shrines and holy places en route to the main venue, perhaps a better name might be WCYE—World Catholic Youth Experience or the like?

Anyhow, a more serious consideration might be: What is the Holy Spirit saying to the church in this comparatively modern phenomenon? Not all share in the euphoria that sometimes accompanies the WYD experience. Some would dismiss it as akin to a Catholic rock festival with cultic overtones.

Clergy will testify that while significant numbers have gone to WYD over the years, evidence of increased weekly Mass attendance by youth of the parish remains minimal. Others may lament that the vast investment of energies and resources seems to generate comparatively little by way of lasting effects.

So, in the face of these reservations, what is the Holy Spirit saying? Presumptuous as it may seem to proffer an answer, could it have something to do with the ways in which Catholic youth of our times prefer to demonstrate their religious orientation? Their faith may prompt them to come together for occasional liturgical celebrations and prayer forms; they will participate in Palm Sunday walks; they will generously participate in charity and social justice outreach initiatives; they may pray regularly; but, in general, they will not attend Mass each week in their parish church.

Can we broaden the umbrella of inclusiveness to create opportunities, beyond current institutional practices, where youth may be drawn together for faith and spiritual nourishment in ways that find resonance with what is best and deep within them? Perhaps we may need to extend such considerations beyond youth to baptised Catholics generally, especially to younger generations. Do we need to revisit our commonly held categorisation of Catholics as 'practising' and 'lapsed/nominal'?

In the words of Pope Francis, how do we build a church that is:

... capable of restoring citizenship to her many children who are journeying, as it were, in exodus.1

The 2011 National Church Life Survey gives the disturbing statistic that almost 95% of baptised Catholics in Australia between the ages 15 - 35 do not attend Sunday Mass regularly. Surely this calls for new paradigms in pastoral ministry to youth especially.

Given that, at its best, attendance at WYD helps young people to grow in personal faith...
and in their identity as Catholics, may it be
time to call for a reduction in the frequency
of the international gatherings so that
occasional mini-WYD’s may be held at
national or state level?

This is not the place to canvass all the
implications of such a move. It is to propose
however that a national forum where young
Catholics who take their faith seriously might
come together to further explore and
celebrate their faith is worthy of consideration.
This could be done in the context of a national
Catholic youth festival of sacred and church
music. True, such a gathering would lack the
attraction of travel and international flavour
but it would have the potential to be a defining
step for many in a journey of Catholic faith
and identity. With variations, such a model
lends itself to trial at regional and diocesan
levels, and could make provision for senior
primary students.

A look at the scoreboard indicates that
recent generations of Catholic youth have, in
the main, disengaged from the institutional
church. Are there some reasons within
present church/school policies and practices
that contribute to this scenario?

Our young pilgrims loved the spiritual parts of the week more than they did
the touristy or pop music dimensions.

The silence after Holy Communion and the reverence it indicated was
palpable.

Our young pilgrims are ready now for their mission. 2

NOTES
1 Pope Francis in an address to the bishops
of Brazil, Rio de Janiero, WYD, August 2013.

Will Catholic Schools be Catholic in 2030?  is available at
catholicschools2030@gmail.com at a cost of $44 plus postage.
There is also information about this publication on the web: http://
catholicschools2030.weebly.com/

'field

‘Bringing the Gospel is bringing God’s power to pluck up and break
down evil and violence, to destroy and overthrow the barriers of
selfishness, intolerance and hatred, so as to build a new world.
Jesus Christ is counting on you! The Church is counting on you! The
Pope is counting on you!’

—Pope Francis to the youth at Rio.
TRULY 'CATHOLIC'

MICHAEL FALLON MSC

LET US BEGIN by reflecting on what we mean by 'religion'. According to the classical etymology, religion is that which binds a community back (Latin 're' and 'ligare') to what it is that holds the community together, to its centre. A community can get out of touch; it can be distracted. Religion binds us back. It is the same with an individual. Genuine religion binds a person back to his or her centre. If it doesn't then it is not genuine, and our world is cluttered with institutions, ideas and experiences that claim to be religious, but are not.

What is the centre that religion binds us to? Every culture has a word for it. The English word is 'God'. God is the name we give to that which we find at the centre, holding a person together, holding a community together, holding the cosmos together. God is discovered at the centre (at the heart) of reality. Our experience is that the closer we get to the heart—to our own heart, or the heart of another, or the heart of matter—the more we discover mystery. That to which we give the name 'God' (other cultures have different names) is the heart and the beyond of everything. That to which we give the name 'God' is a reality that is beyond comprehension. We cannot lock it into a satisfactory concept. It remains essentially mysterious, sacred.

Any religion that 'works' binds us to reality outside, and to reality within. It binds us to the heart of the world and to our own heart. Religion 'happens' when heart speaks to heart. It seems true, however, that certain religions place something of an emphasis on the outer world (the numinous aspect of religious experience), while others place something of an emphasis on the inner world (the mystical aspect of religious experience).

Is Judaism an example of the former, with its interest in the prophet (Moses), the Word of God mediated through nature and history, the sacred book (the Torah), and obedience to the outer word? Of course, Judaism does not neglect the heart, but is it true that a strong emphasis is put on God coming to a person and a community through an outer revelation? Is Islam another example, with its interest in the prophet (Muhammad), the sacred book (the Qur'an), the word of God mediated through a religious leader, and obedience (submission) to God's revelation? Judaism and Islam do put a strong emphasis on the numinous aspect of religious experience.

Buddhism, by contrast, has holy people, but not like Moses or Muhammad. It has sacred writings, but not like the Torah or the Qur'an. Buddhism emphasises the mystical dimension of religious experience. Its focus is on enlightenment and inner transformation.

When people look at Christianity as lived in the Western world, they could be forgiven for likening it to what I have just said about Judaism and Islam, but they would be seriously mistaken. Jews do not claim Moses to be the revelation of God. He is the prophet through whom God revealed himself and his will. The revelation is found primarily in the Torah. Moslems do not claim Muhammad to be the revelation of God. He is the prophet through whom God revealed himself and his will. The revelation is found in the Qur'an. Christians, on the other hand, see Jesus the person as God's revelation. The New Testament is the book in which we find the inspired reflections of first century Christians. The New Testament is not the revelation, it points to the revelation. The revelation is the person, Jesus. That is why we can (and must) interpret the New Testament as the revelation of God through Jesus.
Testament using the same instruments we use for other first century Hellenistic writings. We do this for we want to know what they meant by their writings. We want to know how they saw Jesus and what they thought as a result of the way in which Jesus revealed God to them.

Christians see Jesus as the perfect human expression of God, as THE way in which God is revealed, as THE way God has chosen to communicate Godself to us in a human way.

If we understand 'Word' as the traditional expression for God's self-communication, Christians see Jesus as 'THE Word made flesh', for in his actions and his teaching he brought to a perfect fulness what other words (creation, history, holy people) have said about and for God. He clarified the various 'words' that people experienced as giving partial expression to the mystery that they discovered as the heart and the beyond of their world. He made God's Word flesh for us, showing us what God is when God reveals himself in a human way. Jesus is the human 'word' (self-expression and self-communication of God) that reveals the numinous, and reveals God as love.

But there is much more to Christianity than this. Christians believe that it is the Spirit of love that binds Jesus to God that also binds ('ligare') the Christian community together. In the words of Paul: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (Romans 5:5). That is why Paul can also say: 'I live, no longer I, it is Christ living in me' (Galatians 2:20). Christianity is essentially about the heart. The numinous and the mystical are both central. For revelation to occur heart needs to speak to heart. Jesus showed us that the outer world is sacred, as is the inner world of every person. Evil is what happens when we ignore the heart of the outer or the inner world.

To grasp the essence of Christianity it is essential, too, that we examine the profound insight that is expressed in genuine monotheism. Polytheism is a natural phenomenon, very understandable and basically healthy. People experience the presence of the sacred in a stream, a grove of trees, the sun, the moon, a storm, fire, a hill, anything. This experience invites us to wonder and to worship. However, people do not necessarily identify the sacred presence in the tree with the sacred presence in the stream, and so are polytheists. Monotheism (when it is genuine) is an extraordinary insight. A monotheist has come to see that one and the same mystery is at the heart of everything. A monotheist sees that everything belongs to everything else; that there is only one source holding everything in existence.

A person or a group that says that there is only one God, and then goes on to restrict God to their group, is certainly not a monotheist in any real sense of the term. A genuine monotheist will talk to a Samaritan woman at a well, will embrace a leper, will eat with sinners, and will be able to say to a criminal dying on the next cross: 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' We know a true monotheist by the way he or she treats every person, indeed, everything. A genuine monotheist sees that one and the same sacred mystery at the heart of everything, and knows that this mystery is love.

Since religious experience is universal, since everyone is graced by the One who is the source of all existence, we should expect to find elements of truth, elements of inspired revelation, in the varied ways in which people have responded to the divine
and have given expression to their religious experience. We should expect to find elements of truth, and so to be enlightened, by the Vedas and the Upanishads, by the sayings of K'ung-fu-Tsu (Confucius), Lao Tzu and Gautama the Buddha. We should listen from the heart to the oracles of the Hebrew prophets and the writings of Paul of Tarsus and the Christian writers of the Gospels.

This is not to say that all these are equally revelatory of God. Equality is a mathematical term that measures quantity. A Christian who has come to believe that God is revealed in Jesus cannot expect people who lived before Jesus or those living now who do not know him to see God as God was revealed in Jesus. But they will see 'seeds of the word' wherever truth has been spoken, wherever religious experience has found expression in words, in art, in architecture, and in the inspired love of ordinary people in every culture of the world. Every culture, every people, has 'saints' who are a 'word of God' to their contemporaries, connecting them in a remarkable way with their own hearts and with reality, and so with God.

Christianity that is narrower than the cosmos, Christianity that is self-consciously denominational, Christianity that is in any way bigoted, or blind to the revelation of the sacred wherever that revelation may surprise us, is a contradiction in terms. A Christian must needs be 'Catholic' in the best sense of that word. A Catholic Christian must be a person who lives by Jesus' Spirit and so learns to see with Jesus' eyes and love with Jesus' heart. A Christian must be one whose heart bleeds to see anyone not belonging. A Catholic Christian must be one who opposes violence because he or she knows that the heart is sacred, that everyone's body is an expression of the divine. A Christian must be one whose arms are open to welcome everyone. A Catholic Christian is one whose vision is universal, all-embracing. A Catholic Christian is one who has come to see that everyone has something to say, that revelation comes wherever a person speaks the truth from the heart. A Catholic Christian is not for conformity but for a harmony that rejoices in difference wherever there is sensitivity to the other and a humble awe before the unfolding of the mystery. He or she knows that only the embrace of everyone welcoming the fire of divine love can bring about the paradise that God wants for our world.

**The word Catholic is derived from the Greek adjective, katholikos, meaning ‘universal’, and from the adverbial phrase, kath’holou, meaning ‘on the whole’.

The term was first used by St Ignatius of Antioch (d.c. 107) in his Letter to the Smyrnaeans: ‘Where the bishop is to be seen, there let all his people be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is present we have the Catholic Church’ (n.8).

—Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, p.3
‘THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL’—SOME POINTS

Pope Francis published his first Apostolic Exhortation in which he presented the results of the Synod of Bishops held last year on the topic of the New Evangelisation. Pope Francis entitled his Exhortation: 'The Joy of the Gospel'. In it he has taken the opportunity to present some key elements of the agenda he has for his Papacy and for the Catholic Church. I have chosen to reflect on what appear to me some key points.

In the opening paragraph Pope Francis writes: 'The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and the lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept this offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.' He is asking us to examine our lives. Do we cherish the freedom we are offered as disciples of Jesus and members of the Church? If we do, we must want others to share this freedom and this joy, for surely we realise that it is meant for everyone, no matter how lost we might be, however sinful. Christ, the Pope assures us, never tires of forgiving (par. 3). He goes on to ask: 'if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives how can we fail to share that love with others?' (par. 8).

He speaks of three groups who need to hear the Gospel of God’s love. The first group is ‘the faithful who regularly take part in community worship. Importantly, he includes in this group ‘those members of the faithful who preserve a deep and sincere faith, expressing it in different ways, but seldom taking part in worship.’ This is very encouraging to us, for we all have people who are close to us, who identify as being Catholic, but who do not come regularly to Mass. The second group are people who have been baptised but have no connection with the Church, and the third group are those who ignore or even reject God, for they, too, experience a yearning for love and a yearning for meaning. They need to hear the Good News and surely we want to share it with them.

He reminds us of the privilege we have to share the joy we have and to point others to what he calls ‘a horizon of beauty and a delicious banquet’. Surely we want to attract others to the life we are privileged to know and live (par. 14).

In Chapter One of his Exhortation, Pope Francis issues a challenge to each of us and to us as a parish. 'Go out to others', her writes, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast' (par. 24). The Church is in constant need of reform. This is obvious because it is a Church of sinners. During his life on earth Jesus ate with sinners. It has always been this way. What the Pope wants to stress in this exhortation is the need for the Church to change so that it truly is a missionary Church.

We must concentrate on what he calls the essentials, 'on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing, and at the same time most essential.'(par. 35). This is true of what we are to believe, but also of what we are to do (par 36). So often we get caught up on matters which, however important they may be, are nevertheless secondary (par 34).

As regards the Eucharist he reminds us that 'it is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak' (par. 47).

In Chapter 5 he speaks of 'Spirit filled evangelizers'. If we are going to take seriously the call that comes with baptism to share the faith with others, if we are truly committed to building a new world: 'we do so, not from a sense of obligation, not as a burdensome duty, but as the result of a personal decision which brings us joy and gives meaning to our lives.' The fundamental point Pope Francis makes, is that we enjoy intimacy with Jesus, and that we make our contribution to bringing this joy to our needy, yearning, and often confused, but beautiful world.

—Michael Fallon MSC
FAITH AND / OR REASON
IN ETHICS

NEIL BROWN

When you regard 'faith' as 'the devil's masterpiece' as Sam Harris does, it is not surprising that you also consider it is going to play havoc with everything to do with morality. Faith, according to Harris, fails all ethical tests:

Faith is what credulity becomes when it finally achieves escape velocity from the constraints of terrestrial discourse—constraints like reasonableness, internal coherence, civility, and candour. Despite science being about 'facts', not values, about objects, not subjective states, he puts his faith in science as our aid to moral improvement:

A scientific understanding of the link between intentions, human relationships, and states of happiness would have much to say about the nature of good and evil and about the proper response to the moral transgressions of others. Harris throws into his moral mix 'biology', 'love', 'compassion', 'reason' and 'happiness', and draws from it the rather lame conclusion that 'we discover that we can be selfish together'.

Similarly, Christopher Hitchens observes that 'the order to 'love thy neighbour as thyself' is too extreme and too strenuous to be obeyed', and from the same mix as Harris draws his own conclusion that 'By a nice chance', we discover that 'cupidity and avarice are the spur to economic development'.

Daniel Dennett also rehearses the sins of 'faith', such as infantile motivation, absolutist morality, intolerance, and crimes against humanity—it is a long list. What he advocates in its place is:

an open-minded ('ambivalent') stance that permits rational dialogue to engage the issues between people, no matter how radically different their cultural background.

It is not at all clear how all the adherents of religious faiths around the world will be able to take part in this dialogue given his view of faith, although in spite of it he claims that 'the good news is that people really do want to be good'.

A.C. Grayling echoes what is beginning to sound like a mantra: 'religious belief does not rest on rationality but on emotions—hope, fear, feelings of absolute certainty or agonising doubt, psychological needs of various and importune kinds', all of which, unsurprisingly, is prone to lead to violence towards the opponents of faith; and, in contrast, humanist morality 'is about behaving like the best of civilised, thoughtful, responsible, considerate moral agents'.

Most of these statements have the sniff of a gentleman's club about them, a club where all the members are totally reasonable and well behaved. Very little, if any, attention is ever paid to the unruly mob of hopes, fears, needs, sufferings, failures, and frailty, howling at the door.

We know from history and from current events that religion too can fall victim to the same mob rule—we forget that at our own peril. Religion deals in these dark realities of life, so it is always vulnerable. Yet it does go where others, particularly the New Atheists, do not care to go, which is one of its strengths, as well as being a constant danger.

Sam Harris confidently asserts that 'all that is good in religion can be had elsewhere'. The answer, of course, depends
on what your definition of 'good' is. Still, it is worthwhile to ask what it is that faith might do that can't be found elsewhere?

The Church's moral teaching has solidified over the centuries into an ethical system that combines insights from the teaching of Christ and the Scriptures, particularly a basis in the ten commandments, and draws upon the conclusions of a long reflection by the early Fathers, Popes, saints and theologians, along with heavy borrowings from secular philosophical sources. The resulting system defends certain absolute principles and values, such as conscience, the protection of innocent life, a strict sexual ethic, and the inviolability of human rights, as well as many other concepts and norms, which seek to apply this ethic to the changing circumstances of life. This moral teaching is in stark contrast to the more utilitarian, secular and libertarian thinking of the New Atheists, and would certainly fail their test of something 'good'. Still for believers it is a 'good' that goes far deeper and offers something more holistic than anything the New Atheists have so far been able to produce.

The Church's moral teaching has evolved over time. Perhaps in today's world that teaching could be expressed more positively in terms of values to be pursued rather than rules and prohibitions, more emphasis put on individual conscience which has to find its way through the modern world's moral maze, and also be couched in more accepting terms for all those who fall, often through no fault of their own, through the cracks of the traditional moral edifice. Yet, even so, the Church is not going to resile from the core values of the Gospel, which especially on the cross enter the darkest places of our world.

Harris' challenge, however, can be met in another way also, by looking at how faith operates at the heart of a moral system, to change hearts, elicit new responses, and to seek continually to overcome the barriers and hurts that keep people apart.

A first point is that while we believe that Christ is an answer to our search for God, he is also a question to our search for an authentic humanity. St Paul understood this: 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rm 12:2); it is a search for 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable' (Eph 4:8). Often we have the impression we have 'arrived', when, really, especially in our complex world, we should be continually 'searching' and 'discerning'.

As followers of Christ we too often forget that we are on a journey of discovery, and that we are not an encyclopaedia of ready-made answers. The Gospels have a freshness of approach we should never lose. The Pharisees represented a system which excluded all but the perfect and gloried in its own intricate web of rules and regulations, a system that Jesus time and time again broke through to respond to people's real human and spiritual needs. It is a responsiveness we should never lose.

Secondly, as the philosopher Terry Eagleton shows, 'reason' does not operate in some rarefied zone independent of the pushes and pulls of flesh and blood real life: 'it is only if', he states, 'reason can draw upon...
energies and resources deeper, more tenacious, and less fragile than itself that it is capable of prevailing, a truth which liberal rationalism for the most part disastrously overlooks.12

Reason must emerge from the play of irrational forces and fears, evils and traumas, misconceptions and the precariousness of the human condition. There seems to be little in the New Atheist arsenal to combat these realities, except to place 'faith' in their number.

Yet, whether you accept faith or not, it does seek to address questions of guilt, hope, meaning, value, suffering, the propensity to violence, victimhood, greed, the sources of motivation, forgiveness, and the kind of love we should endeavour to express.

Thirdly, reason is the ability to reflect and reach conclusions within specified parameters, and for varied purposes, and so comes in manifold forms. The instrumental reason of science and commerce is one such form, while faith is another which prioritizes not objects, mathematical formulae, and costs and benefits, as science and commerce do, but rather subjects, their relationships, purposes, and the actions that realize or achieve them.

The British philosopher, Roger Scruton expresses this well:

Whatever we think of the evolutionary significance of religious belief, and its role in natural selection, we should recognise that there is another and far more transparent function that religion seems to perform: the maintenance of the life of the person... Religions focus and amplify the moral sense; they ring-fence those aspects of life in which personal responsibilities are rooted—notably sex, family, territory and law. They feed into the distinctively human emotions, like hope and charity, which lift us above the motives that rule the lives of other animals, and cause us to live by culture and not by instinct.13

This aspect of religion becomes more and more important as the value placed on personhood is undermined. Alex Rosenberg, for example, is one of a new wave of atheist writers, who deny there is any personal reality at all—it is all an illusion:

Scientism tells us that all this nonspatial, nonphysical self, person, soul is just so much wishful thinking. The self whose existence introspection is so sure of is not physical... Ergo, the alleged facts about the self are not facts at all. They are mistakes. There is no self, soul, person.14

In opposition to this view, faith affirms that there is something about us that is unique, irreplaceable, ungraspable, inexhaustible, and of deep worth. Who we are matters, our choices matter and our strivings matter. As Raymond Gaita shows, so much depends on this affirmation:

Goodness and virtue, evil and vice, do not, therefore, exist separately side by side. Conceptions of virtue and vice, justice and injustice, of strict obligation and of moral necessity are transformed by a sense of the alienable preciousness of each individual human being. That transformation gives us a distinctive understanding of good and evil—to my mind the deepest.15

Far from being a failed science morphed into superstition, as the New Atheists maintain, faith is a complex reality that embraces all we are. For believers, faith is always more than a series of propositions, and what propositions there are do not compete with scientific statements, but rather concern the human meaning of life lived with God and with each other.

Faith is directed to persons and events infused with meaning and value, it resonates with deep intuitions, needs and emotions - it involves convictions, commitments, meanings, dispositions and engagement, has its own relationally-based language and practice, and is personally transformative, as John Cottingham points out:

If anything like the religious worldview is correct, there is something more dynamic and more dramatic typically at work in the human spirit. As moral beings, we do not just start from a reliable innate deposit, and then accumulate information and get more skilled at processing it; rather, we gradually, labouriously, stimulated
by examples, moved by parables, humbled by error, purged by suffering, begin to change... in Pauline language, to putting off the old nature and taking on the new, or in the language of the fourth Gospel, to the possibility of rebirth.16

Fifthly, if you take faith out of the equation, the moral bar tends to be lowered as is the case with Sam Harris' being 'selfish together' and Christopher Hitchens' 'cupidity and avarice', which are only a notch or so of the bar above evolution's reproduction and survival strategies.

Moral reasoning is about the standards we need to apply to our desiring, our goals, and the actions we take to achieve those goals, so as to live up to our own human potential - none of which is a given, but always an exploration throughout history.

Faith respects this reasoning process, but is able to set it within the context of God's own self-giving—'Love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 15:12). Over time, in conjunction with human experience and changing circumstances, the meaning of basic moral concepts, such as love, justice and injustice, and the common good, are able to be filled out to better answer the question of our humanity put to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Terry Eagleton sees this question mark in the bluntest possible terms:

The stark signifier of the human condition is one who spoke up for love and justice and was done to death for his pains. The traumatic truth of human history is a mutilated body. Those who do not see this dreadful image of a tortured innocent as the truth of history are likely to adopt some bright-eyed superstition such as the dream of untrammelled human progress...17

The image of the Crucified God should always be enough to shatter the complacency and self-satisfaction of believers in the moral quest, just as it is a challenge to any atheist wearing rose-tinted glasses. Here, faith and reason are not alternatives: faith without reason becomes a fundamentalism shut off from human history, culture and experience; moral reason without faith is in danger of losing itself in the flux of human wants and desires. Faith and reason should be partners, not competitors, in the response to the vital moral dilemmas continually emerging in our history.

REFERENCES

2. ibid., 65.
3. ibid., 175.
4. ibid., 187.
7. ibid., 376.
8. ibid., 306.
10. ibid., 196.
11. The End of Faith, 149. See also Breaking the Spell, 55.
THE PROPHESIES OF 
DOSTOYEVSKY AND TOLSTOY

REG NAULTY

In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoyevsky has the Elder Zossima say:

For today, everyone is still striving to keep his individuality as far apart as possible, everyone still wishes to experience the fullness of life in himself alone, and yet instead of achieving fullness of life, all his efforts merely lead to the fullness of self-destruction, for instead of full self-realisation they relapse into complete isolation... For he is used to relying on himself alone and has separated himself as a self-contained unit from the whole... [However] true security of the individual does not lie in isolated personal efforts but in general human solidarity.¹

Writing in 1880, Dostoyevsky has the Elder Zossima predict that the period of extreme individualism has some time to run, and then 'the brotherhood of man' would arrive.

The Sixties (i.e. the 1960s) were a huge explosion of the tendency regretted by Fr. Zossima. Sex, drugs, revolt against authority, and renewed interest in anarchism, were all present. I remember attending public lectures on anarchism as a philosophy at the Australian National University in the late Sixties. The 2014 Edmund Campion lecturer Rev. Dr. Wilson [Bill] Miscamble gets it exactly right:

...we can now see as a key driving force of the 'Sixties Revolution'—namely individualism and atomisation. Emerging from The Sixties came an ethos of personal liberation, sexual freedom and self-fulfilment.”²

The anarchist tendency keeps on resurfacing in one of the most persistent changes emanating from The Sixties, the transfer of sin from individuals to institutions, which is itself a declaration of anarchism— institutions are a threat. In Australia, there has been a succession of local institutional villains ever since: the Department of Main Roads, the Tasmanian Hydro, the Australian Wheat Board, the Department of Immigration, and the banks. As well, of course, there are the international anarchist endeavours, notably that child of The Sixties, Julian Assange, doing his best to unsettle the U.S. Government. The latest ongoing target, which must be deeply satisfying to the anarchist mind, are the Churches. The onslaught on institutions is aided and abetted by the media who, if there is any disaster or catastrophe, leap out to identify an institutional suspect, often that anarchist bete noir, the police force.

However, there was another movement coming out of The Sixties which carried the seeds of re-construction, and that was the spirituality movement. At first blush, it looks like a clear instance of the Zossima syndrome, since spirituality is personal, individual and private. One recalls The Beatles doing meditation under the tutelage of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. What could be more solitary than meditation? And, if it is combined with the subjective idealism of Shankara, it is. But in the West, it is used for recreation in the best sense, for re-collecting our scattered selves for more concerted action in the world, though it can go deeper. If it does, it may help fill the spiritual vacuum which sex has flooded into.

In 1893, Tolstoy, like Dostoyevsky, a religious man, also made a prophecy about the Kingdom:

A time is already coming, when the principles of equality [the brotherhood of man, the community of property, and the non-resistance
to evil by violence] will appear just as natural and simple as the principles of...national life do now.3

He was partly right. Communism was coming, and it did come not long after, in 1917. But communism neither believed in nor practised non-violence. In fact, it used violence on a scale never seen before: communism constructed a vast slave labour system which drove people brutally, and turned Russia into a vicious police state.

Tolstoy was mistaken about what was 'already coming'. He thought it would be wonderful; instead, it was horrible. It is still too early to say whether Dostoyevsky was right or not. Neither of them foresaw the very good things that were just around the corner: repeated breakthroughs in medicine, comprehensive health care systems, mass tertiary education, support for national minorities, the multiplication of open societies, men on the moon, the amazing universe discovered by science. However, the Zossima tendency still has life; recall the US Congress's near self-destruction in the recent past, and its continued obstruction of the US President. Even so, constructive tendencies may yet prevail.

REFERENCES

2. Rev. Wilson Miscamble. CSC. Catholics in

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table.

BOOK REVIEW

Hedley Beare, *Dolphin’s Leap, Hind’s Feet—Becoming a Mystic, Journey, Discipline and Practice*. Morning Star Publishing, Melbourne. $34.95.

Emeritus Professor Hedley Beare AM completed his final book, *Dolphin’s Leap, Hind’s Feet* just before his death in 2010, and it was published late last year.

An explanation for the book’s title *Dolphin’s Leap, Hind’s Feet* thankfully appears early in the text. Hedley describes seeing dolphins from the Queenscliff ferry. They appear suddenly and travel alongside the boat. 'They are transparently friendly piercing the water under and around the boat with a fluidity and exuberance which are infectious. Then they head off to deeper water and on the way they breach the water in a manner that is almost mystical. It is an act of grace, a creature’s gift from sea and sky to us as its companions.'

The image of the Hind’s Feet comes from the last verse of the book of Habakkuk in the Old Testament: *He makes my feet like hind’s feet and sets me upon my high places*. The deer knows how to walk on rocky and hazardous paths as it climbs to the heights of the mountains. It does what it does naturally.

So for Hedley the dolphin is the image of entering both worlds—the natural and the spiritual and with great excitement leaping from one to the other. The deer or hind is the image of a creature working with its natural abilities to climb to ever higher places.

These are Hedley’s images as he invites us to journey through the book with him.

He has a sub-title which is *Becoming a Mystic—Journey, Discipline and Practice*. He opens us to this idea by explaining that ‘A mystic is generally defined as a person who has had a direct or transcendent experience of the divine’. Through the book he looks at the lives of a variety of people from all ages and cultures. He is fascinated about their spiritual lives and practices and he draws wisdom from all of them.

The book explores the techniques used by the spiritually adept over the centuries and tries to give an insight into the lived reality of the saints, seers and mystics, including their range and depth. It is therefore intentionally practical.

The book has four parts, each with a number of chapters.

Part One is called *Recognising the Mystical: A Memoir*.

In this memoir, Hedley shares some very personal experiences and his constant refrain is that what he is describing is something which every person can also experience. Mystics are not the select, special, holy few. He says any human being can apprehend reality with the same deepened vision which characterised the saints and mystics. To assist and encourage us with this, he offers lots of practical exercises for us to try—different ways of praying, of thinking, of seeing, of exploring our world. All of this is designed to aid our journey into the mystery of God who is drawing us closer and deeper.

Part Two is *Getting Ready to Receive: The Four Essentials*.

In these chapters, he describes four daily disciplines he sees in the stories of the saints, seers and mystics and which he enthusiastically commends to us. They are:

- detachment, throwing away the baggage we no longer need;
- poverty, learning how to live simply, disentangled from possessions;
- silence, quiet and the skill of being a solitary;
- the depths of sustained, regular prayer.

He says that when we give ourselves to these practices in our ordinary daily routine we could find ourselves in a dimension of
living that is transcendent and transformative. Let me give you an example of a prayer exercise he includes in this section. He refers us to Walter Hilton’s famous The Ladder of Perfection, written in English in 1494. Hedley says:

Hilton provides a useful checklist to help us decide how far up the staircase to fulfilment we have progressed. The more fully we have acquired the characteristics listed in Hilton’s 46th chapter, the higher we have ascended. Take time to clarify what these listed qualities entail. Then examine yourself carefully to discern the degree to which you possess them:

- Purity of spirit.
- Poverty of spirit.
- Spiritual rest.
- Inward stillness.
- Peace of conscience.
- Refinement of thought.
- Solitude.
- Retirement of heart.
- The wakeful sleep of the spouse.

In view of your response, what do you need to do about each of these qualities? (You might write down your responses in your journal).

Part Three is Varieties of Mystical Experience.

The seven chapters of this third part tell wonderful stories about all kinds of people Hedley has read and thought about and in many ways befriended. He has certainly learned from each of them. People like Jean-Baptiste Vianney, the Cure d’Ars, Evelyn Underhill, Thomas Merton, St Catherine of Sienna, St Teresa of Avila, Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, Jean-Pierre de Caussade, Teilhard de Chardin, Mathew Fox, St Cuthbert, St Patrick. There are poets (like Gerard Manley Hopkins), painters (like William Blake), musicians (like Hildegard of Bingen). And many more. It is a wonderful collection of teachers and guides from different centuries, cultures, spiritual traditions. All of them feel like Hedley’s personal friends and wise companions.

Part Four is A Summation and a Conclusion.

Now, as he comes to the end, it’s like the climax of a wonderful symphony. Every theme and melody reaches its fullest expression and we can’t help but be caught up in its wonder. The pattern of the way to our union with God which he has been exploring is the way every person is being drawn into. It is the way for us to be on.

Hedley says to us with such convincing insight and attractiveness: ‘You too can be a mystic—a way of seeing and experiencing the divine that is available to us all’—and so I enthusiastically commend the book to you.

I end this review with a short story—and the book’s final words.

On the morning of the day when I was due to complete the draft of this book for the publisher, I found myself on my morning jog running directly into a spectacular sunrise. During the previous evening I had worked into the small hours on the text, agonising about whether it is too self-revealing, for all authors have to live with the consequences, intentional and unintentional, of their creations.

My suburb seemed to be alive with birds. There were the usual early companions whom I love—two big crows, ubiquitous blackbirds, several wattlebirds, a family of warbling magpies. But today it was predominantly doves. They were on the footpath ahead of me and moved aside but did not fly away as I ran past. They were in the trees, on the parapet of a bridge as I crossed it, on the gables of houses, on overhead wires, and they were present for the whole of my three-kilometre circuit around our streets. They chorused to each other across the trees and rooftops, so that I had the impression that the air was filled with the calls of doves one to another, and to me. I could almost believe they were intentionally companioning me. Doves. Doves all the way.

An experience like this is not unusual, but it was a message exchange nonetheless, a beautifully muted epiphany from the birds.
which are symbols of peace. Benediction is a beautiful word which means 'the proclamation that all is well'. It is often used in conjunction with the acclamation 'Shalom' ('Peace'), and it flows through Julian's 'All shall be well; all shall be well; all manner of things shall be well'.

So, submerging my apprehensions, I resolved that I could release this text in the confidence that its intention is to spread healing, wholeness and peace to whomever it wings its message. In telling their own stories, it seems to me, the saints, seers and mystics exhibited that kind of courage and the same longing to be of service to their friends and hearers. Humbly, then, it is my earnest hope that this book will indeed be for you an epiphany and, like the morning songs of the doves, it too will be a vehicle for spreading far and wide abroad just that kind of mystical wholesomeness, inner and outer harmony, and fundamental peace.

—Revd. John Stewart

Dolphin’s Leap, Hind’s Feet—Becoming a Mystic, Journey, Discipline and Practice is available from bookshops and the publisher.

Email sales@morningstarpublishing.net.au

Jesus, our brother and friend,
born like each of us, of a woman, and in weakness,
plunged himself into human life
at the waters of the Jordan,
at the beginning of his life with us.

Into the depths of sin, love,
into the mystery of fragility, weakness,
and into the history of his people.

All life is holy, sacred, eternal
because of Jesus.
We plunge with him into the depths
of our own being:
in the depths of love we will find the God of love,
in the depths of sin, the God of compassion,
in the depths of weakness, the God of strength,
in the depths of division, the God of reconciliation,
in the depths of poverty and misery, the God of justice’
and in the depths of our humanity
we will find the divine life of God.

—Donal Neary SJ
The following is a brief overview of the Liturgy of the Word for major celebrations proclaimed from the Fourteenth to the Thirtieth Sundays of Ordinary Time in Year B. Please feel free to use or adapt these reflections, with the customary acknowledgement of source.

The readings over this period are indeed exceptional. We move through this period of the liturgical year, Ordinary Time, without interruption. There are no feasts or other celebrations that interrupt the flow of Ordinary Time readings. The gospel selections continue to be from Mark's Gospel though there is an exceptional insertion from John 6, as we shall see below.

A few things are noteworthy about the readings over these months.

• The First Readings encompass a broad range of literary styles and genres from the First Testament. In the opening Sundays of July, the prophets—those stalwart and faithful Israelites who seek to remind their people of their commitment to the Torah-dominate. Their reminder occurs not without its resistance from the prophet's audience, an observation clear from Amos 7 on July 12 (OT 15) and echoed in Isaiah for OT 23 and 24 (September 6 and 13).

Our selection of first readings also allows us to hear from the genre of wisdom literature, writings from the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE that seek to offer insights into day-to-day living, but which also reveal something of the inner depth of God's life reflected among people open to God (OT 25, September 20).

Of particular significance is the powerful Genesis reading of OT 27 (October 4). The poetic magic of this reading invites us to reconsider that goodness of creation and the divine plan infused into the human person through God's creative activity. The connection of this reading with the gospel of the day (Mk 10:2-16) could lead the preacher into a meditation on the value of community life, a theme first established in the Genesis story (with a further note on this gospel selection added below).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

\textbf{PART TWO: NOTES ON THE READINGS}

\textbf{July 5—Ordinary Time 14: Ez 2:2-5.} God declares to exiled people that a prophet will be sent to them. \textit{2 Cor} 12:7-10. With a 'thorn in the flesh' and despite his weakness, Paul declares his faith in God. \textit{Mk} 6:1-6. Jesus is portrayed as God's prophet rejected by his hometown. \textit{Theme—The prophetic tradition.} The role and importance of the prophet has always been acknowledged in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The prophet, exemplified in Mark's portrait of Jesus, is one who speaks the truth, reveals God's activity in human history and community, and experiences rejection. Who might be such prophets today in our local community? What prophetic word do we need to hear?

\textbf{July 12—Ordinary Time 15: Amos 7:12-15.} Amos, God's untrained and reluctant prophet, does God's bidding, despite criticism from Israel's religious leaders. \textit{Eph} 1:3-14. This wonderful hymn summarises Christ's role in creation and God's desire to bring us into communion, to 'adopt' us. \textit{Mk} 6:7-13. The disciples are sent on mission to preach the Gospel. Resistance to the message will be expected. \textit{Theme—Being a prophet.} Continuing the theme from last week, the readings offer an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of baptism, our call to be a prophet. Resistance, even rejection, is expected. The readings offer an encouraging word in our struggle to discipleship fidelity.

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

**July 26—Ordinary Time 17:** 2 Kings 4:42-44. The prophet Elijah takes a few loaves and gives them to his servant. The hunger of a large number of people is satisfied. Eph 4:1-6. The writer urges unity within the faith community. The source of such a bond of peace comes from God's Spirit. Jn 6:1-15. Jesus feeds the hungry crowd. (With this selection from John's Gospel begins several Sundays drawn from Jn 6 and the 'Bread of Life' discourse.) Theme—God feeds our hungers. God desires to feed us deeply in our life's journey. What are the struggles and difficulties that we face and seek God's nurturing care?

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

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

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

**August 23—Ordinary Time 21:** Josh 24:1-2, 15-17, 18. Before entering into Canaan, Joshua challenges the people to commit themselves to their ancestral God. Eph 4:32-5:2, 21-32. The writer offers advice on how to live religiously as God's true household. (A cautionary note: If this reading is proclaimed it must be reflected upon in the light of the ancient 'household codes' to which the writer adds mutual submission. The preacher must be sensitive to the patriarchal nature of the text, not reinforce female submission. It is important to appreciate the original cultural and social conditioning behind this text!) Jn 6:53, 60-69. Faced with the implications of the realistic language of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood, some of his disciples turn away. The Twelve remain faithful. Theme—Centrality of God and Jesus. The statement of the disciples in Jn 6:68 ('Lord, to whom can we go?') captures the essence of the Christian journey: our focus is on Jesus, the heart and meaning of
August 30—Ordinary Time 22: Dt 4:1-2, 6-8. Moses encourages the Israelites to live faithfully to God's commandments and thus display wisdom and discernment to the peoples. James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27. Here is a fine summary of essential truths for authentic living: generosity, openness to God's word that leads to action. The reading concludes with a radical definition of 'religion.' Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23. Mk's Jesus defines true religious living, one that is centered in the heart. Theme—Authentic Religious Living. Whether people show up at church or not, everyone wants to be authentic in themselves and live in harmony with others. Today's readings offer a wealth of insights for reflecting on authentic religious living. What resides in our hearts, and our relationship with Jesus are essential (Mk). These are expressed in the ways we are with others (James).

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

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

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

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

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

**October 11—Ordinary Time 28:** *Wis 7:7-11.* The search for true wisdom is the focus of prayer. Wisdom is a rich, life-sustaining gift. *Heb 4:12-13.* God's Word is powerful, acts, reveals and is affective. *Mk 10:17-30.* Jesus teaches the heart of true religious life—not to be confused with wealth. Freedom from wealth is a gift. Theme—Wisdom: The attachment to wealth and power today is revealed in many stories of business and politics. Jesus' call, bound up with the search for Wisdom, is for a spirit of personal freedom that is neither bought nor manipulated. Freedom is ultimately God's gift.

**October 18—Ordinary Time 29:** *Isaiah 53:4, 10-11.* This song of God's servant affirms how life and light come from anguish and suffering. *Heb 4:14-16.* Jesus can sympathize with us in our suffering and weakness. *Mk 10:35-45.* Discipleship is based on service, not power or prestige—a dilemma even for today's leaders. Theme—Service: Servant leadership may be difficult to define but it is very active in the community around us. Examples of selfless service abound, not often noticed or celebrated.

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

**Fr Michael Trainor** is senior lecturer in biblical studies with Adelaide's Australian Catholic University, and adjunct lecturer with Flinders University.

Although it does not have the complex organisation of the other two synoptic Gospels, Mark's account possesses its own dynamism, and the homelist can note this from time to time as the year unfolds. The early ministry of Jesus is greeted with great acclaim (3rd to 9th Sundays), but opposition soon arises (10th Sunday). Even his own followers misunderstand him, because their hopes are set on an earthly Messiah; the turning point in Mark's account of the public ministry comes with Peter's confession of faith, Christ's first announcement of his passion, and Peter's rejection of this plan (24th to 25th Sundays). The misunderstandings that run through this Gospel, as Jesus continues to do and say things that puzzle and scandalize his hearers, provides a salutary lesson to the Christian community as we gather each week to listen to the word of God—the mystery of Christ always challenges our expectations. Another important feature in Cycle B is the substitution of John's account of the miracle of the loaves and fishes and the subsequent Bread of Life discourse (17th to 21st Sundays). This provides an opportunity for the homelist to preach on Christ as the living Bread who nourishes us with both his word and his Body and Blood.