

EDITORIAL

IN JUNE THIS year Fr Dennis Murphy MSC, co-founder (along with Bishop Jim Cuskelly MSC) of *Compass* passed away in India. *Compass* was founded at the beginning of 1967, just a little over a year after the closure of Vatican II in December 1965. As I wrote in my first editorial in 1999:

They were stirring times, with excitement and turmoil throughout the Catholic world as the Church strove to come to terms with what the word *aggiornamento* might mean. *Compass* had plunged with eyes wide open into the immediate post-conciliar commotion with the aim of providing a better point of reference and guidance for Catholics than the regularly sensationalised and confusing coverage of journals such as *Time Magazine* and *Newsweek*. *Compass* set out to give depth and background to the debates, providing reliable information about trends in theological thinking, about the results of current research and about possible approaches to controversial questions. It wanted to 'open up the inner dynamism of theology, which is not meant to be a pastime for a clique, but an urgent attempt to bring God's Word in its purity and fullness to the world of our time' (first editorial, 1967).

Fr Dennis Murphy (1927-2014) achieved much in his ministry as Scripture scholar, seminary lecturer and rector, author, Provincial Superior and missionary. He was very much appreciated by all who knew him.

On several occasions he had the kindness to tell me that he was pleased with the way *Compass* was continuing. I was glad to give him that satisfaction. May he rest in peace.

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I find William Barclay's scripture commentaries very helpful. At present I am reading his *New Daily Study Bible: the Gospel of Matthew* which I have on my e-book. His commentary on Matthew 13:24-43 concern-

ing the parables of the dandelion in the wheat, of the mustard seed that produces a great tree, and of the yeast in the flour reflects on the kingdom of God as already here and as still coming.

He reflects on what Christianity has achieved down the centuries, while recognising that there is much yet to be achieved. He produces some facts of history that contradict many assertions of militant atheists.

Put simply, Christianity makes bad people good.

Christianity transformed life for women. In Greek civilisation women lived lives of total domesticity, utter seclusion. When the family travelled, the father would be mounted on a donkey, the mother would be walking and carrying a burden. I find this an interesting contrast with our images of the Holy Family fleeing into Egypt—Mary rides on the donkey nursing the Christ child, while Joseph leads the way on foot. This corroborates Barclay's assertion that Christianity transformed life for women.

Christianity also transformed life for the weak and the ill, who in pagan life were considered a nuisance. In Sparta only fit new-born children were allowed to live—the weak or deformed were exposed to die on the mountainside. Christians by contrast came to the assistance of the weak and the ill. It was a Christian monk, Thalassius who founded the first asylum for the blind. The first free dispensary was founded by Apollonius, a Christian merchant, the first hospital by Fabiola a Christian lady.

Christianity transformed life for the elderly. Prior to the coming of Christians the elderly were considered a nuisance and of no value because they were unable to do any work.

Christianity transformed life for children. Marriage and home life had broken down and

children were a burden, and the custom of exposing children to death was very common—especially in the case of girl children.

Barclay concludes these reflections thus:

Those who ask the question, ‘What has Christianity done for the world?’ have delivered themselves into a Christian debater’s hands. There is nothing in history so unanswerably demonstrable as the transforming power of Christianity and of Christ on the individual life and on the life of society.

We must take the long view—look back down the centuries—and see the Kingdom coming. These parables teach that a new force has been let loose in the world—the Kingdom of God is coming. In the Acts of the Apostles the people of Thessalonica cried: ‘These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also’ (Acts 17:6). There is nothing in this world, asserts Barclay, that is so disturbing as Christianity. And that is why so many people oppose it.

Applying this truth to what we see happen-

ing in Australian society today, we see that while the majority of the Australian population agree with the cruel treatment of asylum seekers, Christians are prominent among those who are opposing the policy.

And Christians have worked for greater justice in every field where there is injustice: agitating for justice for Australia’s indigenous people, working for peace, seeking a better deal for the poor, concern for the environment and creation, concern about our prison system, support for family life.

Working for justice and a fairer society is integral to living a Christian life. It is motivated by Jesus’ great commandment to all his followers: ‘Love one another as I have loved you’. The sad truth that we do not always do what Jesus told us to do is due to the fact that we fail, it is not because Christianity has failed—on the contrary, it demonstrates the strength of Christianity and its role in making bad people good and reforming our behaviour.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

The permanent principles of the Church’s social doctrine are:

- * the dignity of the human person,
- * the common good,
- * subsidiarity,
- * solidarity.

These principles, the expression of the whole truth about the human person known by reason and faith, are born of “the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarised in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society”.

—*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* par.160