

## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #1

In July 1994 a small group of Catholics gathered in Sydney to discuss their role in the Church and the world. A variety of factors brought us together. One seemed to be of particular significance – a strong desire to be part of a Church that is good news for our world.

It seemed to us that many are feeling frustrated in their attempts to participate effectively in the life of the Church. Many have stopped trying to participate. None of us particularly wants to leave the Church. We cherish its tradition. We also share both a faith in the Incarnation & God's promise to dwell with us, and a concern that the Catholic Church should play the life-giving role in society which is its privilege and responsibility. The Catholic Church's effectiveness as a sign of God's love and goodness seems to be diminishing at this time – a development we cannot simply blame on a 'materialistic world'. With the Second Vatican Council we acknowledge that "believers themselves bear some responsibility (for this situation)" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.19).

We share Pope Paul VI's perception that "we live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.75). We want to listen intelligently to the signs of the times, as Pope John XXIII called us to do, and respond generously to the call of the Spirit. We seek to participate in the life and mission of the Church as Christian faithful, accepting both the rights and responsibilities that come with our baptism. We see a special and highly significant role for the Second Vatican Council and the work of renewal that was begun there. Pope John Paul II summed it up nicely in his encyclical, *Tertio Millennio Ineunte*: "Now that the Jubilee has ended, I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning" (57).

The times in which we find ourselves see us all facing questions and issues that demand the most serious attention. We must all participate in the best way we can in the processes whereby we will address those issues and questions. Those processes cannot and must not be left in the hands of a few from whom we will then be expected to silently accept answers, explanations and decisions. We all must, to the best of our abilities and opportunities, join with the Church in her struggle to find new expressions of the Gospel at this time.

We are mindful of the temptations of perfectionism, of expecting more of the Church and her human representatives and structures than is realistic. Our desire is to work with and in the institutional Church, freely, honestly and compassionately. We desire to be part of that growing energy within the Church that is inspired by and subject to the Spirit of Christ. That Spirit blows where she will, revealing herself through the Sacred Scriptures, through the actual institutional life of the Catholic Church, through the historical, social, political and cultural reality we have inherited, through other religious traditions and through the issues and questions of our own day.

The heart of such an endeavour has to be the Paschal Mystery. Like her Founder, the Church lives the death and resurrection mystery in every age. The Church – along with each of the Christian faithful – must submit willingly to the dying that alone can bring life. If we evade the death we will not know the resurrection. In Him, with Him, and through Him, we pass over from death to life. Apart from Him we are nothing (cf. Jn. 15:5).

In this spirit we named our group Catalyst for Renewal. In accord with our mission statement, we will do what we can to develop forums of conversation. In those

forums we will encourage adults who share our concerns and intentions to engage in lively debate, to listen respectfully and intelligently to each other, to learn from that experience and thus participate more effectively in the renewal of both Church and society.

Our first forum for conversation was Spirituality in the Pub and we are continuing to develop that forum. We have also begun to hold a series of Catalyst Dinners at which conversation is promoted. A series of Reflection Mornings for Friends and Volunteers has also been introduced. In 1997 we invited two Maryknoll priests - Bill Frazier and Larry Lewis - to Australia to conduct a series of adult education courses. Our journal *The Mix* is now received by more than 1600 people.

Become part of the conversation. We are the decisions we make. The shape of the Church in future generations will be determined as much by our decisions - or lack of them - as it will be determined by the Holy Spirit.

Those choices we make might demand much of us. They might in fact cost us everything. So be it. Our Paschal Lord is the example. Let us make the choices thoughtfully, freely & generously in the spirit of abandonment to the Eternal Mystery.

Like Jesus, our desire is to do the will of the One who sent us (cf Jn. 4:34). We can be at peace then with the outcome. "For us there is only the trying, the rest is not our business" (T. S. Eliot).

What future do we want? What choices shall we make? What sort of Church shall we pass on to the next generations?

## **WHAT CAN I DO?**

From time to time *The Mix* will carry a **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET** as an insert. The purpose is to assist our Friends and others to become actively involved in the process of renewal by either initiating a forum for conversation or participating in a forum for conversation that is already established.

On the reverse side of this sheet are some thoughts about groups. You might be able to meet with one or more others and set up a little group. This could be focused on, for example, the Sunday Readings, a chosen book, a bible study program, prayerful time together considering designated subjects and so on. Upcoming Suggestion Sheets will offer creative ways to meet and engage in good conversation.

## **HELP US HELP OTHERS**

We would also love to hear from you if you have some good suggestions for conversation. Where are the signs of hope? What good things are being done? Let us know and we will let others know!

**(CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEETS are published by Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated, PO Box 139, Gladesville 2110)**

## **RULES AND HINTS FOR GROUPS**

### Purpose

To provide a forum within which adults can grow in their faith and learn from:

the Spirit working in "two or three gathered" in His name;  
speaking of their own lived experiences and considered reflections;  
listening to the experiences and considered reflections of others.

### Suggested Group Rules

The success of the group presupposes that all members:  
take responsibility for the group's success;  
care for the others in the group;  
endeavour to be there consistently and on time;  
prepare material conscientiously;  
be willing to listen *and* speak;  
maintain the confidentiality of material discussed.

### Leadership

Generally it is best if leadership of the sessions is shared. If the group is worth having all must contribute something to its life.

It is also generally the case that if there is not one or perhaps two to take responsibility for getting things done, things do not get done. Watch that those one or two do not get overburdened.

Power struggles can be disastrous for the life of the group. These generally hinge around personality clashes or differences of understanding the purpose of the group. Power struggles must be dealt with openly and honestly.

Good group leaders tend to be invisible

### Hints For Participating Fruitfully

Consider the group as having a certain "energy" which must be kept moving. The more the group members share that "energy" or pass it around, the better will the group be. Grace builds on nature - the "Energy" of God with our "energy".

That flow of "energy" can be inhibited or locked up - e.g. by talking excessively, moody silence, failing to listen sensitively, cynical or cutting comments, restless body movement, forming sub-groups or alliances, depending too much on the facilitator for promptings, arbitrations or answers.

That flow of "energy" can be released and moved - e.g. by thoughtful and honest comment, sensitive listening, paying attention to the one speaking, encouraging remarks, good humour, gently challenging evasions, allowing people to disagree with you or share a contrary opinion, deliberately taking up the "energy" respectfully then letting it go.

Focus on the learning possibilities in the group. Even a "bad" group experience is an opportunity to learn.

If the group's "energy" or your own seems to be chronically inhibited or locked up, address this issue - reflect on what is happening, discuss it with another member of the

group or the facilitator or simply raise your concern publicly in the group. Do something about it!

When you see that another member of the group has been distressed, is angry or otherwise has "unfinished business" when the discussion concludes, don't leave that person alone. See that they have some opportunity to express their feelings to someone. However, respect their privacy should they choose not to pursue the matter with you.

It is not the end of the world if someone leaves a group, or the group disbands or you find that participation in the group is no longer lifegiving for you so you decide to leave. Do what you must do in faith.

### Suggested Reading

Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, Bantam Books, 1986. (Personal listening and awareness)  
John Heider, *The Tao of Leadership*, Bantam Books, 1986. (Developing your skills as facilitator)

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### **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #2**

The cultural anthropologist, Edward Hall, makes a provocative observation about modern western culture and the type of thinking that tends to characterize us:

The psychoanalyst Laing is convinced that the Western world is mad. .... However, it is not man who is crazy so much as his institutions and those cultural patterns that determine his behavior. We in the West are alienated from ourselves and from nature. We labor under a number of delusions, one of which is that .... we are sane. We persist in this view despite massive evidence to the contrary. We live fragmented, compartmentalized lives in which contradictions are carefully sealed off from each other. We have been taught to think linearly rather than comprehensively .... Given our linear, step-by-step, compartmentalized way of thinking, fostered by the schools and public media, it is impossible for our leaders to consider events comprehensively or to weigh priorities according to a system of common good .... (E. T. Hall, Beyond Culture, Anchor Books, 1977, pp.11-12).

The English philosopher, lawyer and political figure Francis Bacon (1561-1626) proposed the theory that knowledge is, in the end, about gaining power over nature. "*We can,*" Bacon said, "*put nature to the rack*". Bacon proposed that we gain power over the natural order and in this way provide the necessities for comfort and wellbeing. Bacon's book, The New Atlantis, (1627), envisaged a scientific Utopia. Bacon's philosophy gave impetus to the natural sciences and a way of thinking and knowing that characterizes our Western way of education and living to this day. We tend to think of knowing as gaining control over facts and information. To describe reality is to "harness the facts" - just "the facts" - and present them with "objectivity".

The Englishman in Nikos Kazantzakis' novel *Zorba the Greek*, reflects on an experience with a butterfly. In his reflection we find something of the limitations of the rationalistic approach to life in general and to the environment in particular. We also find there intimations of more creative possibilities:

I remembered one morning when I discovered a cocoon in the bark of a tree, just as the butterfly was making a hole in the case preparing to come out. I waited a while, but it was too long appearing and I was impatient. I bent over it and breathed on it to warm it. I warmed it as quickly as I could and the miracle began to happen before my eyes, faster than life. The case opened, the butterfly started slowly crawling out and I shall never forget my horror when I saw how its wings were folded back and crumpled; the wretched butterfly tried with its whole body to unfold them. Bending over it I tried to help it with my breath. In vain. It needed to be hatched out patiently and the unfolding of the wings should be a gradual process in the sun. Now it was too late. My breath had forced the butterfly to appear all crumpled, before its time. It struggled desperately and, a few seconds later, died in the palm of my hand.

That little body is, I do believe, the greatest weight I have on my conscience. For I realize today that it is a mortal sin to violate the great laws of nature. We should not hurry, we should not be impatient, but we should confidently obey the eternal rhythm.

I sat on a rock to absorb this New Year's thought. Ah, if only that little butterfly could always flutter before me to show me the way. (N. Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*, Touchstone Books, pp.12-121.)

In the biblical tradition "to know" is to be in some kind of significant relationship with the person or thing known. Thus Jesus says "I know mine and mine know me" (John 10:14). He is not talking about facts or abstract information. He is talking about a certain intimacy of relationship. This intimacy can only be fostered and facilitated, never achieved by conquest. The Jewish philosopher, Abraham Heschel represents this biblical tradition when he notes:

The teaching of our society is that more knowledge means more power, more civilization - more comfort. We should have insisted in the spirit of the prophetic vision that more knowledge should also mean more reverence, that more civilization should also mean less violence. ...Knowing is not due to coming upon something, naming and explaining it. Knowing is due to something forcing itself upon us. Thought is a response to being rather than an invention. The world does not lie prostrate, waiting to be given order and coherence by the human mind. Things are evocative. When conceits are silent and all words stand still, the world speaks. We must burn the clichés to clear the air for hearing. Conceptual clichés are counterfeit; preconceived notions are misfits. Knowledge involves love, care for the things we seek to know, longing, being-drawn-to, being overwhelmed. (Abraham Heschel, Who Is Man?, Stanford University Press, 1965, p.100 & 109.)

Blaise Pascal's comment is well known to all of us, though not always accurately quoted:

The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing; we feel it in many things (Blaise Pascal, Pensées, Trans, J. Warrington, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1973, n.224).

Give some thought to the way you think. *How* you think is probably as important as *what* you think. It will affect your ability to enter into good conversation. Observe other people and try to understand the way they think. Have conversations about this with others.

What difference do you think it might make to the way you approach the issues pertaining to Church renewal?

See the reverse side of this sheet for further stimulating ideas on thinking.

#### Suggested Reading

E. Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Vintage Books, 1971.

H. Smith, *Beyond the Post Modern Mind*, Crossroad, 1982.

M Whelan, *Without God All Things are Lawful*, Society of St Paul, 1995.

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### **THREE STYLES OF THINKING**

(These categories are descriptive rather than definitive. They are given to stimulate thought and conversation.

For good adult conversation - especially in the context of Church renewal - Foundational Thinking is generally preferable to Ideological Thinking and Issues Thinking - though the latter is most definitely required in certain concrete situations.)

## FOUNDATIONAL THINKING

- begins from the standpoint of wanting to search for the truth;
- seeks context, recognizing all relevant factors;
- is subtle, able to make relevant distinctions;
- asks honest questions, probes; in particular asks "What is happening?"
- unveiling the truth is every-thing;
- listening in order to learn is of the essence;
- language is generally unencumbered by extraneous agenda, words chosen to facilitate connection and conversation;
- never resorts to mockery or sarcasm, always focuses on the ideas, questions and issues;
- respect and care for the other as co-searcher, though non-emotive;

- willing to leave the matter incomplete, agree to disagree;
- high tolerance for disagreement;
- high tolerance for ambiguity and paradox;
- high regard for principles and the logic they demand;
- assumes that the truth will set us free;
- able to root a conversation in the depth dimension;
- presupposes life experience and some wisdom;
- requires depth of emotional maturity and significant sense of personal security;
- it probably helps to be humble;
- is self-transcending.

## IDEOLOGICAL THINKING

- begins from the standpoint of already knowing the truth;
- the ideology is the template for addressing any factor;
- is unsubtle, disinclined to make distinctions, paints with broad brush;
- makes definite and clear statements;
- "winning" is everything;
- out-maneuvering the other in order to defend your position is of the essence;
- language is generally loaded, words chosen to defend or promote the ideology and or demolish the opposition;
- at home with mockery and sarcasm, prone to ad hominem argument;
- anxiety about the other as threat, emotive;



- determined to bring the matter to a close with a victory;
- low tolerance for disagreement
- all is clear, no tolerance for ambiguity or paradox;
- high regard for the ideology and the logic it demands;
- assumes that the ideology will set us free;
- interaction remains essentially superficial;
- presupposes cleverness rather than wisdom and probably lack of life experience;
- generally implies emotional immaturity and lack of significant sense of personal security;
- it probably helps to be proud;
- is egocentric.

### ISSUES THINKING

- begins from the standpoint of wanting to solve the problem;
- context is typically bypassed except where it is useful in solving the problem;
- subtlety and distinctions have little or nothing to do with it;
- maybe asks clarifying questions;
- solving the problem is everything;
- functional and practical co-operation is of the essence;
- language is generally detached and technical, words chosen to convey necessary information;
- mockery and sarcasm may emerge when the problem solving is frustrated, product oriented;
- acceptance of other as helper in solving the problem, non-emotive;

- keen to find the solution to the problem;
- disagreement irrelevant so long as the problem is solved;
- little tolerance for ambiguity or paradox;
- high regard for the matters of fact and realpolitik;
- assumes that the solution will set us free;
- interaction remains essentially superficial
- presupposes skills of one kind or another;
- maturity and sense of personal security have little or nothing to do with it;
- humility does not matter;
- get it fixed!

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### **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #3**

The Church exists because of the initiative of God. It is sustained by the Spirit of Christ and our cooperation. It bears similarities to all other human organisations but is, in the end, unique, essentially different from all other merely human organisations. It exists to bear witness to, and be an instrument of, God's salvific will. Its work in the world, like its renewal, is ultimately by the grace of God. It may help to think of a *primary level* (Spirituality), a *secondary level* (Community) and a *tertiary level* (Communal expressions and needs) in the Church and the renewal process.

#### PRIMARY LEVEL: SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is primary because it is essentially about our relationship with God, self, others and world; that fourfold relationship is the heart and soul of humanity; spirituality situates our lives within the Trinity via the Paschal Mystery; it gives ground, energy and direction to everything else; it keeps us focused on the Spirit of Christ and the Kingdom; it helps us to judge everything against the Person and Teaching of Jesus; spirituality will express itself in some sort of communal way - to discover my true self is to discover that I am a relational being, to be me is to be in relationships.

#### SECONDARY LEVEL: COMMUNITY

The Church is a community of disciples, gathered by Word and Sacrament; life-giving community grows out of and feeds back into solid spirituality; it lives in and on the Spirit of Christ - it is not just any merely human group; by its very nature Christian community will be a worshipping, serving and evangelising group.

#### TERTIARY LEVEL: COMMUNAL EXPRESSIONS AND NEEDS

We might think of this tertiary level as manifested in four interdependent types of expressions and needs:

LITURGICAL

Worship  
Ritual  
Symbol  
Music  
Presiders  
Sacred space

PASTORAL

Poor  
Sick  
Aged  
Hospitality  
Visitation  
Education

ORGANIZATI

ONAL  
Authority  
Roles  
Responsibilities  
Committees  
Accountability  
Policies/proced  
ures

BUSINESS

Finance  
Management  
Plant  
R & M  
Insurance  
Legalities

In an ideal renewal process, all three levels of Church life will be fully addressed. Different people and groups have different gifts to bring to the renewal process.

The *primary level* holds the key to renewal. Advances can be made at the *tertiary level* - even spectacular advances - but if they are not supported by a well-grounded spirituality it is probably better if they do not happen. On the other hand, if there is a genuine spirituality present - and this will be evident in some form of genuine community life - renewal can proceed, eg, amidst inefficient organisation, bad music and very little money, for example.

The *tertiary level*, being mostly concrete and immediate, presenting jobs to be done and problems to be solved, easily attracts the most attention in the efforts for renewal. Needs and success can clearly be seen and measured here. There are tangible rewards. Efforts will only bear fruit in the long run, however, if this *tertiary level* work is well grounded in and expressive of *primary level* work. Clearly it is preferable if those doing the work for renewal at the *tertiary level* are also putting in effective effort at the *primary level* and the *secondary level*.

In the end, renewal is not a question of jobs to be done - though jobs need to be done - nor is it a question of problems to be solved - though problems need to be solved. A reductionism that reduces renewal to jobs to be done and problems to be solved is ultimately destructive - despite early positive signs to the contrary. Such reductionism is especially destructive when it is done amidst the rhetoric of spirituality and community but without the reality of spirituality and community. If we are serious about renewal, we must live the Paschal Mystery as generously as we possibly can. The reality of the Cross must never be far from our minds - especially when we are assessing successes and failures.

For the most part renewal will proceed in hidden and incremental ways: "the march of the ants". Successes will sometimes look like failures and failures will sometimes look like successes. The key will be people with dispositions such as constancy and fidelity, generosity and big-mindedness, patience and forgiveness, courage and wisdom, which allow God to do what God will do, in God's way and God's time.

Like a tree that sinks its roots before and while it spreads its branches, so those working in renewal must grow deep in the Spirit of Christ, individually and communally, before and while they spread their branches.

In Catalyst for Renewal we believe genuine conversation can serve the work of renewal admirably. It requires - and in turn fosters - respect and care, listening and learning, life-giving relationships and communion in the Spirit of Christ.

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**Reflect on the following references from Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi***

(1975):

15. Anyone who rereads in the New Testament the origins of the Church, follows her history step by step and watches her live and act, sees that she is linked to evangelization in her most intimate being:

- The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the Twelve. ...
- The Church remains in the world when the Lord of glory returns to the Father. She remains as a sign.
- The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love; and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the "mighty works of God"(41) which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by Him and reunited.
- The Church is the depositary of the Good News to be proclaimed.
- Having been sent and evangelized, the Church herself sends out evangelizers.

20. What matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et spes*,(n.53) always taking the person as one's starting - point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

31. Between evangelization and human advancement - development and liberation - there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the people who are to be evangelized are not abstract beings but are subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combatted and justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of humanity?

32. We must not ignore the fact that many, even generous Christians .... in their wish to commit the Church to the liberation effort are frequently tempted to reduce her mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. They would reduce her aims to a human-centred goal; the salvation of which she is the messenger would be reduced to material well-being. Her activity, forgetful of all spiritual and religious preoccupation, would become initiatives of the political or social order. But, if this were so, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems and political parties. She would have no more authority to proclaim freedom as in the name of God. This is why we have wished to emphasize ... 'The need to re-state clearly the specifically religious finality of evangelization. This latter would

lose its reason for existence if it were to diverge from the religious axis that guides it: the Kingdom of God, before anything else, in its fully theological meaning".

41. Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. .... It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus - the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.

46. In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?

75. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church. It is he who explains to the faithful the deep meaning of the teaching of Jesus and of his mystery. It is the Holy Spirit who, today just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows himself to be possessed and led by him. .... Without the Holy Spirit the most convincing dialectic has no power over the heart of man. Without him the most highly developed schemes resting on a sociological or psychological basis are quickly seen to be quite valueless. We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What good thing has happened in your parish in the last year? Why do you call it "good"?
2. Where do you think the main energies for renewal ought to be directed? Why?
3. Would it be possible to change structures in the Church without renewing the Church? Discuss this.
4. Would it be possible to renew the Church without changing structures in the Church? Discuss this.
5. Do you think "we live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit"? Discuss this.
6. What does it mean to say "the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church"?
7. What does it mean to "evangelize human culture and cultures"?
8. What does it mean to say "the Church must begin by being evangelized"?
9. How might the mission of the Church be "reduced to a simply temporal project"?
10. Get a copy of Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and read it meditatively. Discuss it with someone.

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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #4

### FACILITATING GOOD CHANGE IN THE CHURCH: RENEW, RETHINK, REFORM

**RENEW:** The focus is on being transformed in Christ; being drawn into the Trinitarian life through the Paschal Mystery; becoming sacraments of God's liberating love in the world; it explicitly and deliberately highlights the Originating Event of the Tradition: ie the Paschal Mystery; it is the heart of good change in the Church and is interdependent with **rethinking** and **reforming**.

**RETHINK:** The focus is on new understanding & articulation of faith; typically this is the work of scholars, but all must contribute; it must be grounded in, expressive of, and always interdependent with the ongoing **renewing** process; it must also maintain interdependence with the **reforming**; it explicitly and deliberately highlights the Faith Tradition: ie what we believe.

**REFORM:** The focus is on new forms (structures, rituals, symbols etc) to express the faith; it requires the work of scholars & others to ensure the new forms express faithfully both the authentic Faith Tradition and the social-cultural reality of the people; it must be grounded in, expressive of and interdependent with the ongoing **renewing** process; it must be interdependent with the **rethinking**; it explicitly and deliberately highlights the Form Tradition: ie how we express what we believe

### COMMENTS

1. When we speak of **renewal in the Church** - or **facilitating good change in the Church** - we are speaking of the **renewing** *and* the **rethinking** *and* the **reforming**; we, the Church, must be dedicated to this threefold process in every age in every place - but we must be especially committed to this in a time of immense cultural and social transition such as the current period of history.
2. Genuine **reformers** and **rethinkers** will be deeply committed to **renewing**. They will be convinced that the **renewing** always begins with their own personal faith journey and that the **renewing** never ends.
3. When the **rethinking** - or more precisely the **rethinker** - becomes more or less disconnected from a genuine **renewing**, the **rethinking** tends to lose its *raison d'être* and becomes more or less dislocated from the Originating Event (the Paschal Mystery) and thus disconnected also from the authentic Faith Tradition and, in turn, unable to effectively support the authentic Form Tradition. In principle, it would be possible to have much **rethinking** within the Church without facilitating good change.
4. When the **reforming** - or more precisely the **reformer** - becomes more or less disconnected from a genuine **renewing**, the **reforming** tends to lose its *raison d'être* and becomes more or less disconnected from the Originating Event (the Paschal Mystery) and thus disconnected also from the authentic Form Tradition and unable to adequately express the authentic Faith Tradition. In principle, it would be possible to have wholesale **reform** within the Church without facilitating good change.

7. When the **renewing** is not authentically, actively and constantly pursued as the source and end for all change within the Church, emphasis on the **rethinking** and/or the **reforming** will tend to lead to certain more or less unhelpful expressions; for example:

a) **reductionism** - the process of change may be reduced to one or more issue, question or idea, to a set of things to do, strategies or behaviours; reductionism may propose that "If only we do this or that ...." or "All we need to do is this ..."; reductionism is about allaying anxiety by reducing life to clear and controllable issues which are then managed by simple answers and strategies; two very common forms of reductionism are *functionalism* and *moralism*:

i) *functionalism* - this form of reductionism says renewal is a problem solving exercise; strategies, skills and finance are the key to renewal therefore; the focus is on getting jobs done, changing structures; functionalism gives primacy to competence, efficiency, quantification, measuring; functionalism is fundamentally egotistically; it is about allaying anxiety by establishing the illusion of control through problem solving and efficiency. (It should not be confused with functionality!)

ii) *moralism* - this form of reductionism says renewal is about establishing - or in fact re-establishing - disciplined behaviour; the Gospel is reduced to a moral system, Jesus is reduced to a moral teacher, and all we have to do to set things right is obey the rules; moralism is basically about allaying anxiety by having everyone conform to a system of behaviour, thus establishing the illusion that everything is under control; such reductionism is typically angry and punitive towards those who refuse to conform; (It should not be confused with morality!)

b) **politicization** - particular issues are taken to "the people" with a view to forcing the issue by unleashing strong emotional currents - especially anxiety, fear and anger; politicization subverts all else to that struggle for victory; it shifts issues from the rational to the emotional, from the conversational to the confrontational; the politicizer may in fact be innocent of the process or use it cleverly to defeat an otherwise securely entrenched foe; the politicizers might also be simply angry people externalizing an inner conflict to avoid dealing with it as their own (ie by refusing the call of **renewal**).

c) **withdrawal** - the person simply walks away from what seems to be a pointless, irrelevant or unrewarding situation; if my centre of gravity is in the system and the system denies me the power to participate, for sanity's sake fight or flight are the only options - generally the latter option is taken if the fight proves unwinnable; withdrawal - whether it is physical (ie I absent myself from the system and its activities) or psychological (ie I continue to stay in there but withdraw into a private world of indifference) - may in fact be a useful (temporary) strategy to avoid distressing rage and discouragement.

**Reflect on the following references to Church documents:**

1. *(The following prayer (in its Latin form) was used at the Second Vatican Council before every meeting of preparatory commissions and conciliar commissions. It is thought to have been composed by St Isidore of Seville for the Second Provincial*



*Council of Seville in 619. It was used during the Fourth Provincial Council of Toledo, Spain, in 633. This prayer was also used at the beginning of the sessions of the First Vatican Council in 1869:)*

We are here before You, O Holy Spirit, conscious of our innumerable sins, but united in a special way by your Holy Name. Come and abide with us. Deign to penetrate our hearts. Be the guide of our actions, indicate the path we should take, and show us what we must do so that, with Your help, our work may be in all things pleasing to You. May You be our only inspiration and the overseer of our intentions, for You alone possess a glorious name together with the Father and the Son. May You, who are infinite justice, never permit that we be disturbers of justice. Let not our ignorance induce us to evil, nor flattery sway us, nor moral and material interest corrupt us. But unite our hearts to You alone, and do it strongly, so that, with the gift of Your grace, we may be one in You and may in nothing depart from the truth. Thus, united in Your name, may we in our every action follow the dictates of your mercy and justice, so that today and always our judgments may not be alien to You and in eternity we may obtain the unending reward of our actions. Amen.

*2. (The following words are excerpts from the first "document" of the Second Vatican Council - "Message to Humanity" - issued by the Council Fathers on October 20, 1962, as the Council was beginning:)*

In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we might be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ. We shall take pains to present to the people of this age God's truth in its integrity and purity that they may understand it and assent to it. .... We as pastors devote all our energies and thoughts to renewal of ourselves and the flocks committed to us, so that there may radiate before all, the lovable features of Jesus Christ, who shines in our hearts. ... Faith, hope and the love of Christ impel us to serve our brothers and sisters, thereby patterning ourselves after the example of the Divine Teacher who "came not to serve but to be served" (Mt. 20:28). Hence, the Church too was not born to dominate but to serve. He laid down His life for us and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Accordingly, while we hope that the light of faith will shine more clearly and more vigorously as a result of this Council's efforts, we look forward to a spiritual renewal from which will also flow a happy impulse on behalf of human values such as scientific discoveries, technological advances, and a wider diffusion of knowledge. ... We urgently turn our thoughts to all the anxieties by which modern humanity is afflicted. Hence, let our concern swiftly focus first of all on those who are especially lowly, poor and weak. ... We would emphasise whatever concerns the dignity of humanity, whatever contributes to a genuine community of peoples. ... The Supreme Pontiff, John XXIII in a radio message delivered on September 11, stressed two points especially. The first dealt with peace between peoples. ... We are giving witness that all are brothers and sisters, whatever their race or nation. ... The Supreme Pontiff also pleads for social justice. ... To be sure, we are lacking in human resources and earthly power. Yet we lodge our trust in the power of God's Spirit, who was promised to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence we humbly and ardently call for all to work along with us in building up a more just and loving city in this world. We call not only on our brothers and sisters whom we serve as shepherds, but also upon all Christians, and all people of goodwill. ... For this is the divine plan, that through love God's kingdom may already shine out on earth in some fashion as a

preview of God's eternal kingdom.

3. By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind. She is also an instrument of the achievement of such union and unity. (*Lumen Gentium*, n.1)

4. The Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal. (*Lumen Gentium*, n.8)

5. While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. For every benefit which the people of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation (cf *Lumen Gentium*, n.15) simultaneously manifesting and exercising God's love for humanity. (*Gaudium et Spes*, n.45)

6. All the Christian faithful must make an effort, in accord with their own condition, to live a holy life and promote the growth of the Church and its continual sanctification (*The Code of Canon Law (1983)*, n. 210).

7. In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all co-operate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function. (*The Code of Canon Law (1983)*, n. 208).

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Having read carefully both sides of this sheet, what questions does it raise for you?
2. Explain in your own words, with reference to your life experience, the differences between *renew*, *rethink* and *reform*.
3. In what way do you think *you* can promote good change within the Church?
4. Recall an experience which typifies for you the Church at its best.
5. Is prayer a regular part of your life? What is happening?
6. What caught your attention about the "Message to Humanity" (#2 above)?
7. What does it mean for you to say that "the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God" (#3 above)?

#### CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #5

#### GOOD REASONS FOR CONVERSATION

In recent generations, both within the Church and wider society, there has begun a massive, profound and rapid shift. This is reflected at all levels of our human experience - in our institutions, customs, perceptions of right and wrong, good and evil, our expectations of governance, our attitudes to religion, our appreciation of symbols and rituals and so on. Among other things, amidst this flux, and the opportunities and dangers it offers, we need to remember the value of people and human relationships. We need each other in our struggles to connect with God at work in the world. Good

conversation can contribute immeasurably to this.

Pope John XXIII - reading the signs of the times - called for adaptation and renewal. In particular, the Church had to take both the Gospel and the world more seriously. Pope John's new spirit is perhaps nowhere better summed up than in the following words from his speech at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in October 1962:

"At the outset of the Second Vatican Council, it is evident as always, that the truth of the Lord will remain forever. We see, in fact, as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of people follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations. .... Even more important, experience has taught people that violence inflicted on others, the might of arms, and political domination, are of no help at all in finding a happy solution to the grave problems which afflict them."

Pope Paul VI picked up on that same spirit in his first encyclical - *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) (sometimes referred to in English as *Paths of the Church*) - some eighteen months before the final session of the Council. Pope Paul focused most particularly on the need for dialogue. (NOTE: When you read the texts from Pope Paul below, you will see that the word "dialogue" has a much broader meaning than that usually implied by the word "conversation". For example, in the first reference below (*Ecclesiam Suam*, n.64), "dialogue" seems to be another word for apostolic outreach, any movement to engage the world with a view to proclaiming the Good News. More frequently, however, the word "dialogue," as used in Pope Paul's document as well as other documents from Rome, means "conversation". It is that more common sense that we wish to highlight in this reflection, noting the rich spirituality that it implies.)

The word "dialogue" is used more than one thousand times in the Vatican Documents and subsequent Church documents from Rome. It clearly indicates that Pope Paul's focus on dialogue or conversation has been accepted as a central feature of the Church's thinking and vision. Is it any wonder? When we start to reflect on the nature and implications of dialogue and conversation, it not only throws us up against human nature and its yearning for connection and loving relationship, it also reminds us of the nature of God, the eternal loving relationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian conversation.

Dialogue and conversation point to the heart of our humanity as well as the heart of our faith. When we enter on the path of genuine dialogue and conversation we are moving more deeply towards our nature as human beings baptized into Christ, members of the Mystical Body. There is, potentially, a rich spirituality in human conversation. The pastoral instruction on the uses of the modern means of communication (*Communio et Progressio* (1971)) puts it nicely: "Communication is more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level it is the giving of self in love" (n.11).

Dialogue and conversation are about connecting with others in a joint pursuit of truth

and goodness. They require, among other qualities, trust, magnanimity, commitment, care, respect, willingness and ability to listen, honesty, humility and patience. Dialogue and conversation may be pursued in different ways: formal, structured negotiations, debates and discussions; informal shared conversations about Scripture, theology, renewal and aspects of the spiritual life; more ad hoc conversations about the things that matter to us; conversations such as we have at Spirituality in the Pub or the Catalyst Dinners, and so on. Dialogue and conversation are obstructed when people are combative, engage in win-lose interactions, are aggressive, will not listen, show little or no respect for others, are bombastic, ideological or dogmatic and so on.

The baptized believe this dialogue or conversation has its roots in the life of God - the Trinity of Persons in an eternal and loving conversation. Our human existence is produced by that eternal conversation of love, we reflect it and feel it in our beings. We are relational beings, like God. We are urged by our divine roots, by our nature, to relate well with - that is, love - others. We do not do this automatically or even easily. We must choose to facilitate it and give ourselves generously to the task that is at times extremely trying. In the end loving relationships emerge as grace, as pure gift, amidst our generous efforts and hard work. Good conversation, likewise, emerges as grace. And grace is no more nor less than the presence of God. Where grace is, there is transformation. Good conversation is transforming.

The following references to Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* give some indication of the roots, meaning and implications of the dialogue and conversation spoken of above. These references also give some indication of the central role of dialogue and conversation in Pope Paul's vision for the Council and the Church in the years ahead:

1. The nature of the dialogue and the responsibility of all the baptized: "An attitude of preservation of the faith is insufficient. Certainly we must preserve and also defend the treasure of truth and of grace which has come to us by way of inheritance from the Christian tradition. 'Keep safe what has been entrusted to thee,' warns St. Paul. But neither the preservation nor the defence of the faith exhausts the duty of the Church in regard to the gifts which it possesses. The duty consonant with the patrimony received from Christ is that of spreading, offering, announcing it to others. Well do we know that 'going, therefore, make disciples of all nations' is the last command of Christ to His Apostles. By the very term 'apostles' these men define their inescapable mission. To this internal drive of charity which tends to become the external gift of charity we will give the name of dialogue, which has in these days come into common usage." (*Ecclesiam Suam* n.64) (Emphasis added.)

2. The origins and universality of the dialogue: "The fatherly and holy conversation between God and humanity, interrupted by original sin, has been marvellously resumed in the course of history. The history of salvation narrates exactly this long and changing dialogue which begins with God and brings to humanity a many-splendoured conversation. It is in this conversation of Christ among us that God allows us to understand something of Himself, the mystery of His life, unique in its essence, Trinitarian in its persons; and He tells us finally how He wishes to be known; He is Love; and how He wishes to be honoured and served by us: Love is our supreme commandment. The dialogue thus takes on full meaning and offers grounds for confidence. The child is invited to it; the mystic finds a full outlet in it." (*Ecclesiam*

Suam n.70)

3. Dialogue implies a special kind of relationship: "This type of relationship indicates a proposal of courteous esteem, of understanding and of goodness on the part of the one who inaugurates the dialogue; it excludes the a priori condemnation, the offensive and time-worn polemic and emptiness of useless conversation." (Ecclesiam Suam n.79)

4. Speaking specifically to priests a message that should be taken up by all the baptised: "And before speaking, it is necessary to listen, not only to people's voices, but to their hearts. People must first be understood - and, where they merit it, agreed with. In the very act of trying to make ourselves pastors, fathers and teachers of people, we must make ourselves their brothers. The spirit of dialogue is friendship and, even more, is service. All this we must remember and strive to put into practice according to the example and commandment that Christ left to us." (Ecclesiam Suam, n.87)

5. In general, of the way the Church must engage the world: "The dialogue is not proud, it is not bitter, it is not offensive. Its authority is intrinsic to the truth it explains, to the charity it communicates, to the example it proposes; it is not a command, it is not an imposition. It is peaceful; it avoids violent methods; it is patient; it is generous. Trust, not only in the power of one's words, but also in an attitude of welcoming the trust of the interlocutor. Trust promotes confidence and friendship. It binds hearts in mutual adherence to the good which excludes all self-seeking. In the dialogue, conducted in this manner, the union of truth and charity, of understanding and love is achieved. In the dialogue one discovers how different are the ways which lead to the light of faith, and how it is possible to make them converge on the same goal. Even if these ways are divergent, they can become complementary by forcing our reasoning process out of the worn paths and by obliging it to deepen its research, to find fresh expressions. The dialectic of this exercise of thought and of patience will make us discover elements of truth also in the opinions of others, it will force us to express our teaching with great fairness, and it will reward us for the work of having explained it in accordance with the objections of another or despite that other's slow assimilation of our teaching. The dialogue will make us wise; it will make us teachers. Many, indeed, are the forms that the dialogue of salvation can take. It adapts itself to the needs of a concrete situation, it chooses the appropriate means, it does not bind itself to ineffectual theories and does not cling to hard and fast forms when these have lost their power to speak to people and move them." (Ecclesiam Suam, nos. 81-85)

7. Dialogue with members of other Christian traditions: The principle that we are happy to make our own is this: Let us stress what we have in common rather than what divides us. (Ecclesiam Suam n.109)

6. Dialogue within the Church: "It is our ardent desire that this conversation with our own children should be full of faith, of charity, of good works, should be intimate and familiar. We would have it responsive to all truth and virtue and to all the realities of our doctrinal and spiritual inheritance. Sincere and sensitive in genuine spirituality, ever ready to give ear to the manifold voice of the contemporary world, ever more capable of making Catholics truly good men and women, men and women wise, free, serene and strong; that is what we earnestly desire our family conversation to be." (Ecclesiam Suam n.113)

One of the last documents of the Second Vatican Council - The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (November 1965) - indicates in one brief paragraph just how deeply this desire for dialogue and conversation was operating within the Council: "For the cultivation of good human relations, truly human values must be fostered, especially the art of living fraternally with others, cooperating with them, and initiating conversation with them." (n.29)

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Form a small group to reflect on the contents of this and other Catalyst Suggestion Sheets.

In reference #1 above, Pope Paul VI offers a description of "dialogue". What do you think he means?

In what sense can we say dialogue or conversation is "Trinitarian"?

What can it mean to say that human beings are relational by nature?

What are the biggest obstacles to good conversation?

What assists good conversation?

What might Pope Paul mean by "offensive and time-worn polemic and emptiness of useless conversation"? (#3 above)

Does conversation play a significant part in your life? Why?

What does it mean to listen to another's "heart"? (#4 above)

What are the implications for you of the thoughts expressing reference #6 above?

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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #6

### AUTHENTIC RELIGION

## REALTIONSHPIS - THE HEART OF TRUE RELIGION

Authentic religion is first and foremost a matter of relationships - with God (however we might name God), self, other people and the physical world. Authentic religion involves an ongoing, never ending struggle and search to know and foster those relationships. Growth emerges slowly through facilitation rather than mastery, it is gift rather than conquest, a grace of the Spirit rather than a triumph of the ego. And is this anything other than authentic humanity?

At the heart of this whole process is self-transcendence. We experience the truth that lies at the heart of the human story: we must die in order to live, that we find ourselves by losing ourselves, that the centre of our existence - our true selves, our identity in other words - is found in God. Relationships are stifled by egoisms of one kind or other - self-absorption, selfishness, meanness, greed, narcissism, pride and so on. On the other hand, relationships - at least life-giving relationships - are fostered by moving beyond our tiny ego worlds, by dying to ourselves in daily acts of self-transcendence - mindfulness of others, self-forgetfulness, generosity, compassion, listening, patience, magnanimity, humility and so on. The goal of authentic religion is participation or communion in a Great Mystery, not control of a little material world.

## VISION - BORN OF RELATIONSHIPS AND NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

A certain vision is born of this process of fostering relationships. We can also say that the process is born of the vision, for we would not pursue the relationships without some sort of vision, at least implicitly there. Relationships and vision are inseparable, each demanding the other. Without the focus of relationships, there would be no vision. Without the vision, the relationships would become deformed and deforming. Even as we generously give ourselves to fostering and living the relationships, we must constantly return to the vision that gives the purpose and meaning to that endeavour. The vision will have specific facets - mystical, moral, theological, legal and organisational.

## DETAILS - THE NECESSARY ARTICULATION OF THE VISION IN SERVICE OF RELATIONSHIPS

All of us who desire to be committed to an authentic religious project, must do our best, according to our possibilities and limits, to articulate the details of the vision by which we live. It is, however, the special task of certain people to articulate in detail what this vision entails. We need good scholarship. Thus we have moral philosophers, ethicists and moral theologians, systematic theologians and scripture scholars, canonists and organisational experts. The work of these people must always be grounded in, foster and point back to relationships. Apart from that, their work has no value. One of the critical roles of the Church in every age is to keep the scholars faithful to this task.

## CONSEQUENCES ARISING

In a healthy religious project there is constant and free flow of thought and attention between relationships, vision and detail. The less self-conscious this free flow of thought and attention is the better. Increasingly we become one with the One, with ourselves, others and our world.

Human beings being human, there is always the tendency to focus on the details as ends in themselves. Unlike relationships, they are more or less concrete, immediate, controllable, measurable, no where near as messy and so on. But when the details lose their relative position as servants of the vision and the relationships that give rise to the vision, they become, at best, more or less irrelevant ideologies. At worst those detached details become destructive systems that oppress people. Thus, religion may be reduced to moralism, dogmatism, legalism and institutionalism. Religion, in this sense, may

stand between us and God. Representatives of this kind of religion tend to become ideologues rather than witnesses to liberating and lifegiving relationships. Under such circumstances, preaching tends to be reduced to propaganda, scholarship to polemics, spirituality to pietisms, worship to ritualism and tradition to mere repetition. This is fertile ground for bigotry, sectarianism and prejudice in its many forms. The work of renewal is always primarily about the recovery of relationships - with God, self, others and creation. This work of renewal is about loving others into freedom as we have been loved into freedom. And the work of renewal never ends

#### FOR REFLECTION

1. "We must avoid like the plague that selective egotism that begins by censoring the world, goes on to miss out half the Bible, and finally, and predictably, takes flight and scandal when, in the end, it has to meet an uncensored God. It will certainly be best, if we are going to come into relationship with the God who is, not to think that we can know in advance what he will be like. There will be something very wrong both with the theology and the theologian, that does not approach the mystery of God through a deep reverence for the mystery of what he has made. It can never be too often said that one of the first traps set before the person who desires to pray or to study the theology of prayer is to set it in a world apart. The person of prayer cannot be a person of two minds. If our attitude towards the least of the creatures is wrong, so will our attitude to God be wrong. We might remember that, in the right hands, a little of the common earth, upon which people walk without reflection, can open the eyes of the blind." (Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, Paulist Press, 1976, 9)

3. "In the mystery of the human person God guards his own mystery. To this sense that God is utterly beyond our conceiving, the doctrine of the Fathers is faithful, as the word of scripture requires. Like Job, we may enter into relationship with God through his intervention in history, but then it is God the incomprehensible we meet, God the breaker of the heart's idols and the confounder of edifying talk. He is what he is." (Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, Paulist Press, 1976, 21)

4. "The biblical picture of the human person at creation is of a being whose basic call is to relationship, relationships first and foremost with God and with others, and then relationship to the universe at large through understanding and care. We are, as it were, born for openness, for that shared life which is the mark of those who are capable of knowledge and love. Only the orthodox doctrine of the Fall clearly asserts how intimately every other relationship, inner and outer, is bound up with the maintenance of the living relationship with God which, mysterious though it be, is an ineradicable need of our nature." (Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, Paulist Press, 1976, 37)

5. "While they were at dinner in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does you master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. God and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous but sinners.'" (Mt 9:10-13; also Mk 2:15-17 and Lk 5:29-32)

6. "One of the scribes who had listened to them debating and observed how well Jesus had answered them, now came up and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the



commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master, what you have said is true: that there is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dare to question him anymore." (Mk 12:28-34; also Mt 22:34-40 and Lk 10:25-28)

7. "He couldn't see her in the darkness, but there were plenty of faces he could remember from the old days which fitted the voice. When you visualized a man or woman carefully, you could always begin to feel pity - that was a quality God's image carried with it. When you saw the lines at the corners of the eyes, the shape of the mouth, how the hair grew, it was impossible to hate. Hate was just a failure of imagination." (Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, Penguin Books, 1971, 131)

8. "In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 46)

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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#### RELATIONSHIPS

between  
God  
Self  
Others  
Creation

#### VISION

Mystical  
Moral  
Theological  
Legal  
Organisational

#### DETAILS

Spirituality  
Moral Philos/Theol  
Systematic Theology  
Canon Law  
Institutional Reality

## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #7

### CHANGE AND GROWTH

CHANGE WILL HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY, GROWTH IS THE RESULT OF HARD WORK

The world - our lives included - is dynamic; change is part of the nature of things; as Frank McCourt says in Chapter 1 of *Angela's Ashes*: "... 'Tis"; Whether or not change is also good, will depend on us; life is not what happens to us but what we do with what happens to us; we do not have the pig's advantage - we must think and choose, and the shape of our lives ultimately depends on that thinking and choosing; John Henry Newman's observation must be understood in the light of the foregoing: "To grow is to change. To grow much is to have changed much;" Human beings need a sense of continuity and purpose amidst the change; constant change can be very destructive if people do not have some sense of being grounded beyond the change and some sense of meaning in the change.

CHANGE TODAY IS MASSIVE, PROFOUND AND RAPID

Our time is probably unique in the history of humankind; we do not know how long this era will last; perhaps we are just in the beginnings of the end of an era, a period of deconstruction rather than reconstruction; probably we will not live to see the reinstatement of a stable and predictable world such as the one we knew in the **fifties**; that is neither good nor bad - "'Tis"; how we respond is the critical issue; Change is happening throughout the human family; we may find it useful to think of concentric circles of change with ourselves at the centre of those concentric circles: the outer circle of change **might** be the whole human family, the next circle Western culture, the next circle the Church, the next circle Australian society, the next circle the Church in Australia, the next circle our neighbourhood, the next circle our workplace, the next circle our family and so on; within each of those circles we can name specific processes of change - eg consider:

- the human family took tens of thousands of years to reach 1 billion people on earth in 1805, 155 years to treble that to 3 billion in 1960, and less than 40 years to double that to almost 6 billion in 1998;
- the advent of huge advances in communications and travel;
- development of multi-national corporations, economic rationalism and their effects on the availability of work, types of work, work practices, career expectations and so on;
- advances in medical technology, genetic engineering and the like;
- the advent of highly sophisticated weapons of mass destruction, from assault rifles to nuclear bombs;
- changes in the ways people think of themselves and the world, their sense of right and wrong, good and evil, their attitudes, felt needs and expectations, and the effects these have on the family, education, health care and relationships generally within the community;
- the emergence of a strong sense of the rights of the individual, minority groups, cultural and national identities;
- the damage we have already done to the environment and the connection between high material standards of living, such as we experience generally in the Western world, and pollution;

Understanding of these concentric circles and the dynamics of change within each circle, may help us gain perspective, keeping an eye to the big picture, relating what happens in the smaller circle of our lives to what is happening in the wider circles of the world in which we find ourselves; it will help us gain and maintain a sense for what does and does not matter in the end.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

Our responses must be communal and multi-layered; not everyone will bring the same gifts and insights - we need each other and need to work together; our communal responses must be global and local, practical and theoretical, short term and long term, but above all person-centred; we must think deliberately about what it is to be human. The following are some suggestions from the field of spirituality as to how we might

respond:

- Firstly, our response to what is happening, will be governed pretty much by our inner worlds; we have an extremely rich tradition of spirituality within the Church upon which we can draw to deepen this inner world;
- Expect change to take something out of you, demand something from you; it entails a sort of dying;
- Foster a transcendent self-presence: always think of yourself and life in the context of the Transcendent, always within the ambience of the Loving One who has professed "I am with you!"; always think of yourself as connected!; this will give you perspective and a deepening sense of what does and does not matter in the end;
- As a complement to transcendent self-presence, foster opportunity thinking: regard your circumstances as promise not threat, consider your limits as opportunities to grow; be alert, hear and heed what life is saying;
- Remember those worse off than you, reach out to them; by all means look after yourself but never forget that part of being yourself is a certain self-forge-ness and generosity to others; this is part of being connected!;
- Remember, we are a pilgrim people; we have not here a lasting city; our consciousness is defined by the Kingdom of God; we turn to the great metaphor of the Exodus for understanding and light in the movement of our lives; we see ourselves and our worlds in the context of the God of the Covenant;
- Deliberately work to build a life centred on God, the Still Point, that Source of all Reality, the Loving Creator of this changing and finite world - through involvement in community worship, parish life, personal prayer;
- An exercise: do reflectively something you would normally do pre-reflectively;
- A book: get and study Eugene Gendlin's *Focusing*, Bantam Books, 1983;
- A project: join up with like-minded people and have conversations about things that matter; eg use these Suggestion Sheets.

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TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

1. "Teaching the need to be free and unfettered, (Chuang Tzu) realised that the only freedom worth having is the freedom which results from perfect harmony with that power or principle which lies at the heart of all that is and which he called TAO." (D. Howard Smith, *The Wisdom of the Taoists*, New Directions, 1980, 9)

2. "What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life - daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and in right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual." (Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning*, Touchstone Book, 1962, 76)

3. "It is precisely when people cannot fall apart and recover, that they enter a condition in which most of their energy is spent holding themselves together in one piece, while a crippling spiritual and emotional corrosion goes on underneath." (Fredric F. Flach, *Choices: Coping Creatively With Personal Change*, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1977, 47)

4. "Because our lives and memories are so short we think that what has been going on for the past ten to fifteen years is the way it has got to be." (David Suzuki cited in Phil Noyce, "Lessons From A Japanese Canadian", *In the Future*, 4 (Feb/Mar, 1989), 9)

5. "Whether I am a child or an adult, a simple person or a hero, a prisoner or a free citizen, I am always a potentiality for transcendence in many ways. If I were to freeze myself into one mold by repression of the aspiration to transcend what I currently am I would die to authentic living. The most sordid crime against our humanity is to destroy what we basically are: transcendent selves." (Adrian van Kaam, *The Transcendent Self* Dimension Books, 1979, 167f.)

6. "God and humanity are like ~ lovers who have missed their rendezvous. Each is there before the time, but each at a different place, and they wait, and wait, and wait. He stands motionless, nailed to the spot for the whole of time. She is distraught and

impatient. But alas for her if she gets tired and goes away. .... Ale eueffixion of Christ is the image of the fixity of God. God is attention without distraction. One must imitate the patience and humility of God." (Simone Weil, "Me Things of the World" in G. A. Panichas (ed.) *The Simone Weil Reader*, David McKay Company Inc., 1977, 424f.)

7. "In 1961, and certainly all through the 1950's there was, to be sure, a certain malaise in American Protestantism. It was limited to relatively small circles within the churches. .... The situation could not be more different today. Mainhne Protestantism is marked by a widespread demoralisation that has been called a general failure of nerve. Its expressions range from masochistic self-laceration to hysterical defensiveness. .... ne Catholics, who back in 1961, still seemed to be sitting pretty on the rock of Peter, are now looking for plausible lifeboats with the rest of us. .... Christians, like other men are creatures of habit. .... I ~ that many in our churches today can be described as being in search of a culture with which to identify." (Peter Berger, *Facing Up To Modernity*, Penguin, 1979, 227f.)

8. "The fact that the Church exists and lives within a true history also means that she cannot free herself from **time**, from its burdens and its dullness, and from the delays that it imposes. It is not in spite of time and its unfolding, but in them that the Church carries the gifts of God and puts them into practice. History and the action of people in time, and through the means usually employed by them, are not, for the work that God pursues in and through the Church, an extrinsic element, or even a hostile one, which should be reduced as much as possible, forgotten or oven eliminated; nor is it an external framework within which a non-terrestrial scenario wdl develop. It is rather that in which and through which a divine enterprise is realised." (Yves Congar, *nis Church that I Love*, Dimension Books, 1969, 89-90)

9. "Yes, but where is God in the silence and darkness, in the laboured beatings of the heart? Where is the idea of God in this uttenmost emptiness? Perhaps after all the ultimate truth is not light and goodness but darkness and horror? Surely this terrible happening, this extreme anguish of the poor naked hiunan spirit is proof that there is no God at all or that if there is he is without care of me? 'All thy billows and thy waves have passed over me .... The water compassed me about even to the soul ... the bars of the earth have shut me up for *eeve*. So spoke Jonas, and Job too under the silent heavens. It is indeed a note that is struck again and again in the Old Testament. But always the Lord comes to save, and is as it were thus, by this extremity, defused in the fullness of his saviourhood. Jesus comes as the one who saves, the God who saves. Yet he is also Jonas and he enters into the darkness of Gethsemane and the darkness of the tomb." (Noel Demiot O'Donoghue, *Heaven in Ordinarie*, Templegate, 1979, 74)

10. "**Ciod**, ... who abides forever, for whose presence no one has to wait, whose absence no one has to fear, for the very reason that God truly *is*, is ever present." (St Augustine, *On Order*, 11, ii, 6)

1 1. "We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit. " (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), n.75).

12. "BestillandknowthatlamGod..."(Ps.46:10)

### SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What has been your personal experience of change in recent times?
2. Describe what you see as one of the most significant changes in the *world* in your life time. How has it alleded you?
3. Describe what you see as one of the most significant changes in the *Church* in your life time. How has it affected you?
4. How do you find stability and peace in your life?
5. Do you ever feel tempted to withdraw? What is that like?
6. What gives you hope?
7. What do you think Pope Paul VI meant when he said "we live in a privileged moment of the Spirit"? (ef #10 above)
8. What does a time of transition ask of us that a time of greater stability may not?
9. What do you think O'Donoghue means when he asks: "Where is God in the silence and the darkness"? (ef #8 above)
10. What is Congar saying about "time" and "the Church"? (cf #7 above - especially the last line)

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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #8

### GOOD AND BAD WORDS

Consider your experience when:

- You are given a complimentary or encouraging word;
- You overhear someone mention the word that is your name in a caring way;
- You read a good story;
- You hear a good speaker;
- You have an evening of lively conversation with friends.

All of these are everyday intimations of a world beyond the superficial, of the Real beyond the real. Such experiences appeal to and reveal something deep within us as human beings, they evoke a dimension of life that remains unknown to us until the word is spoken. We experience this as something good and life-giving. Such words invite us into deeper relationship, to seek more conversation. We recognise something good and right about this.

Compare the above with the following:

- A derogatory word about you gets back to you;
- You hear a speaker who is articulate and clever but not thoughtful and wise;
- Someone loses his temper and aims foul or abusive language at you personally;
- An individual uses a forum of conversation for self-promotion or to express or vent unacknowledged conflicts.

In these instances the words reveal the darker side of the human condition. Such words do not invite us into relationship or to further the conversation, except perhaps to seek redress. However, it is potentially life-giving to face what is so revealed, acknowledge it and work through it. These words, unpleasant as they might be, have exposed things that must be dealt with.

Good words are a matter of self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness, not self-indulgence or self-focus. In good words something beyond ego is highlighted; we seek the Real, we wait upon the moment listening for Truth to break in. Words, at their best, are sacramental, they point. They can take us into wonderful depths of healing and riches of life-giving experience.

Absolutely fundamental to the pursuit of good words - and particularly good conversation - is an effective pursuit of self-knowledge. If I bring unresolved conflicts or chronic anger or unacknowledged anxieties and fears to my words, they will form "hidden agendas". If these unnamed and unattended dynamics are awakened - as they frequently will be - they will tend to confuse and misdirect the words. Good words demand at least a measure of objectivity and inner freedom. If this measure is present, along with good will, the words can become a source of growing self-knowledge as I accompany myself in that experience. Eugene Gendlin's little paperback *Focusing* (Bantam, 1983 - about \$10) is highly recommended.

Spirituality in the Pub has been developed as a forum for good conversation. The intention is that adults come together and share words about things that matter. The forum, if it is to be genuinely good conversation, requires that the participants are willing to be honest with themselves, coming along with a sincere desire to change, believing that the Holy Spirit can use the forum to everyone's benefit. Some simple, basic dispositions are required - a willingness to listen, to be patient, to respect others and to refrain from using the forum for ulterior intentions, such as venting my anger or promoting myself.

It can happen that a guest speaker at Spirituality in the Pub might have an unnamed and unattended "agenda", that he or she is in fact incapable, at this time, of engaging in good conversation. Such a speaker might use emotionally-laden language, speak half-truths, quote texts (eg the Bible, Church documents or writers from the tradition) out of context. Or they might turn out to be bad public speakers or egotistical or just have nothing to say that is worth listening to. So some conversations, set up with the best intentions, might fail. That is life. However, we should think very carefully about such public forums and choose speakers who are willing and able to promote good conversation - as distinct from polemics or argument or debate or taking cheap shots at people or institutions or promoting their own egos.

There is an old Irish invocation that points to something of the spirit in which we might choose our words:

These things are of God:  
The merciful word,  
The singing word, and  
The good word.  
May the power of these  
Three holy things be on all  
The men and women of Erin  
For evermore.

#### **TEXTS FOR REFLECTION**

1. "The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living" (Abraham Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy Of Religion*, Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951, 37).
2. "The teaching of our society is that more knowledge means more power, more civilization - more comfort. We should have insisted in the spirit of the prophetic vision that more knowledge should also mean more reverence, that more civilization should also mean less violence. .... Knowing is not due to coming upon something, naming and explaining it. Knowing is due to something forcing itself upon us. Thought is a response to being rather than an invention. The world does not lie prostrate, waiting to be given order and coherence by the human mind. Things are evocative. When conceits are silent and all words stand still, the world speaks. We must burn the cliches to clear the air for hearing. Conceptual cliches are counterfeit; preconceived notions are misfits. Knowledge involves love, care for the things we seek to know, longing, being-drawn-to, being overwhelmed." (Abraham Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, Stanford University Press, 1965, 100 & 109)

3. "Yet another reason for reticence in matters religious has to do with the infirmity of language itself. Language is a living organism and, as such, is subject to certain organic ailments. In this case it is the exhaustion and decrepitude of words themselves, an infirmity that has nothing to do with the truth or falsity of the sentences they form. The words of religion tend to wear out and get stored in the attic. The word 'religion' itself has a certain unction about it, to say nothing of 'born again', 'salvation', 'Jesus', even though it is begging the question to assume therefore that these words do not have valid referents. And it doesn't help that when religious words are used publicly, at least Christian words, they are often expropriated by some of the worst rogues around, the TV preachers. So decrepit and so abused is the language of the Judeo-Christian religions that it takes an effort to salvage them, the very words, from the husks and barnacles of meaning which have encrusted them over the centuries. Or else words can become slick as coins worn thin by usage and so devalued. One of the tasks of the saint is to renew language, to sing a new song." (Walker Percy, "Why Are You A Catholic?" in Patrick Samway, ed., *Walker Percy: Singposts in a Strange Land*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991, 306).

4. "Plato's concern (about sophistry) points toward something else, and he insists on it, and he challenges us with it, even challenging himself and his own profound sensitivity for linguistic form: the possibility that something could well be superbly crafted - that it could be perfectly worded; brilliantly formulated; strikingly written, performed, staged, or put on screen - and at the same time, in its entire thrust and essence, be false; and not only false, but outright bad, inferior, contemptible, shameful, destructive, wretched - and still marvellously put together!" (Joseph Pieper, *Abuse of Language, Abuse of Power*, Ignatius Press, 1988, 18-19).

5. "The endless cycle of idea and action,/ Endless invention, endless experiment,/ Brings knowledge of motion but not stillness;/ Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;/ Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word". (T S Eliot, *The Rock*)

6. "Modern people listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. ... We are well aware that modern people are sated by talk; they are obviously often tired of listening and, what is worse, impervious to words. We are also aware that many psychologists and sociologists express the view that modern people have passed beyond the civilisation of the word, which is now ineffective and useless, and that today they live in the civilisation of the image. ... The fatigue produced these days by so much empty talk and the relevance of many other forms of communication must however not diminish the permanent power of the word, or cause a loss of confidence in it. The word remains ever relevant, especially when it is the bearer of the power of God (cf 1Cor 2:1-5)." (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41-42)

7. "Communication is more than the expression of ideas and the indication of emotion. At its most profound level it is the giving of self in love." (The Pastoral Instruction, *Communio et Progressio* (1971) 11)

8. "It was named Babel therefore, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:9)

9. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God remains forever." (Is.

40:8)

10. "All you need say is 'Yes' if you mean yes, 'No' if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one." (Mt 5:37)

### SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Reflect on your experiences of the different uses of words as indicated at the beginning of this reflection.
2. What do you think it means to say "good words are a matter of self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness"?
3. Have you ever experienced this "self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness" in conversation? What was it like?
4. What do you think it means to say "good words are ... not a matter of self-indulgence or self-focus"?
5. Have you ever experienced this "self-indulgence or self-focus" in conversation? What was it like?
6. How might self-knowledge be connected with good conversation?
7. What might Walker Percy mean when he says "one of the tasks of the saint is to renew language"? (cf #3 above)
8. What might the connection be between silence and good words? (cf #5 above)
9. Reflect on the comment by Pope Paul VI. (cf #6 above)
10. Reflect on the comment from the Pastoral Instruction. (cf #7 above)

### **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #9**

#### HIGH AND LOW CONTEXT

#### **FINDING MEANING IN OUR WORLDS**

One of the most striking things about human beings is the way we try to find and/or create meaning in our worlds. The very act of *naming*, for example, is a way of giving meaning and order. Thus, paradoxically, the diagnosis that "life is absurd" is an attempt to impose some meaning by naming it "absurd". And so we develop customs, rituals, symbols, myths, a whole web of meaning-evoking, meaning-giving and meaning-maintaining structures. Without these structures life would be unbearable. Imagine, for example, what it would be like if you could find no meaning whatsoever in your relationships or work.

At their best, such structures are experienced as *relative* and *facilitative* instruments of our encounters with the Ultimate - the Real, the Good, the True, the One, the Great Mystery. They also facilitate life-giving encounters with other people and enable us to deal creatively with the events and things that are part and parcel of daily living. Too often, however, those structures become *ends in themselves* and we treat them as if *they* were the Ultimate. In this way they can obstruct rather than facilitate life-giving encounters with other people, events and things. The relative is absolutised and the means can subvert the ends.



## WE LIVE WITHIN A CERTAIN CONTEXT

Those structures and, more particularly, the meanings they bear and/or evoke, provide a *context* for our lives. Thus, in Australia if we are introduced to someone, it is our custom to extend the right hand in a ritual grasping of the other's right hand. We call it a "handshake" (appropriately enough!). This is a little ritual that eases the way in our social interactions. Its origin seems to be in the intention to show the other that we carry no weapon. Other societies have different rituals to achieve the same end - eg, rubbing noses. None of us can claim that *our* ritual is the *right* ritual.

These things are for the most part more or less arbitrary, *necessary fictions* if you like, or, as Ernest Becker says, "vital lies". (You will see just how "vital" if you, for example, mess around with a handshake.) Other fictions and "vital lies" that help make up the *context* of our lives include money, religious rituals, table manners, dress codes, implicit and explicit rules of the road, ways of addressing certain people, our national flag, celebrating birthdays with a cake and candles, and so on.

Some societies are *high context* and others are *low context*. In a *high context* society, much is taken for granted, many structures are universally accepted by the group. In a *low context* society much less is taken for granted, fewer structures are universally accepted by the group. Typically, for example, Asian societies are more or less *high context*. A huge amount is taken for granted. The Catholic Church used to be, throughout the world, a *high context* society and its liturgy, in particular, was pre-eminently a place of *high context*.

Typically, societies in the so-called New World - such as in Australia - are more or less *low context*. Relatively little is taken for granted. For example, in Australia we have nothing like the immensely complex and sophisticated patterns of custom and ritual that you will find in Japan. The Catholic Church, while it remains *high context* in some parts of the world, has, for the most part, moved significantly towards being a *low context* society. This is particularly evident in the liturgy.

## THE GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD NEWS

Neither *high* nor *low context* is simply good or bad. There is *both* good and bad news in *both* of them. Like life itself, the main issue is how we respond to the context within which we find ourselves. The good news of *high context* is that:

- it saves us making many trivial decisions;
- it therefore releases a lot of energy, time and talent for the main tasks;
- communication tends to be efficient because the *context* already says much;
- roles tend to be clear;
- group projects and team efforts tend to be practicable and effective;
- it tends to promote a shared and coherent moral vision.
- power and authority are backed by the institutional structures and the traditions, and this can facilitate efficient decision-making and institutional focus.

The bad news of *high context* is that:

- it does not allow us to make a lot of those decisions that involve originality and foster a sense of individuality;

- the group dominates the individual, systems and institutions tend to be maintained at the expense of individuals;
- a lot of immoral, destructive and incompetent behaviour can be hidden by uncritical acceptance of “the system”;
- the creative talent of individuals can be lost to the group because excessive attention is paid to maintaining “the tradition”;
- serious change is extremely difficult to promote.

The good news of *low context* is that

- it allows for great flexibility, adaptability and originality;
- it can thus release an enormous amount of creative energy and initiative;
- change is much more easily promoted;
- the opportunities for the individual to develop and express his or her individuality can be significantly enhanced.

The bad news of *low context* is that

- it tends towards individualism at the expense of the group;
- it takes significantly more energy to go on living in it because we are constantly inventing life, as it were. Enormous amounts of time, talent and energy go into creating structures and making decisions that are taken for granted in *high context* situations;
- communication tends to be inefficient and even problematic because the shared world of meaning has diminished, the *context* says little that is clear;
- roles can become easily confused;
- it tends to resist a shared and coherent moral vision;
- it can leave many feeling impotent and anxious, without a clear sense of purpose or role;
- it is fertile ground for fundamentalisms and authoritarian solutions of one kind or another, efforts to rein life in and “restore order” by artificially and wilfully imposing *high context* (eg Adolf Hitler);
- power and authority depend largely on the credibility of the person, the systems and organisational structures having diminished credibility; this tends to place people and relationships under extra pressure;
- it can at times paralyse decision-making processes because every individual expects to be part of the process and expects the outcome to embody his or her point of view.

## TEXTS FOR REFLECTION

1. "Let me read with open eyes the book my days are writing -- and learn." (Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, Trans. Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, 131)

2. Truly religious people, however, have learned how to live with this uncertainty in the light of their faith that everything - even darkness - has a divine meaning, a holy purpose, a mysterious design. Therefore, the first premise in the art of living is to be able to live with one's problems, not to see them as problems to be solved, but as mysteries to be lived. As long as we are anxious, agitated, perturbed about our problems, we prove that we have not yet learned the fundamentals of the art of religious living." (Adrian van Kaam, *Religion and Personality*, 1964, 14)

3. "My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I

cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I do not do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." (Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, Farrar Straus and Cudahy, 1958, 83)

4.. "'The shell must be cracked apart if what is in it is to come out; for if you want the kernel you must break the shell.' And therefore, if you want to discover nature's nakedness, you must destroy its symbols and the farther you get in, the nearer you come to its essence. When you come to the One that gathers all things up into himself, there you must stay." (Meister Eckhart in R. Blakeney, *Meister Eckhart*, Harper Torchbooks, 1949, 148)

5. In the time of St Paul, the Christian community in Corinth would have been very *low context*. This is the advice he gave them: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Cor 13:4ff)

### SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Name some of the structures - symbols, rituals, myths - that give meaning to your life.
2. Reflect on an experience of significant change in your life, noting the differences it made to your daily experience.
3. Describe in your own words a *high context* situation you have experienced. Reflect on advantages and disadvantages.
4. Describe in your own words a *low context* situation you have experienced. Reflect on advantages and disadvantages.
5. What happens in celebration of the liturgy in a *low context*? What is it like?
6. What could it mean to say the Church has moved from *high context* towards *low context*? Reflect on the implications.
7. What do you think Merton is saying in his prayer? (cf #2 above)
8. What might be the special import of St Paul's instruction on love for us today? (cf #4 above)
9. In what sense might a *low context* situation be more helpful in assisting us to find our true identity?
10. Is it possible that a *high context* might lead the Church to forget its true identity? Why? Why not?

### **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #10**

#### WAYS OF RELATING

How we choose to relate constitutes the heart of living. That is the essence of spirituality. Broadly speaking, there are three different ways or modes by which we can

relate with people, events and things: the **Conversation Mode**, the **Mastery Mode** and the **Victim Mode**.

## **THE CONVERSATION MODE**

In this mode we are *with* the world, not *at* it or *overcome by* it. The dispositions that are more typical of this mode include willingness, eagerness to listen, to respect, to wait upon, to trust, to care and a manner marked by freedom and graciousness. The Conversation Mode is Mystery-centred rather than ego-centred.

The Conversation Mode says to live is to participate, to know oneself to be part of a great mystery, to live life as a mysterious giving and receiving process. Life is always seen as mutual, even though the mutuality may not be actually experienced in this or that moment. Life is seen as a constant, gracious unfolding, a pilgrimage centred in the Mystery.

The Conversation Mode depends on a decision for abandonment to the Mystery. Living becomes increasingly a free cooperation with grace in community. Human relatedness is more important than any law, credal formula or organisational structure. To be is always *to be-with*.

To live is to affirm Being - in all its manifestations - over non-being, to affirm self-transcendence over ego-centricity, to submit to the demands of Being in every ordinary moment. The courage to be in this way is sorely tested when "the other" does not respond and take up the conversation. Especially when that "other" is God. The "silence of God" is one of the most tormenting of all human experiences. It takes great courage and faith to remain in the conversation alone, facing the silence, the void.

## **THE MASTERY MODE**

In this mode we are *at* the world, not *with* it and trying not to be *overcome by* it. The dispositions that are more typical of this mode include wilfulness, aggression (often as *passive-aggression* or at least controlled aggression), anger, impatience, dogmatism, authoritarianism and a manner marked by driveness and a clear desire to be in control. The Mastery Mode is ego-centred rather than Mystery-centred, even when it purports to be religious.

The Mastery Mode says to live is to take control. Life is typically seen as an either/or situation where you are *either* a "master" *or* a "victim". Thus life is made up of "winners" and "losers". You are on your own when it comes down to it. If there is a Mystery it cannot be trusted, except to reward the "winners". Grace - if there be such - is that which enables you to gain mastery. The only alternative to wilful control is will-less submission.

Anxiety about the human condition - which anxiety, by its nature, is nebulous and uncontrollable - must be transformed into fear about concrete obstacles and threats which can then be overcome by sufficient courage and effort. And life, then, is all about overcoming rather than being overcome.

This Mastery Mode disguises anxiety about being a victim and may slip into Victim

Mode when courage and/or effort falter or fail. Failure can bring on deep despondency and/or depression. The anger failure evokes in the master - whether it is failure of the master or another - is a measure of the anxiety by which he/she is haunted. And the anxiety is about non-being, non-existence, losing one's place in the world.

Our culture tends to favour the Mastery Mode. It is probably fair to say that much of the impetus of religious training in recent generations has been towards the Mastery Mode also. "Conquering faults" and "mastering virtues" were heavily stressed. This tended to lead to a will-power Christianity that lacks both grace and freedom. It also tended to promote "grocery list confessions", false guilt and scruples.

## THE VICTIM MODE

In this mode we are *overcome* by the world, not able to be either *at* it or *with* it. The dispositions that are more typical of this mode include will-lessness, eagerness to please, lack of confidence, withdrawal, sadness and a manner marked by accommodation and a willingness to settle for much less than one ought. The Victim Mode is also ego-centred rather than Mystery-centred, but the ego is too weak.

The Victim Mode says life is not "promise" but "threat". Life is typically seen as disappointment, failure, loss. Life is made up of "winners" and "losers" and - in this instance at least - I am "the loser". The Mystery might "exist" but the Mystery is not "with us" or we see that Mystery simply as "rescuer".

In the Victim Mode we might find ourselves demanding that "they" should do something about it. Chronic gamblers approach life as victims. Fundamentalisms and authoritarian systems attract those who live in the Victim Mode, and they have a vested interest in keeping those people in the Victim Mode.

## CONCLUSION

The key in each way of relating is **internal** rather than external, a set of **dispositions** and **attitudes** rather than the external circumstances. For example, I may in fact be a victim but maintain a Conversation Mode (eg Nelson Mandela), or people might maintain a Conversation Mode with me, but I might choose to take on a Victim Mode or a Mastery Mode.

Individuals may live, more or less, in one or other of these modes. It is probably impossible to live exclusively in one mode. Ideally, we should foster a Conversation Mode and gently, humbly and constantly re-affirm our commitment to that, even in the face of repeated regression to either a Mastery Mode or a Victim Mode. It is hard to see how either the Mastery Mode or the Victim Mode can be accepted as authentic expressions of the Gospel spirit. The whole thrust of divine revelation, especially in and through the Covenant, is to reveal a God of conversation rather than a God who wants to be or create masters and victims. The central thrust of God's action towards freedom would be vitiated by the latter.

And sometimes all is not what it might seem to be. For example, under the pretence of a Conversation Mode I may in fact be attempting mastery. This is common enough in some of the approaches to "better communications" today, especially where something is to be sold or a contract signed. It may also be fair to assume that lurking under every

Mastery Mode is someone who feels himself/herself to be potentially or actually a victim. Some people may use a Victim Mode to gain mastery.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. In your own words describe briefly, with examples, each of the three modes outlined.
2. Have you ever experienced yourself in one or more of these modes? What was it like?
3. How do you react when you encounter another person in the Mastery Mode? Give an example.
4. Reflect on Jesus' way of relating. How would you describe that in your own words?
5. What obstacles do you find in yourself to the Conversation Mode?
6. Under what circumstances might you feel inclined to move into either the Mastery or Victim Modes?
7. What relevance is there for the environment in this?
8. Is it possible to survive in the business world in any other way than the Mastery Mode?
9. Is it true to say that religious training might foster the Mastery Mode? What is your experience?
10. Can you suggest ways by which you might foster the Conversation Mode in yourself and others?

## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #12**

### THE AUTHENTIC TRADITION

The authentic Tradition is nothing less than the Good News alive in generation after generation. Believers in each generation are captured by the mystery (cf Phil 3:13) and live out that liberating encounter more or less well, more or less badly. Each generation stands on the shoulders of the previous generation. Even as a generation of believers does that, the people of that generation must engage in a conversation with both the Good News and the circumstances of life in which they find themselves.

### **THE ROOTS OF THE WORD "TRADITION"**

The English word *tradition* comes from the Latin word *tradere* meaning *to hand over* or *to give up* or *to surrender*. It shares its roots with English words carrying a generally positive connotation (such as *trade*) and words carrying a generally negative connotation (such as *betray*). In its most authentic use, our English word *tradition* has a **positive** and **dynamic** sense to it. It suggests a twofold paradox:

- Firstly, we keep a spiritual reality alive by passing it on, handing it over in trust;
- Secondly, we keep the authentic Tradition alive by adaptation and change.

We must never confuse *tradition* with *repetition*. The latter wants to hang on to something (in anxiety & fear generally) rather than hand over something (in trust). Reduced to mere repetition, authentic Tradition will die. Similarly it will surely die if its participants cannot or will not continue the handing over process - for whatever reason.

## THE SOURCE OF THE TRADITION

The authentic Christian Tradition, like all the great religious traditions, begins with *event*. The English word *event* comes from the Latin words *e* meaning *out* and *venire* meaning *to come*. In the strict sense of the word *event* means *a coming out or revealing*.

The Real comes forth, is revealed in some particular way. The Christian Event in which our Tradition is grounded is **the Passover of Jesus Christ (the Paschal Mystery)**, the Great New Exodus Event for the entire cosmos, foreshadowed by the Old Exodus Event in which the liberating Covenant of love was first forged with the people.

Jesus Christ passed through death to life. Baptised in Christ, we too pass through death to life. In essence this is the Christian story, the Good News, the source and heart of the Tradition.

## THE BEARERS OF THE TRADITION

The Christian Tradition is **a living tradition because people live it**. In their beings they remember, in their bones they bear the Tradition, they know the Christ of the Passover. This is something quite distinct from knowing theology. It is a lived and living reality for them. They see themselves, other people and the world, through the eyes of Christ. It imbues all that they do, more or less, implicitly or explicitly, unconsciously or consciously. Through custom, symbol, ritual, worship, iconography, pilgrimage, reading, thinking, working, conversing, etc. they both express and foster their appreciation for and involvement in the Tradition, and thus the Paschal Mystery. Where this does not happen - or to the extent that this does not happen - the Tradition quite simply dies.

## TWO FACETS OF THE TRADITION

In any tradition we can speak of **Faith Tradition** and **Form Tradition**. Each of these facets of a tradition is relative to and servant of the primary event that is the source of that tradition. In the Christian Tradition, for example, the Paschal Mystery is the primary event, the source, and every aspect of both the Faith Tradition and the Form Tradition relate us to that Mystery. Both the Faith Tradition and the Form Tradition facilitate the handing on and the keeping alive of the reality of that source event. The Faith Tradition, for example, will endeavour to do this by trying to articulate an understanding of what happened in the Paschal Mystery, and it will try to explain it in terms of the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves and give us the words by which we can then express our belief. The Form Tradition, for example, will endeavour to do this by developing concrete forms that express, maintain and foster the Faith - rituals, symbols, customs, institutions, lifestyles etc. The forms will be empty if they are not imbued with a genuine faith. The articulation of the faith will tend to die if it cannot find social and cultural forms that embody it, for it is by immersion in that social and cultural reality that the Faith is in fact essentially caught rather than taught. The Tradition is passed on, as it were, by osmosis.

## THE NECESSARY SUBTLETIES OF TRADITION

That we express our faith in some way, that we give form to it concretely, is absolutely necessary. Whether it be *this* or *that* theological formula or expression or *this* or *that* concrete form is generally negotiable. For example, Eucharist is central to the Christian

tradition, it is the source and summit of the Christian life (cf *Lumen Gentium*, n.11). Keeping alive the tradition includes, as an absolute necessity, keeping alive our faith in and celebration of the Eucharist. Just *how* we do that is subject to negotiation and debate.

Tradition, like culture, runs deep. Communities become disoriented without it and will die or transmute into something else. And you cannot just re-invent a tradition by simply deciding to do that. It takes time, it is subtle and complex and will not submit to any quick fix. Realising this might help us to understand some of the pain and anxiety in our culture today and the essential challenge of renewal.

### **THE PROPER FOCUS OF TRADITION**

The proper focus of the tradition is relationships - God's relationship with us and in particular God's infinite desire to love us and draw us into the Eternal Mystery of love through the Paschal Mystery; our individual and communal relationships with God in response to this Self-giving; our relationships with ourselves and other people; our relationships with the environment and this world that is God's creation. When the primary focus becomes dogmatic formulae, moral rules and organisational structures - essential as these are - then the tradition is moving towards death. The lifegiving response is to re-focus on the relationships.

The Second Vatican Council - and the times in which we find ourselves - demand that we ask some crucial questions of focus, both individually and corporately. Questions like: What matters in the end? What is negotiable and what is not negotiable? Do the forms by which we endeavour to express the faith today do justice to either that faith or our situation as human being living in this culture at this time? The response to questions such as these - a response begun in the Second Vatican Council - must be engaged by us all. Perhaps our contribution to the next generations will be found quite simply in our willingness to ask the questions and, for the time being at least, to live within the tension of those questions.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. What questions would you ask to discern whether a person was a Catholic?
2. Put in your own words what you understand by the Faith Tradition.
3. Put in your own words what you understand by the Form Tradition.
4. Reflect on the relationship between the Faith and Form Traditions and the way they affect each other.
5. Is it possible that the Form Tradition might become an end in itself?
6. Name some of the effective and not so effective aspects of the Form Tradition today.
7. On what basis do you say an aspect of the Form Tradition is or is not effective?
8. Use your own words to describe the Paschal Mystery as the source of the Christian Tradition.
9. Can you name any part of the Form Tradition that is absolutely essential to the Tradition as such?
10. What are you doing in your life to keep the authentic Tradition alive?



## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #12

### THE EUCHARIST AND RENEWAL

The Church's liturgy is an immensely rich source of ritual, symbol and theological insight. It is the most profound expression of the Covenant, that liberating relationship we have with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council is unambiguous in its affirmation of the reality of the liturgy:

The liturgy, through which the work of our redemption is accomplished, most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek (cf. Heb 13:14). While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit (cf. Eph 2:21-22), to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13), at the same time it marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations (cf. Is 11:12) under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together (cf. Jn 11:52), until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd (cf. Jn 10:16). (*Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)*, n.2)

When we enter the liturgical assembly and give ourselves attentively in faith to the process and content of the liturgical action, we are transformed. When we faithfully celebrate any of the sacraments we are changed. The person beforehand is not exactly the same as the person afterwards. The changes, like most changes at depth in a mature person, might only be noticeable five or ten years later. However, we should go to the liturgical assembly *expecting* to be changed by the action in which we participate.

### **EUCHARIST: FOUNT AND APEX OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

The power of the liturgy is nowhere more manifest than in the eucharistic assembly. The eucharist is the heart of the christian life and the fullest expression of our liturgy. Again the Second Vatican Council:

Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, (the baptised) offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with It. ... Strengthened in Holy Communion by the Body of Christ, they then manifest in a concrete way that unity of the People of God which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most august sacrament. (*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)*, n.11).

We are perhaps at ease with the proposition that the Eucharist is the "apex" of the Christian life. After all, as St Paul says, when we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim the death of the Lord Jesus until he comes (cf 1Cor 11:17-34). In other words,

eucharist re-presents and celebrates the paschal mystery, the very saving death and resurrection of Jesus.

But what about the eucharist as the “fount” of the christian life? The tradition, expressed by Vatican II, points to a truly remarkable belief in Eucharist as holding the power to heal and forgive, to build up and enliven the community and all in it. In the light of the authentic eucharistic tradition, we ought to approach the table of the Lord precisely because we are sinners seeking forgiveness rather than because we have been forgiven or deem ourselves as not needing forgiveness and reconciliation.

## **EUCCHARIST AS RECONCILIATION**

Among other things, *the eucharist is a celebration of reconciliation*. We may easily overlook this at a time when there is so much discussion about the form by which we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* quotes St John Damascene (657-749): “(The sacrament of the eucharist) unites us to Christ and renders us partakers of his flesh and divinity, reconciles and unites us to each other in the same Christ, and consolidates us, as it were into one body” (Part II, Chapter IV, Q. iv).

All of this points to something beyond the personality of the celebrant or the quality of the music or the way we happen to be feeling at the time. This is how the eucharist *is* - it “unites us with Christ” and “reconciles and unites us to each other”. *This* is what is on offer to all those who participate faithfully in the eucharistic assembly. There is nothing automatic or magical about it. However, if we seek it in faith and expect it in hope, it will be. The language, symbols and rituals all point to a profound and potentially transforming reality here.

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent* also reminds us that if we are “spiritually dead” - that is, gravely at odds with God, flagrantly in violation of God’s law - communion in the eucharist is a judgement on us (cf 1Cor 11:29) (Ibid. Q.xlviii). The *Catechism* also reminds us “that by the eucharist are remitted and pardoned lighter sins commonly called venial” and cites St Ambrose (339-397): “That daily bread is taken as a remedy for daily infirmity” (Ibid. Q. l).

How do we begin our celebration of the Eucharist? “To prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries ....” We call this the penitential rite and we believe that those who engage in this liturgical action with the correct dispositions are forgiven those sins that are less than “mortal”.

The Church does not set down idle words or actions for the liturgy. Everything that is to be said and done is to be said and done for a very specific purpose. So when the minister of the gospel says, at the end of the proclamation of the gospel, “May the words of this gospel wipe away our sins” we ought to take it very seriously indeed. Similarly, when the one presiding at the assembly washes his hands and prays to the Lord: “Wash away my iniquities and cleanse me of all my sins”. And when we all pray before the uplifted body of Christ: “Lord I am not worthy to receive you, say but the word and my soul shall be healed”. These are not idle words or gestures.

It is a matter of conjecture just how many of us ever commit “mortal” sins, sins that

render us “spiritually dead”. Such death-dealing actions must certainly be more rare than was thought to be so a generation or two ago when, for example, a priest, it was taught, could commit several dozen such “mortal sins” from the time he vested for mass, actually celebrated the mass and then removed his vestments.

A further practical and very pastoral question arises in this same context. How is this Penitential Rite essentially different from the celebration of the so-called Third Rite of Reconciliation which is not permitted at the moment, except in grave circumstances? Perhaps we would do well to look more closely at the eucharist and the celebration of God’s healing and liberating mercy available to us there. We should take every opportunity to receive and celebrate the liberating mercy of God.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. What has been your experience of liturgy? Reflect on why this has been so.
2. What has been your experience of the changes to the Liturgy over the past thirty years?
3. Use your own words to summarise the first quotation from Vatican II (above) on the Liturgy.
4. What does it mean to you to say the Eucharist is the “apex” of the Christian life?
5. What does it mean to you to say the Eucharist is the “fount” of the Christian life?
6. What does it mean to speak of Eucharist as a celebration of reconciliation?
7. What ritual or symbol in the celebration of Eucharist means most to you? Why?
8. In what sense is it true to say we are all sinners in need of the Eucharist?
9. Read 1Cor 11:17-34. What strikes you about St Paul’s teachings there?
10. How do you think you can contribute to the Eucharistic Assembly in your community?

### **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #13**

#### CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

#### **IS SPIRITUALITY RELEVANT TODAY IN AUSTRALIA?**

The Australian poet, Les Murray, answers this question very well:

While (the Christian) vision is no longer the dominant one (in Australia), and may never have been, neither is any other at the moment. There is as yet no other vision abroad in our society which commands the same authority as ours does, the same sense of being the bottom line, the great reserve to be called on in times of real need. Many of the themes of the rallies are necessary problem solving and little more, and much in the spiritual supermarket is fair weather stuff, adjuncts to a prosperity which may now be vanishing. Unbelief, once a daring and rather aristocratic gesture, must now have exhausted most of its glamour; it is certainly no longer exclusive, or particularly rebellious. Much the same could be said of sexual indulgence, pornography and the like. Having by now surely lost most of its flavour of forbidden fruit, sexual licence has to justify itself in terms of whatever real satisfaction it can give; its utility as a bait to draw people out of traditional ways and

beliefs, and if possible into new allegiances, must by now also be wearing thin. And it will be difficult at the very least, for the cult of unremitting youthfulness and physical beauty to survive in the era of aging populations which it has helped to produce. By now liberal humanism is as badly fragmented by dissension as our witness ever was, and its fiercest adherents are often covertly uneasy at its lack of gentleness, its readiness to force the facts and its desolate this-worldliness. Its unrelenting adulthood forces people onto the thorns of tragic complexity and the strange intractability of the world, and often when people who subscribe to it relax for a moment, their eyes are seen to contain an almost desperate appeal: please prove us wrong, make us believe there is more to it than this, show us your God and that Grace you talk about. We are more widely judged on our own best terms than we think, and more insistently expected to be the keepers of the dimension of depth than we find comfortable. (Les A. Murray, "Some Religious Stuff I know About Australia" in D. Harris et al, eds., *The Shape of Belief: Christianity in Australia Today*, Lancer, 1982, pp. 25-26 of pp. 13-28.)

## WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

**Spirituality is living relationships - with the Great Mystery (however we name that), with ourselves, with other people and with the created world.** Spirituality is at the heart of being human. This fourfold relating finds its unity in the Source of all Unity - the One we call, in our Western English language tradition, God. A healthy spirituality is a living and deepening integration of those relationships and goes on integrating them in a never-ending journey of discovery.

We cannot live a fully human life *without* spirituality. Nor can we live an entirely private life *with* spirituality. Of its very nature, spirituality is communal, finding its fullest expression in love. "Private spirituality" is a contradiction in terms. An authentic spirituality will have us constantly moving in a self-transcending way, always going beyond ourselves, always seeking to ground life in the Great Mystery rather than mere ego or ideology or project. It will seek to heal and build relationships, it will proceed by way of facilitation rather than conquest, and it will be recognised by the grace and freedom it brings to the market place of human endeavour. Spirituality is mutuality, living life as dialogue, attentive, listening. It will, in the end, always see life as a mystery to be lived rather than a problem to be solved.

## FOUNDATIONAL SPIRITUALITY AND SPECIAL SPIRITUALITIES

It is helpful to distinguish between *foundational spirituality* and *special spiritualities*. *Foundational spirituality* is a theoretical construct, containing all - and only - the essential features of spirituality. No human life can contain all the essential features, fully expressed, fully lived. *Special spiritualities* are the lived instances of spirituality, expressing some of those essential features. While *special spiritualities* do not explicitly and fully express all the essential features of spirituality as such, neither do they express any features that would be contrary to those essential features. The major religious and cultural traditions of the world have many *special spiritualities* as part of their traditions. Within Catholicism, for example, we have, among others, the *special spiritualities* of the Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan and Jesuit traditions. *Special spiritualities* provide ways of developing a rich and well-grounded personal spirituality that suits a certain temperament, lifestyle or phase of development. However, some *special spiritualities* may in fact be obstacles for certain people who are not suited to the

ways of that *special spirituality*.

## THE DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

*Christian spirituality* is a special instance of spirituality as such. While it shares with any authentic spirituality the fourfold relationship, it has its own way of expressing and fulfilling that. The distinguishing marks of an authentic *Christian spirituality* might be indicated as follows:

- *Christian spirituality* will first and foremost be **Christ-centred**. Jesus of Nazareth, whom we believe to be Son of God, embodies in His life, action, person and teachings the ultimate source, measure and reference for all that claims to be “Christian”. In particular, through His death and resurrection - the Paschal Mystery - we are set free from that which prevents us coming to be what God made us to be. Through Him, with Him and in Him we live. All else that is specifically *Christian* about spirituality is already implicit in the reality of Jesus Christ. Therefore we say that *Christian spirituality*:
  - finds its beginning and end in **God’s will** and **God’s action** in the world and **God’s liberating love** for each of us (rather than in our will, our achievements or what we must or must not do);
  - will focus on **grace** before personal effort;
  - will be grounded in **the Word** and will draw wisdom and insight from the way the community of the baptised has heard, understood and lived the Word through the ages;
  - will give a central place to **the Cross** and what Thomas Merton has called “the paschal rhythm” of life; *Christian spirituality* is necessarily a *paschal spirituality*;
  - will find in the **Eucharist** - the community’s celebration of the Paschal Mystery - a central and guiding action, a lodestone as it were;
  - will be **ecclesial**, serving the community, always seeking the unity of the Body of Christ, finding its fullest expression in and with the assembly of the baptised;
  - will be **eschatological**, marked by the conviction that history, under the power of God’s Spirit and with our cooperation, is moving towards a consummation of all things in Christ, that the Kingdom is ultimately much more than any political, social, economic ideology could envisage;
  - will be **incarnational**, daily moving more deeply into the human condition and the human situation, always working through Him, with Him and in Him to bring about the freedom of creation so that eventually all that is might come to be what it is called to be in the will of God.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Describe “spirituality” in your own words.
2. What has been your experience of “spirituality”?
3. Describe how you relate with God.
4. Which of the four relationships needs most attention in your life at the moment? Why?

5. How would you describe your experience of specifically “Christian spirituality”?
  6. Who is Jesus Christ for you?
  7. What area of specifically “Christian spirituality” would you like to give more attention to?
  8. What would you say has been the most significant factor in the development of your own spirituality?
  9. What does it mean for you to say that “Christian spirituality” is *ecclesial*?
  10. What does it mean for you to say that “Christian spirituality” is *eschatological*?
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #14

### FOUNDATIONAL THINKING

Ours is a culture that prizes rational thought, clear and distinct ideas. Problem-solvers are in great demand. The functionalistic types who can get the job done are well paid. All of which is like garlic in cooking – some of it is fine but you can overdo it. We tend to overdo it. At every turn we foster rationalism and functionalism. The fact that the deeper issues of human existence – most particularly those concerning relationships (with God, self, others and environment) – tend to languish in such an atmosphere seems to go largely unnoticed.

The Church is primarily about relationships. The ways of rationalism and functionalism that so dominate the prevailing secular culture are apt to be particularly damaging if we let them also dominate us as we approach the huge and complex matters of renewal and reform within the Church. Yes, there are some very practical and functional tasks to be done. Yes, it is important to be able to think rationally and clearly about matters. And yes, we can learn much from big business and the way the secular world achieves best results. But the essential matters of renewal will not succumb to the functionalistic and rationalistic approaches that seem to drive the secular world.

Together with a healthy dose of the functional and rational, we also need an ability to listen, wait and submit to the emergence of truth that is, in the end, the sole possession of none of us.

### **TWO CONTRASTING STYLES OF THINKING**

There are a number of ways we can speak of different styles of thinking – concrete and abstract, left brain and right brain, linear and comprehensive, meditative and calculative and so on. Each of these distinctions is more or less helpful. It is also very helpful to distinguish between *issues thinking* and *foundational thinking*.

*Issues thinking* tends to be characterised by at least five distinctive features:

- It tends to *decontextualise* or isolate the matter being considered – the matter in hand is removed from its context and treated as if it were an isolated matter, not intimately or essentially connected with a web of other matters; it is not uncommon to find *issues thinking* preoccupied by a very limited focus;
- It tends to be *reductionistic* – the matter in hand is reduced to fairly simple components, and even quite complex matters may thus be spoken of and dealt with in a simplistic way;
- It tends to be dominated by a felt need for a *practical outcome* – the matter in hand is regarded as “a problem to solve”, and once you have worked out what the problem is, all you have to do is apply yourself to the appropriate strategy to solve it;
- It tends to be relatively *superficial* – pressing to achieve a “solution” to the “problem”, *issues thinking* can never get very deep; it is more interested in a workable outcome than an enriching process;
- It tends to be driven by a desire to *control* – the *issues thinker* is bent on mastering the information, being in command of “the truth”, staying on top of the matter.

Clearly, there are many day-to-day situations in which *issues thinking* is not only acceptable – it is desirable. However, the more complex and subtle challenges in life – like the essential processes of renewal and reform in the Church – demand something much more. It hardly needs to be stated, for example, that *issues thinking* typically does not lead to good conversation. Rather, on its own, when applied to complex matters, it tends to lead to strategic manoeuvring and even confrontation.

If we were to apply only *issues thinking* to the matter of, say, leadership in the Church, we might just consider that matter alone – and probably not the whole of it either – perhaps just the juridical or organizational part of it, or the part that affects us most immediately and concretely. *Issues thinking* might, for example, become preoccupied with the election and appointment processes.

Such thinking would not pay sufficient attention to the fact that leadership in the Church is a profound *theological* matter, rooted in the Incarnation and developed throughout the tradition; a profound *social, historical and cultural* matter, rooted in the time and society in which we live; a profound *institutional* matter, rooted in the particular needs, limits and possibilities of the organization; a profound *political* matter, rooted in the expectations and possibilities of all the people concerned, and so on.

*Issues thinking* will bring something worthwhile to the challenge of renewal and reform in the Church, but it must be secondary to and dependent upon *foundational thinking*.

## **WHAT IS FOUNDATIONAL THINKING?**

*Foundational thinking* tends to be characterised by at least four distinctive features:

- It tries to *contextualise* the matter being considered – the matter in hand is placed within a context and treated as part of a bigger picture, intimately and essentially connected with other matters; it will be attentive and alert, listening for further connections and implications;

- It tends to be *integrative* – the matter in hand is treated as an integrated whole, within itself and in its relation to other matters, with all the complexities and subtleties sought out; *foundational thinking* is thus at home with ambiguities and paradoxes, grey areas and uncertainties;
- It tends to be dominated by a felt need *to allow the truth to emerge* – the matter in hand is regarded as a possibility for building relationships and seeking the truth with other people;
- It tends to be *foundational*, as the name suggests – it is all the time in search of the deeper dynamics, the roots; it is more concerned that the Truth, rather than any individual, wins out.

*Foundational thinking* will ask questions like: “What is happening here?”, “Do I have any prejudices?”, “Are there other agendas at work here?”, “Am I willing to be transformed by this process?”, “Are there more fundamental matters of which this is a manifestation?”, “Do I fully understand this matter?”, “Do I understand what the other person is saying?”, “What is my gut saying?” and so on.

*Foundational thinking* assumes that thinking is a way of relating, that it is, in fact, a form of love. It also assumes that, ultimately, to seek to know the truth, in whatever form, is – at least implicitly – a seeking to know the Truth who is a Person.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. “At every turn we foster rationalism and functionalism” – do you agree/disagree? Reflect.
2. “The Church is primarily about relationships”. Reflect.
3. How might rationalism and functionalism be damaging to our work for renewal and reform?
4. Explain in your own words the difference between *issues thinking* and *foundational thinking*?
5. Are you more inclined to *issues thinking* or *foundational thinking*? Give an example.
6. What does it mean to *contextualise* a matter? Give an example.
7. What does it mean to be *integrative* in thinking of a particular matter? Give an example.
8. Reflect on the differing outcomes for conversation of *issues thinking* and *foundational thinking*.
9. What sorts of questions might *foundational thinking* ask about renewal in your parish?
10. What can you do to promote *foundational thinking*?

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #15**



## THE MYSTICAL HEART OF OUR FAITH

### **OUR HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN VOCATION**

“The human being is an animal who has received the vocation to become God.” So wrote St Gregory Nazianzen in his eulogy for St Basil of Caesarea in 379. Gregory was actually quoting Basil himself and giving voice to one of the most profound truths of our faith.

The human vocation, in essence, is a call to communion – with the Transcendent (however we name that One), with ourselves, with other human beings and with creation. That life of communion will be facilitated and manifested by different people in a multitude of different ways. The *Christian* vocation is to realise the fullness of that *human* vocation – to become what we most deeply are, in Christ and through Christ. He is “the Way” (cf John 14:6). St Irenaeus of Lyons (130-200) is concise and explicit: “The Son of God was made man so that man might become son of God.” Through the loving action of God in Christ, we are set free to unfold in the fullness of our human potential. We are baptised into Christ (cf Romans 6:3) and enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God (cf Romans 8:21).

### **FAITH VERSUS IDEOLOGY**

Our Christian faith is not an ideology, but a set of relationships – primarily and most specifically our relationship with God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. That primary relationship inevitably permeates and shapes our other relationships. The fulfilment of our faith is found in the fulfilment of those relationships. This is the life of love.

We could think of ideology as any more or less coherent system of ideas whose purpose is to shape the world of people, events and things in a particular way. Ideologies, by their very nature, tend to preempt reality. They operate on the basis of a pre-definition of the way things ought to be. In this sense ideologies are always idealizations.

Ideologies stand or fall on the strengths of their human resources and arguments and perhaps the accidents of history. Ideologies tend to be closed and self-centred. Too often ideologies give birth to violence, perhaps because they become the servants of human ego rather than reality. An ideologue, for example, would never be able to accept Gamaliel’s principle as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles ( Cf Acts 5:34-39). Ideologies tend to obscure the deepest hungers of the human heart and the signposts of what is real, because they (ie the ideologies) have “the answers”. Ideologies do not believe in grace or gift since they believe the world is divided into two types – masters and victims, winners and losers. Ideologies imprison people.

Genuine faith is always available to be taken beyond the present limits and boundaries by going through the actual, concrete and definite reality of the here and now. Genuine faith sees life as sacramental, everything a signpost to what is real and therefore life-giving because God-bearing. Genuine faith feels the deepest hunger of the human heart for communion with the Transcendent and with all that is. Genuine faith knows that life is grace, pure gift. Genuine faith liberates because it is, in the end,

a love affair with the Incarnate God living, loving and working in our midst.

Down through the ages, sadly, Christianity has frequently been reduced to an ideology and its preachers to ideologues. When this happens the essential Gospel vision is more or less diminished. Some of the unmistakable signs that it might be happening include excessive dependence on rational argument, legalism, exclusivity, sectarianism and violence perpetrated on God's behalf.

## **THERE ARE NO STRANGERS**

Another way of saying the above is to say that the Christian faith is essentially a call to be a mystic. We know ourselves to be one with the Father and, in that oneness, we also know an affinity and communion with ourselves, other people and the physical world. Thomas Merton describes this ordinary mystical experience well:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. .... My solitude ... is not my own, for I see now how much it belongs to them – and that I have a responsibility for it in their regard, not just in my own. It is because I am one with them that I owe it to them to be alone, and when I am alone they are not “they” but my own self. There are no strangers! (Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Doubleday, 1989, 156-158)

## **THE MYSTICAL GIVES BIRTH TO THE MORAL**

Only when we are taking this *mystical vocation* seriously can we talk realistically about the *moral vocation* of the baptised. One of the most common ideologies to which Christian faith has been reduced down through the ages is *moralism*. Authentic morality begins and ends in relationships – primarily the covenant. Moralism begins and ends in ideas and rules. Moralism is an ideology. This ideology of *moralism* is sometimes passed off as if it were the teaching of Jesus and irreparable harm is done in the process. Too easily Jesus is reduced merely or primarily to a moral teacher and his teachings to a moral philosophy. Thus, for example, the parables may be simplistically interpreted as moral fables calling us to an obvious behavioural response.

Part of the seduction of *moralism* is its accessibility. It is much easier to grasp “things to do” than answer the call “to be”. Our anxious need to feel in control is satisfied more easily with a clear cut set of moral rules and injunctions than it is by an invitation to a life of abandonment to the Mystery, a call to communion in and through Christ. To the anxious, life seems much more manageable when it is presented as a problem to be solved rather than a mystery to be lived.

What maintains the integrity of the *moral vocation* is the underlying communion with God in Christ. If, like St Paul, we are captured by the mystery of Christ (cf Philippians 3:13), we will be set in motion by that relationship and it will be our freedom. The energy and purpose for moral commitment will come not from our will-power but from grace. The moral behaviour will be free and grace-full. One of the distinguishing marks of *moralism* is its wilfulness. It lacks freedom and grace. Frequently it takes on either a hard, even harsh quality – one of the tell-tale signs of ego-centric behaviour – or a dour, humourless quality, or both. The “charity” of this

*moralism* will always have strings attached, because it is – despite its protestations to the contrary – self-serving.

If we want to develop a liberating and grace-full moral life, we would do well to put our best efforts into growing in intimacy with God in Christ. There is the path of genuine self-fulfilment. And genuine self-fulfilment is self-transcending. And in the self-transcendence is our freedom. This life-giving transcendence will happen – and can *only* happen – in and through communion with the Other. Without the loving communion, we will be too anxious to let go.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. What do you make of the statements by St Gregory and St Ireneus?
2. Put in your own words what you think the *human* vocation is.
3. What is the relationship between the *human* vocation and the *Christian* vocation?
4. What difference does Jesus Christ make to your life?
5. What is your experience of *mysticism*?
6. In your experience have the *mystical* and *moral* been intimately linked?
7. How do you understand *moralism*? Give an example.
8. Do you think *moralism* will ever disappear? Exemplify from experience.
9. How do you understand *self-fulfilment*?
10. Use your own experience to describe what Merton was describing above.

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #16**

### CONDEMNED TO BELIEVE

#### **A COMMON SENSE VIEW**

The human being is a believing animal. To be human is to believe. We cannot avoid it. And we are talking here about something more significant than the everyday beliefs – for example, that the bus will come, that the oncoming traffic will stay on the other side of the road and that, when I pack my lunch in the morning, I will still be alive at 1pm to eat it.

There is a more serious and deep level at which belief must operate. For example, if I do not believe in myself and my ability to cope with this and that, I will have some difficulty getting on with the business of the day; if I do not believe in other people and their basic good will I will find myself caught in paralysing paranoia. And if I do not believe that life is worth living I will probably have great difficulty getting out of bed in the morning.

## **BELIEVING SOMETHING ABOUT DEATH**

Perhaps the issue of belief is nowhere more pressing than when we face the fact of our mortality. Confronted with the prospect of my own death, I have only two options really. (I can of course avoid the issue and suppress the question. But this is hardly an option if I am to embrace my humanity in all its aspects and attempt to live life to the full.) The two options are both options of belief: I must either believe – or tend towards believing – that death is simply termination and annihilation, or I must believe – or tend towards believing – that death is some sort of passage or transition. I am condemned to believe, more or less, no matter how implicitly or explicitly, no matter how coherently or incoherently, one of these.

In this context, we could say that the idea of “resurrection” – that life is moving towards, and is therefore defined by, a meaningful “passing over” – is more reasonable than the idea of “annihilation” – that life is moving towards, and is therefore defined by, a meaningless cessation. If my life is moving ineluctably towards a meaningless conclusion, why bother? Why would I make the effort to turn something that has no meaning into an experience in which I fabricate meaning? But so much about the human experience suggests meaning and purpose, suggests journey and goal. And these are not of my making. I may, of course, give them my meaning – which meaning may in turn be more or less consistent with the meaning inherent in the reality as such.

## **THE ACT OF BELIEVING**

The act of believing – particularly when it is of the more significant kind – is a deeply human act, a liberating act. It is one of the primary ways by which we become human. And to engage the act of believing as a clear-eyed and reasonable adult, is also to struggle and, in a sense, die. For our inherent tendency towards egotism and its wish to be in control – itself a flight from our inherent anxiety as finite beings – will be threatened by the self-transcending movement and loss of control implicit in the act of believing. Believing exposes our anxiety. To the extent that we are unwilling to engage this struggle, and live through the anxiety, we will be less than we might be as human beings.

The act of believing ultimately demands trust and abandonment to something – or Someone. It calls us out of ourselves, beyond egotism and control. It will, at best, be no more than pseudo-belief if it is not an expression of a relationship with something more than ourselves. Belief is, at its best, an act of love. In it we are as vulnerable as we are real.

## **THE ENLIGHTENMENT LEGACY**

The post-Enlightenment consciousness, which we have inherited, promotes the proposition that belief belongs to another era, that it is essentially a sign of immaturity or perhaps anxiety. Belief, according to this thesis, is unnecessary because rationality can – in principle at least – reveal all we need to know about reality. Hand in hand with this proposition is the belief that knowledge is power. When we know what we need to know, we just set about doing what we need to do. The rationalist motto might be stated thus: Real human beings believe nothing – they know!

The irony of this rationalistic proposition ought to be evident to any reasonable person. It is actually built on the belief that we should only accept as true what can be empirically verified or proved by mathematical or philosophical argument. What happens when we apply this principle to the principle itself? Can we, for example, empirically verify that empirical verification is a valid – or necessary or even sufficient – condition for accepting this or that as true? Rationalism, built as it is on such a strange leap of faith, is ultimately irrational, despite its claims to the contrary. Rationalism – the over-prizing of the rational – is the antithesis of what is reasonable.

## **A CONTEMPORARY DILEMMA**

The influence of rationalism over the past century or so has left us with a dilemma: We must believe (because we are human beings) but our ability to believe has been severely – in some instances perhaps fatally – eroded (because we are post-Enlightenment people). In other words, belief for our generation, is not quite the same as it was, for example, for our grandparents and great-grandparents.

Add to this dilemma – which has deep roots in our post-modern consciousness – the disillusionment many feel today in the face of the failing structures and institutional forms of organized religion, and you have the ingredients for a dark night, a prolonged walk through the desert.

Therein lies a paradox. In the very limits of this situation we find our possibilities. Just as the desert was the place of liberty and love for the People of old, so we might find in this new “desert” a place of liberation and love.

Nothing can fail quite so badly as institutional religion when it is successful. That might just be the essential lesson for Catholics – and other Christians – at this time. What do we have left? To whom shall we go? The desert and the dark night are places of urgent questioning. They are also places where the superficialities and pretences evaporate. And that can be life-giving, even if painful.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Having read the foregoing, what is the main question on your mind?
  2. Name the various levels of belief in your life, giving examples of each.
  3. Do you think it is possible to live without believing anything?
  4. In what sense can we speak of the act of believing as a deeply human act?
  5. How do you experience the act of believing?
  6. Reflect on the relationship between anxiety and believing.
  7. Do you in any way experience the “dilemma” described above? Give an example.
  8. How do you understand the metaphors of “desert” and “dark night”? Give a personal example.
  9. In what sense might the act of believing be “liberating”? Is this part of your experience?
  10. Does this discussion put in you in mind of anything in the Gospels?
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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #17**

### **SYMBOLS**

#### **THINGS COME TOGETHER**

The English word *symbol* comes from the Greek words *sum* meaning *together* and *ballein* meaning *to throw*. Symbols gather together multiple meanings and present them as one. The Greek root *ballein* implies that this happens with a certain suddenness. In other words, the symbol – to those who appreciate it – instantly bespeaks a complex message in totality, as if it were one. Symbols, like jokes, lose their power if they have to be explained.

Symbols also tend to unite those who jointly appreciate them. Thus, the raising of a national flag can be a gathering point for the people of that nation. This gathering may be more or less powerful, depending on the importance of the symbol, its history, how



much appreciation the people have for it and other circumstances that might prevail at the time. We could think similarly about other symbols – some more formal than others – such as a wedding ring, a police officer’s badge, a flight attendant’s uniform, a “thumbs up” gesture, a birthday cake or a family barbeque.

Symbols – like poetry and art, metaphors and images – take us beyond the limits of rational thought. They allow us to encounter and engage dimensions of the real world that the rational mind can never reach. They therefore appeal to something in us beyond the purely rational or intellectual.

Symbols can bear testimony to what is going on inside a person or group. We could, for example, wonder what “the outback” symbolizes for Australians or “the swastika” for some young people in Germany today or designer clothes for certain people or the off-road vehicle for someone living in the city.

### **CAN WE THRIVE (SURVIVE?) WITHOUT SYMBOLS?**

Human beings may – and do – make symbols of literally anything – a colour, a design, a landscape, vegetation, a person, an event, a particular gesture or action etc. So what is happening? Why do we do this? Is it just the residue of a pre-scientific stage in our evolution? Or does it express something of what it means to be a human being? Can you, for example, imagine a human existence without symbols?

The eminent psychiatrist Rollo May offers a response to these sorts of questions:

“We forget at our peril that man is a symbol making creature; and if the symbols (or myths, which are a pattern of symbols) seem arid and dead, they are to be mourned rather than denied. The bankruptcy of symbols should be seen for what it is, a way station on the path of despair.” (Rollo May, *Power and Innocence*, Fontana Books, 1976, 70.)

Writing on the same theme but in another context, Rollo May observes further:

“I began my study of the relation between myth and culture some years ago when, as a young man, I lived and taught in Greece. What particularly intrigued me was the way the ancient Greeks seemed to handle their anxiety and other psychological problems. In the classical phase of Greek culture, anxiety in our modern sense did not seem to emerge as an overt problem.

“I could not escape the implication that in certain historic periods, the culture provides the help which the individual needs to face the crises of life - birth, adolescence, marriage, procreation, death - so that he does not experience the profound insecurity, self-doubt and inner conflict which we associate with anxiety. “But scarcely do we propose a discussion of myth and culture when we are confronted by an almost insurmountable obstacle - that is, the myth that we live a ‘mythless existence’. Myths and symbols are scorned and rejected or, at best, taken as unreal, imaginary, and, at worst, become synonyms for ‘falsehood’. The wide prevalence of anxiety and alienation in our society, is, I believe, bound up with our rejection of the language of myth. Jerome Bruner put it well: ‘When the myths of

society are no longer adequate to man's plight, the individual first takes refuge in mythoclasm and then he undertakes the lonely search for inner identity'.

"At the outset I shall state the hypothesis which then took shape in my mind: Psychotherapy, and the problems which lead people to come in numbers for psychological help, emerge at a particular point in the historic development of a culture - that is the point where the myths and symbols of the culture disintegrate. The values of the culture are mediated by these myths and symbols, and with their breakdown comes the inner conflict which sends people to psychotherapy." (Rollo May, "Myths and Culture: Their Death and Transformation", *Cross Currents*, XXXIII, 1 (Spring 1983), 1 (1-16).)

## **SYMBOLS NOW**

If Rollo May's analysis is more or less on target – and the evidence would suggest that is the case – what are we to say about our culture at this time? What are our symbols and myths? Where and by whom are they generated? What part are the symbols and myths of our culture playing in both shaping and manifesting the lives we live? What can the symbols of our culture tell us about the direction we are moving?

And what about the symbols of the Christian community? Do the great symbols of the Cross and the empty tomb still have the power to set us in motion? Do the symbols embodied in the rituals by which we celebrate the Eucharist still have the power to gather the people and draw them into genuine worship? Do we perhaps cling to symbols that no longer have any unifying power, and power to gather? And in those cases where symbols seem to have lost their power to move us, is that saying more about us than the symbol or more about the symbol than us?

There are many questions we might ask. Perhaps the first question any of us should ask is: What is happening with me? Perhaps we have to be more imaginative and deliberate in our efforts today to remain realistically connected to God in our lives, to maintain a lively sense of God's presence and, in particular, to find concrete and energizing expressions of our relationship with God. This will inevitably involve a critical review of our formal and informal symbols.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Using a symbol from your own life, reflect on how symbols work and what part they play in our lives.
2. Name several of the important symbols in our culture? What do they express?
3. Can you name one especially *positive* and life-giving symbol in our culture? Reflect.
4. Can you name one especially *negative* and death-dealing symbol in our culture? Reflect.
5. What would you say is the most powerful symbol in *your* life? Why do you say that?
6. Think of something that *was once* symbolic for you but no longer is. What has changed?
7. What is the most significant religious symbol in your life? Reflect.
8. How do you experience the religious symbols of the Church today?
9. What can *you* do to enhance the power of religious symbols in your life?
10. In what sense is nature symbolic for you? Reflect.

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4. Can you name one especially *negative* and death-dealing symbol in our culture? Reflect.
5. What would you say is the most powerful symbol in *your* life? Why do you say that?
6. Think of something that *was once* symbolic for you, but no longer is. What has changed?
7. What is the most significant religious symbol in your life? Reflect.
8. How do you experience the religious symbols of the Church today?
9. What can *you* do to enhance the power of religious symbols in your life?
10. In what sense is nature symbolic for you? Reflect.

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #18**

### IDEALISATIONS

#### **WHAT IS IDEALISATION?**

Idealisation is the psychological process whereby we bring an exalted pre-definition to our world – to a person, event or thing – and expect that person, event or thing to fit the definition. When the idealisation is particularly entrenched, we may not even recognise the awful contradictions between our exalted pre-definitions and the real world. Or, we may note the contradictions but assume that it is the world and not our exalted pre-definition that must change. Idealisation is thus accompanied by a good deal of wilful and irrational behaviour. It can also lead to violent behaviour.

Needless to say, if we are idealising our world, we have first idealised ourselves and our place in that world. And such self-idealisation carries with it a good deal of self-hatred and moral confusion – despite the fact that the idealisation may, ostensibly at least, manifest itself as maturity, dependability and moral rectitude. It is a life built on pretence, no matter how many “right” and “true” things we claim. It is also a paper volcano – of more or less significant proportions – waiting to explode.

Idealisation may be *passing* or *chronic*. *Passing idealisation* might occur as, for example, when I go to a new job with totally unreal expectations of how wonderful life will be when I am in that job or when I move to the “dream home” or retire or fall in love. We are probably going to experience this kind of passing idealisation a number of times during our lives – especially when we are young. Happy are those who are disappointed by life and do not become cynical or resentful! *Chronic* or *ongoing idealisation* might occur when I, for example, experience my childhood as more or less distressing. Thus I may become “the dutiful daughter” or “the dependable son” or “the peacemaker” and so on. I may then move into adulthood without being aware that I am relating with the world on the basis of this idealisation.

Idealisation is a deceit – even if we are not morally culpable and even if it contains some substance of truth – and when the pretence is finally laid bare, the victims of that deceit will typically be disappointed, perhaps very angry and may even turn in hatred on the source of the deceit. When an individual is coming to terms with self-idealisation, he or she must contend with a certain amount of self-hatred.

## CULTURAL IDEALISATIONS

We idealise because we are anxious and because we yearn to be something “better” or at least “more than” we are or perceive ourselves to be. Put more simply: We idealise because we are frightened to admit the truth. We cannot stand being *just* “this” or “that”. The Danish theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, summed it up in his own enigmatic way: “... but the self that did not become Caesar is the thing that is intolerable.” Thomas Merton put it more bluntly:

“Everyone of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the person I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about that person. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy. My false and private self is the one that wants to exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love – outside of reality and outside of life.”

Cultures have their idealisations too. How could we ever forget the idealisation of President Kennedy and his beautiful wife, Jacqueline or, more recently, Princess Diana, “The Queen of Hearts”. In each instance the culture held exalted pre-definitions of these people. We tried so hard to make the idealised image replace the reality. Eventually, however, the reality broke through. In Australia various idealisations have been evident, for example, in relation to lifesavers, the “Aussie male”, sports men and women, the early settlers, the outback, Great Britain and British ways, Ireland and Irish ways, and so on.

Affronts to reality – no matter how inevitable or predictable or apparently benign – exact a price. Neither individuals nor cultures can live a pretence for long – especially

if that pretence is about something significant. As Dostoevsky observed: Put nature out the window and it will come in the door.

## **CHRISTIAN IDEALISATIONS**

Christians find themselves contending with idealisations just as all other human beings do. Another name for idealisation is *idolisation*. It is not surprising that so much should have been said to condemn idol worship in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, there is ample evidence that Jesus was also very alert to this process. For example, he condemned the Pharisees for idealising the Law. The Pharisees, in developing an exalted and fixed pre-definition of the Law and its place in Judaism, had forgotten the whole point of the Law. They had fallen into the quagmire of unreality that idealisation always leads to – the means replace the ends, the relative is absolutised, the finite takes on infinite characteristics, the man-made insidiously becomes “the divinely constituted”. This is how idols are made by us. And this is roundly condemned time and again in both the Old and New Testaments.

The hierarchy, clergy and religious have tended to be idealised within our Catholic history. An idealised image of these people, buttressed by a well-established Catholic sub-culture, had an immense influence on the thinking of Catholics. In many instances the wonderful humanity of those people broke through the idealisations and did great work for the Kingdom. Sometimes, however, the idealisation did immense harm, dislocating men and women from the truth of their humanity and manifesting itself in authoritarianism, dogmatism, chronic anger, sexual conflicts and even psychopathologies.

We can accept the infallibility invested in the successor of Peter and still acknowledge the idealisations that Catholics have attached – and have been encouraged to attach – to that office. Similarly, we can acknowledge the exalted pre-definitions we have attached to the form of church we brought into the middle of the twentieth century. In both instances it is as difficult as it is necessary to sort out the truth from the pretence, the real from the unreal, what is essential to the Gospel Tradition and what is accidental or even an obstacle to that Gospel Tradition.

We can understand the work of renewal within the Church as parallel to the work of renewal we must all pursue in our personal lives – it is a movement from the false towards the true, from the unreal towards the real. This requires constant vigilance and persistent effort. Ultimately this is a work of grace though. We are all subject to anxiety, all yearning to be “more than” we are and all such gifted self-deceivers, that idealisation is an ever-present possibility, one that we can never conquer by human effort alone. Only much effort from us and much grace from God can keep us pointing in the right direction!

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Give your own definition of *idealisation*.
2. Can you recall a time when you *idealised* someone or something?
3. How did you become aware that you were in fact *idealising*?
4. On the basis of your experience, what do you see as the damaging effects of idealisation?

5. Do you think there might be some *demonisation* – as a reaction to *idealisation* – in the Church today?
  6. What might Kierkegaard mean by his statement quoted in paragraph 5 above?
  7. Reflect on the quotation from Thomas Merton, drawing on your own experience.
  8. Can you give an example of specifically *Catholic idealisation*? Reflect.
  9. Can you recall any occasion in the Gospel when Jesus condemned *idealisation*?
  10. Can you recall anything from the Gospels that might help you resist *idealisations*?
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #19

### FUNDAMENTALISM

#### WHAT IS FUNDAMENTALISM?

*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines fundamentalism as “the strict maintenance of traditional orthodox religious beliefs or doctrines”. We could describe it more fully as:

- A psychological disposition
- that inclines a person to cling unbendingly to certain rules and dogmas,
- holding that the major questions have already been resolved and
- all that is required is conformity.

The concept of fundamentalism may apply, for example, to economists, politicians, educationists as well as adherents of a religious tradition. In this discussion we will concentrate on the latter.

First of all, fundamentalism is an *a psychological disposition*. It is first and foremost about psychology, not theology, despite its rhetoric. Fundamentalism may initially present as a reasoned position or a justifiable stance. Sooner or later it will reveal itself as an irrational attitude towards the world. It is more about anxiety and fear than faith or reason. Fundamentalism, of whatever kind, is essentially an attempt to put things in order and thus allay the anxiety that comes from feeling that the world is out of order and therefore potentially overwhelming.

Secondly, fundamentalism is *unbending because it is confident of its dogmas*. This is perhaps the surest sign that we are dealing with raw anxiety rather than reasoned thought or genuine faith or even healthy emotion. Like the Gnostics of old, fundamentalists claim - at least implicitly - some special unassailable knowledge and insight into truth. They believe this knowledge and insight must be enforced if people are not willing or able to accept it voluntarily. And the only people, according to the



fundamentalists' perspective, who will not accept this knowledge and insight are either too stupid to see it or too perverse to accept it. Either way, such people must be regarded as enemies.

Thirdly, fundamentalism *does not allow for questions or open conversation*. Life is monologue for the fundamentalist, not dialogue. Why would you want to explore and search and question when the answers are already given? Thus, fundamentalism reduces complex issues to clear-cut options. It draws a line in the sand and wants to know which side you are on. Fundamentalism focuses on laws rather than people. It is generally rigid and often enough very angry in its proclamations – especially when it does not get its own way. Typically it is accompanied by an embattled feeling or siege mentality in its proponents. In exercising authority it tends towards severity and straightforward punitive measures.

Fourthly, fundamentalism demands *conformity*. This is the inevitable outcome. Fundamentalism cannot tolerate any person, event or thing that would erode the illusions of confidence and being in control. That would expose the anxiety. And it can hardly be over-emphasised: anxiety is the key.

## **LIVING WITH FUNDAMENTALISM**

Notwithstanding the foregoing, there may be a limited case for fundamentalism. Take, for example, the man who has little or no education, has been caught up in a life of crime and finds himself serving a long jail term. While in jail he is “converted” and espouses a very fundamentalist style of Christianity. We would have to judge such cases by their fruits. Limited as the Christian commitment might be, it may also be a significantly better option than the hopelessness of that man’s previous life. However, we can hardly use this kind of exception as a defence of fundamentalism.

Let us look a little more closely at the problem. The religious fundamentalist may appear very committed, articulate, reasonable - at least initially - and courageous enough to make sacrifices for what is “right” and “true” and “orthodox”. But the central issue is not theological. It is psychological. What drives the fundamentalist is not a living relationship with God, who is full of compassion and mercy, faithful from generation to generation. What drives the fundamentalist is anxiety. Authentic religion is a relative structure that connects us with God. Religious fundamentalism is an absolute structure that connects its adherents with a human system pretending to be “god”. Fundamentalism is, in other words, a form of idealisation.

The fatal flaw at the heart of religious fundamentalism is that it allows laws and dogmas to usurp the role reserved to God. The relative is absolutised. The Great Mystery we call God, at work in the world through the mysterious Spirit of Jesus Christ, certainly uses laws and dogmas. In one form or other they are necessary. But rules and dogmas are not the ultimate thing. God alone should occupy that place in our lives.

It has become a truism that the Australian Church and society - like the rest of the human family - are in transition. We have many serious social, political, cultural, economic and religious questions and issues that will not, indeed cannot, be easily resolved. We must live with many unanswered questions that call for intelligent and

honest ongoing conversation. We must struggle for creative and imaginative strategies to promote the common good, amidst much uncertainty about what will or will not achieve that end. We must endeavour to respond intelligently and bravely to what life puts before us, especially when that is not very palatable.

None of the major questions or issues before us can be reduced to simply this or that. Every response we make will be, in some measure at least, unsatisfactory and inadequate. That is part of life in general, but it is particularly part of the curse of being born in an exciting time. This situation inevitably generates a good deal of anxiety. It is fertile ground for fundamentalism in both Church and society. People will look for simple black-and-white answers, desperate attempts will be made to rein life in and reduce it to manageable proportions. “Heretics” will be hunted down and dealt with.

In fact, the times demand something quite different from us as disciples of Jesus. We are a people who, after all, profess to always experiencing life as “not-yet”, as “in-between”, as ultimately a mystery to be lived rather than a problem to be solved. Our times call for a deep and well-grounded spirituality, one that will give birth to great patience, sincere respect, a willingness to listen, a genuine commitment to personal transformation, humility, courage and, above all, hope. They also demand intelligence and imagination, hard decisions and committed action and an unashamed trust in Divine Providence.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Was there ever a time when your religious commitment was in any way fundamentalist?
2. Do you see any relationship between sectarianism, violence and fundamentalism?
3. Describe your own experience of anxiety and the effects it has on the way you relate with people.
4. What do you think is the best way to deal with excessive anxiety in others?
5. Is there any sense in which you could describe the “pharisaism” of the Gospels as fundamentalism?
6. Do you see any signs of fundamentalism in the Church – Catholic or other – today?
7. What can we learn from the person and teaching of Jesus about dealing with fundamentalism?
8. Have you ever met anyone for whom fundamentalism may in fact have been a good option?
9. In what sense might we speak of fundamentalism as a form of idealisation?
10. What do you see as the biggest danger of fundamentalism?

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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #20

### CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

#### A DIFFERENT SORT OF KNOWING

The notion of “knowledge” of God, in both the Old and New Testaments, carries with it a strong *experiential* connotation and a profound sense of *relationship*. Consider the following references to “knowing” God found in these typical Old Testament texts – read them slowly and meditatively:

- “And those that know your name put their trust in you.” (Psalm 9:10)
- “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)
- “‘You are my witnesses,’ says the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He.’” (Isaiah 43:10)
- “Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and the needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 22:15-16)

#### ST PAUL AND CHRISTIAN “GNOSIS”

*In the New Testament, St Paul represents a development of this same Old Testament understanding of “knowing” God. For example, in his letter to the Christian community in Philippi, St Paul speaks of his deep desire “to come to know him and the power of his resurrection.” (3:10). A couple of verses later, in the same letter, Paul says he has been “taken hold of” by Christ, indicating that he is speaking of a radical life experience, one in which he is irrevocably drawn into relationship with God in Christ.*

St Paul uses the Greek word *gnosis* when he speaks of “knowledge” and this is sometimes misunderstood to link him with Greek philosophers or the early Gnostics. Nothing could be further from the truth. Greek philosophy, up to that time, never gave this term any special importance or technical meaning. For St Paul this “knowledge” is part of putting on “the mind of Christ” (1Corinthians 2:16. See also Philippians 2:5: “Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus.”) This is not the “knowing” of the philosopher (see 1Corinthians 1:17-21). “To those who have been called”, this is knowledge of “a Christ as both the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1Corinthians 1:24) Thus the Christians in Colossae are exhorted and warned:

As you received Jesus as Lord and Christ, now live your lives in him, be rooted in him and built up on him, held firm by the faith you have been taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving. Make sure that no one captivates you with the empty lure of a ‘philosophy’ of the kind that human beings hand on, based on the principles of this world and not on Christ. (2:6-8)

St Paul is certainly aware that this *gnosis* includes true information – true teaching –

about Jesus. But it is much more than that. For St Paul, “to know Christ” is clearly a radical and dynamic *relational* thing. It is, in its fullness, *identity*; to know Christ Jesus is to be on the way to becoming one with Him. Because St Paul knows this oneness in his own life, and can say to the Christians of Galatia, “You are all one in Christ” (Galatians 3:29), and of himself, “I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20), his teaching is more than mere doctrine, though it includes much rich doctrine. The “knowledge” he passes on in his teaching and preaching by the grace of God is nothing less than a living and transforming relationship with God in Christ. To receive this “knowledge” is a life-altering experience because it is to receive the person of Jesus Christ himself into our lives.

## **HISTORICAL INFLUENCES**

We can point to at least four major historical influences that have profoundly affected our current understanding of, and approach to, Christian “knowledge”:

- The emergence of the Schools in the 12<sup>th</sup> century – theology became a “science”, more or less remote from lived experience and, over time, less able to facilitate a relationship with God;
- The Counter Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century – when so much Catholic thinking was defensive and polemical; when theology was popularised and packaged in the simplified format of the questions and answers of the “catechisms” (first introduced by Martin Luther);
- The Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – when the hard sciences began to gain an ascendancy and there was a willingness to question old customs and practices, driven by a strong emphasis on human reason (“Sapere aude!” – “Dare to think!”)
- The Post-modernity of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century – when the arrogance of the Enlightenment and its confidence in human reason were called into question; when there was a loss of a sense of the whole or of the possibility of ever encountering objective truth; when individualism and disconnectedness seem to have gained an ascendancy; when the search for spirituality intensified.

The foregoing is descriptive rather than definitive; it is meant to stimulate thoughtfulness about the way we think and about the way we might therefore appropriate – or fail to appropriate – the great Christian truths. (For those interested in pursuing further the historical influences, see Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Ballantine Books, 1991.)

We find ourselves in a time of great dangers and great opportunities. Whether they be times in which we realise the opportunities or succumb to the dangers will, in great part, depend on how we deal with this issue of Christian “knowledge”. Among other things, the following would seem to be urgent needs:

- Theology must recover its roots in spirituality – the theologian is, before anything else, a contemplative, a person who has an intimate and growing relationship with God in Christ;

- Solid scholarship must be brought to bear on the key questions facing us as a community of the baptised today – it is not true that everyone’s opinion is of equal value; there are some questions that demand special expertise, knowledge and training;
- The radical non-negotiability of the Gospels must be recognised and effectively embraced – in reading the Gospels, especially in the context of the community, we meet the Risen Lord; all else must be measured against the person and teaching of Jesus.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Having reflected on one of the OT texts above, what do you think “knowledge” means there?
2. Which one of the references to St Paul caught your attention? Reflect.
3. What has been your childhood experience of Christian “knowledge”?
4. What has been your adult experience of Christian “knowledge”?
5. What steps are you taking now to increase your Christian “knowledge”?
6. In what sense do you understand the need for theology to recover its roots in spirituality?
7. Do you think everyone’s opinion on the truths of the Christian faith is of equal value? Reflect.
8. What do you think might be meant by “the radical non-negotiability of the Gospels”?
9. What would you say was the most important thing about your Christian “knowledge” now?
10. What has been the most valuable learning experience for you as a disciple of Jesus?

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #21**

### **“SHAME”**

#### **THE STORY OF “THE FALL”**

We are all familiar with the story of “The Fall” (Genesis 2:25-3:24). Given their right relationship with the Creator, “(the original human beings) felt no shame before each other” (2:25); they eat the forbidden fruit and experience “shame”; they sew “fig-leaves together to make themselves loincloths” (3:7); God comes in search of them and asks the question that echoes in every human heart: “Where are you?” (3:9). This is the universal story: Connected with God, human beings were utterly at ease with themselves and each other; disconnected from a proper relationship with God, this ease of relationship is replaced by dis-ease – we feel “shame”; in our “shame” we hide behind “fig-leaves”.

This experience of “shame” is a non-rational, gut experience. It may manifest itself in feeling awfully alone and even alien to oneself; a sort of embarrassment; perhaps sadness and emptiness when we have so much; vulnerability and nakedness in the face of existence; even a strange sense of “guilt”. And there may be no (apparent) good reason for it – nothing we have done, nothing anyone has done to us. Any of us can experience this “shame” at any time; it is not brought on by society but by our very existence. Our fundamental choice – one which will shape our existence – is between facing and fleeing.

### **FLEEING: “THE FIG-LEAF SYNDROME”**

An instinctive reaction to “shame” is denial. “Shame” is painful, so we “sew fig-leaves together” and endeavour to hide. That is pathetic and absurd, but we do it anyway. Some of us spend too much of our time and energy and talent striving to evade that dark place of our “shame” and the pain it evokes. Literally anything that can give us the illusion of being in control can also be used as a “fig-leaf”. “Fig-leaves” may be worn as badges of honour and even bring us wealth and respectability. Thus we may work excessively, strive to possess many things or grasp at popularity or respectability.

Perhaps most worrying is the violence we can wreak on ourselves and others because we are caught in the “fig-leaf syndrome”. Ernest Becker notes: “All through history it is ‘the normal average men’ who, like locusts, have laid waste to the world in order to forget themselves.” Hatred and violence are modes of flight, born of denial. The darkness behind the “fig-leaves” of our lives that we dare not face is stalked by personal “demons” that we attempt to slay “out there”. Pain that is not dealt with does not go away; it simply shifts. Much of the great literature of the world struggles with this situation – the pain of existence and our attempts to deal with it more or less well, more or less badly.

### **PRETEND FACING: THE ABUSE OF “SHAME”**

“Shame” may be used to manipulate and control people. It is not too difficult to push unsuspecting or vulnerable people into that space of “shame” and then draw them into your power by offering to rescue them from the “shame”. Social conformity often depends too much on this dynamic as does, for example, much advertising. Organised religion has been known to do the same. Thus, the faithful may be indoctrinated with the belief that this experience of “shame” is actually the result of their behaviour or non-conformity; they are told that they are “bad” or liable to “damnation” unless they conform to this or that law, custom, ritual or expectations of the group. If the faithful accept this message – consciously or unconsciously – they will be prone to evade the “shame” and seek out the solace and refuge offered by that particular religious group through conscientious adherence to its laws, faithful participation in its customs and rituals, generous commitment to its projects and uncritical acceptance of its expectations. This kind of “shame”-based religion erodes human freedom and is the very antithesis of authentic religion.

“Christian moralism” exemplifies this pseudo-religion. It is, in fact, a form of moral and psychological violence, despite its rhetoric to the contrary. When we reduce the Gospels to a moral blueprint and reduce Jesus to a moral teacher and thus reduce the Christian life to a moral project, we end up using the pursuit of “virtue” as a control

mechanism. Christianity is reduced to a sort of moral behaviourism. The “virtuous” can feel satisfied with their “virtue”, and mechanisms and rituals are established to restore the “virtue” of the “virtuous” when it is “lost”. Mysticism and the liberating mystery of communion are forgotten. This is probably what Marx meant when he called religion “the opiate of the people”.

## **FACING: THE CROSS AND THE EMPTY TOMB**

The ultimate and tragic irony of this kind of pseudo-religion for its followers is that it uses the universal experience of “shame” to avoid that very experience. Authentic religious experience, as the Bible testifies, is about the inner journey which entails, among other things, a liberating encounter with the Eternal Lover precisely in that experience where we know our indigence and utter vulnerability, our poverty and utter helplessness in the face of existence. There, and only there, can we be sure that we are not cheating when we hear the voice within that reminds us of our divine destiny. The experience of “shame” is – potentially at least – the gateway to our humanity in its deepest possibilities.

The cross and the empty tomb are the two great symbols of Christianity. These symbols invite us into our humanity with the promise of freedom; they carry the profoundly reassuring truth – and we all need desperately to be reassured in this matter – that facing into the dark night of our souls will not only not destroy us, it is the one and only path to become what we are called to be as human beings. God has already entered that place of “shame”. God awaits us there and, in and through Jesus, says, “Come, follow me. Don’t keep the pain in circulation – live through it and out of it. It will destroy you if you do not live it; you will destroy it if you do live it; I am inviting you to be in love, not to do virtuous things. Come!” Karl Rahner puts it well:

“We Christians, then, are really the only people who can forgo an ‘opiate’ in our existence or an analgesic for our lives. Christianity forbids us to reach for an analgesic in such a way that we are no longer willing to drink the chalice of the death of this existence with Jesus Christ. And to this extent there is no doubt that in living out its Christian existence Christianity is required to say in an absolute and sober realism: yes, this existence is incomprehensible, for it passes through something incomprehensible in which all of our comprehending is taken from us. It passes through death. And it is only when this is not only said in pious platitudes, but rather is accepted in the hardness of real life – for we do not die at the end, but we die throughout the whole of life, and, as Seneca knew, our death begins at our birth – and it is only when we live out this pessimistic realism and renounce every ideology which absolutizes a particular sector of human existence and makes it an idol, it is only then that it is possible for us to allow God to give us the hope which really makes us free.”

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. How would you describe this inner experience of “shame”?
2. What do you understand by “the fig-leaf syndrome”? Reflect on the basis of personal experience.
3. “Hatred and violence are modes of flight, born of denial.” Reflect.
4. In what sense might it be said that “we keep the pain in circulation”?

5. What do you find helpful in facing and dealing with your inner pain?
  6. Have you had any experience of “shame” being abused? Reflect.
  7. How would life look for you and those you love if you all dealt with pain at its source?
  8. How might you deal with pain at its source in families and other groups?
  9. “I am inviting you to be in love, not to do virtuous things.” Reflect.
  10. Is your life focused more on what God wants to do for you or what you think you must do for God?
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #22

### “MYSTICISM”

#### THE “MORE THAN”

Everything points; life is evocative. Nothing is *merely* this or that; every person, event or thing says: “Not me, more than me!” The more we know about the cosmos, the more we know we do not know; every discovery or answer is an invitation to go further. “The more than” pervades all that is. It is most obviously there in the spectacular and the very beautiful and the highly complex; it is also there in the mundane and the ordinary, it is as much part of the grain of sand as the ocean that produced it, as much in the moment of exciting triumph as in the moment of boredom, in the experience of happiness as in the experience of sadness.

My own heart constantly presses for the “more than” – never completely satisfied, always leaning out over the abyss. Any moment of satisfaction or completion is temporary and itself contains the seeds of dissatisfaction and incompleteness. To be human is to be always in between; life is suspension, and we do a violence to ourselves – and others – when we try to pretend otherwise. And we are all prone to pretend otherwise, because we cannot stand ... what? The anxiety? The fear? The sadness of it all? The loneliness? The terror? Probably all of these and a whole lot more. Thus we flee into busyness, we hoard possessions, we escape into roles, we sleep or eat or drink too much, we use a multitude of subterfuges and games and pretensions to escape. The tragedy is that if we only faced these experiences – the anxiety, fear, sadness, etc – we would discover in them and through them the “more than” that would lead us into an experience of freedom and grace that we cannot even begin to imagine while we are in flight mode. The Irish Dominican, Donagh O’Shea, describes this nicely:

Fear takes on many disguises and it lurks in everything we do. Its chief form is *restlessness*. This restlessness drives us into a search for constant entertainment, a forlorn attempt to forget our reality entirely. We have to dismantle this



restlessness, layer by layer; we have to look underneath. What do we find? We find *sadness*. No, I am not talking about depression or anything that we should be cured of. I am talking about a calm and gentle sadness that lies at the heart of human existence; it is an essential quality of being human, as distinct from being a machine. If we run away from it we are running away from human life itself. It is not quite what people usually mean by sadness, and in the long run it is the real basis of joy. It is a kind of *tenderness*; it ensures that we approach everything as human beings, open and vulnerable; it is the essential face of humanity.

## **MISFITS WHO BELONG**

We will always be pretending – living in flight mode – unless or until we acknowledge that the “more than” of life is the constant reminder and intimation of what we desire most. Unless or until we face the heart’s hunger for the “more than” and what it points to, and allow ourselves to feel the deep lostness and incompleteness that come from our constant brushes with the “more than” and what it reveals about us, we will hold back from our best possibilities as human beings.

We are all misfits who belong; none of us fits here, but we all belong here. We waste too much of our time and energy and talent on trying not to be misfits – we do so want to *fit*. In our anxiety we believe that if we *fit*, we will be “someone”. There is one thing more tragic than this anxious striving to fit – that is the belief, finally, that one *does* fit.

We are made for the “more than”. We could also say that we are made – or become what we most deeply are – in and through the “more than”. What the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, says of the discipline of philosophy applies to life as such:

University philosophers will never understand what Novalis said: ‘Philosophy is, strictly speaking, a homesickness’. It is not a discipline that can be learned ... He who does not know what homesickness is, cannot philosophise ... because we do not feel at home anywhere, because we are unceasingly being pushed up against Being, against that because we feel at home nowhere except on the way to the total and essential. We are without a native land and are restlessness itself, living restlessness; it is because of this that it is necessary for us to philosophise. ... And we are not allowed to let it pass away, to comfort ourselves in an illusion about totality and a satisfactory infinitude. We must not only bear this restlessness in us but accentuate it .... only then are we in a position to be ‘gripped’. And when we thus make ourselves ‘grippable’, by handing ourselves over to reality, our homesickness makes us into human beings.

## **WHAT IS MYSTICISM?**

Mysticism is what happens when we hear and heed the call of the “more than” – we slowly become one with the One. We are all called to be mystics; mysticism is the deepest expression of our humanity. We want unity – with ourselves, with others, with the world, with what is true and good and beautiful. Those we call “great mystics” – Benedict, Bernard, Teresa, Catherine, etc – are pioneers of humanity; these are the people who have travelled to the farther reaches of human nature and speak of their experience.

Specifically *Christian* mysticism grows in and through the Paschal Mystery. It is Christ-centred. Its great symbols are the cross and the empty tomb. The “more than” that beckons us in every moment of every day opens into the freedom of the children of God – through Him, with Him, in Him. Jesus did not come to teach us a moral code, but to set us free to become one with the One. What is Christianity? It is “being in love”. In that communion of love we find communion with ourselves, with other people and with the created world. We also uncover a wonderful paradox: in the oneness we find our unique individuality and true identity. There we also discover the truth of every person, event or thing.

Finally, a word of warning: it is very easy to lose one’s bearings in yielding to the “more than”. There is, for example, only a hair’s breadth between mysticism and madness – and fanaticism. Mysticism is intimacy with the Great Mystery; madness is loss of intimacy; fanaticism is (toxic) intimacy with ego – your own or someone else’s. Mysticism needs the checks of community and the wisdom of experienced guides. This is not a journey to make on one’s own. Would it be better, therefore, not to attempt the journey, to ignore the call of the “more than”, to live a controlled, ordered, respectable existence? How do you think Jesus would respond to such a suggestion? That sort of domestication of existence has been the death of Christianity. The renewal of Christianity – the recovery of the power of the Gospel for our world – depends on a new generation of well-grounded Christian mystics more than anything else.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Describe in your own words the “more than” as you experience it in daily living.
2. Why do you think we play games and pretend? Reflect on your own experience.
3. Have you felt the “sadness” Donagh O’Shea speaks of? Reflect.

4. What do you make of the suggestion that we are all misfits, but we all belong?
  5. What do you think Heidegger means by “satisfactory infinitude”?
  6. “Our homesickness makes us into human beings.” Reflect.
  7. “Christianity is being in love.” Reflect.
  8. Who do you say Jesus is?
  9. What is the essence of the Gospel?
  10. “Renewal depends on well-grounded Christian mystics more than anything else.” Reflect.
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #23

### “REMEMBERING”

#### MEMORY – A MIXED BLESSING

There is a memorable line in Eugene O’Neill’s 1956 play, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*: “The past is the present, isn’t it? It’s the future too. We all try to lie out of that but life won’t let us” (2:2). Try as we might, there are some things we just cannot forget – hurts, disappointments, failures, missed opportunities, traumas and so on. In fact, we also remember many things – for better or worse – even when we are not aware we remember them. Thus we might remember how to cook a pasta or drive a car; we might also remember the pain associated with certain people and events, a pain we thought we had forgotten but had simply consigned it to the unconscious.

And there is the flipside of memory’s coin: Try as we might, there are times when we just cannot remember: “What’s her name?” “Where did I leave the keys?” “Why did I come out here into the kitchen?” And so on. In its extreme form, we have the tragedy of Alzheimer’s disease and various forms of dementia. Perhaps one of the most notable things about people so afflicted is their disorientation and confusion. Although we may be haunted and distressed by remembering certain things, it is probably fair to say that it is nothing compared with the distress of not remembering anything.

Consider the situation of forgetfulness from another angle. How do you feel when those who ought to remember you forget you? For example, a number of people have worked very hard for the parish fête – especially you – and they are all thanked by name from the pulpit on Sunday – except you. It is generally affirming to be remembered and distressing to be forgotten. It is almost as if the forgetting means we do not exist. And we feel more or less badly. Just as *our* remembering or forgetting affects *our* being in the world, so our *being remembered or our being forgotten* affects our being in the world. It hardly needs to be added, that our remembering or forgetting also affects *others’* being in the world. Our connectedness – with ourselves, with others and with

the assorted facts of daily existence – depends absolutely on someone remembering. If we do not remember, others must.

## **TO BE HUMAN IS TO REMEMBER**

We are dealing with a mystery when we begin to explore such questions. We will never understand it. Each human being is a particular instance of the Great Mystery beyond the mystery. Facing such a subject, we ought to be more readily disposed to awe and reverence and humility than rational comprehension and the desire for control and mastery. Every “answer” we produce will contain more questions. So we proceed with deep respect for this remarkable being – this mysterious, tragic-comic *remembering* being.

In this being, the past, in some mysterious way, remains with us – it is present. The relationship or connection with the past will affect us for better or worse. We are not merely hapless victims of the past either; we can, again in some mysterious way, re-configure that past which is present through remembering. The past as past is unchangeable; the past as remembered is changeable.

We have already noted the impact on our lives when the remembering fails, more or less. What might the impact be when the remembering works well? Consider, for example, the photograph of a loved one you keep near, the gathering with old friends, the thoughts and images and feelings associated with a dear departed parent, the impact of a near-death experience, the long-term effects of a dedicated and fine teacher, the thoughtfulness of a loving spouse. When we are remembering in this way, we are in fact allowing life into us. We are opening to wider horizons. Our better possibilities are awakening and we are inclining towards goodness and truth and love.

Even when we find ourselves remembering painful and perhaps tragic events, we can still experience this as opening us to the greater good, expanding our personal horizons, enabling us to be more merciful and compassionate. There is a remarkable paradox here: The person as remembering is thus, potentially, the person as emerging, coming to be what he or she is called to be, moving into the future in a particular kind of way. It is not difficult to see, then, that the life formation process is essentially dependent on our remembering formatively rather than deformatively. Our freedom from unresolved conflicts, regrets, resentments, grudges and the like, depends on us remembering well. “Forgive and forget” is bad advice; much better to remember and forgive.

## **AS CHRISTIANS WE MUST REMEMBER WELL**

We could think of both the writing and reading of the Bible as an act of remembering. The Bible records the remembering that lies at the heart of the relationship between God and the Chosen People. The Bible is as much about Yahweh’s faithfulness as it is about the People’s struggle to be faithful. In other words, the Bible records the fact that through the Covenant Yahweh has undertaken to remember the People and the People have undertaken to remember Yahweh, and the remembering allows the intimacy to grow. When Yahweh appears, for example, in the burning bush (cf Exodus 3:1-15), Moses is asked to remember what Yahweh remembers – the Covenant of old.

Forgetting Yahweh – ie forgetting the Covenant – is the root of all their sins (Cf Judges

8:34; Jeremiah 2:13; Hosea 2:15). One of the central roles of the Prophets is to call the People back from their forgetfulness, to help them remember once again who they are (Cf Micah 6:3ff; Jeremiah 13:22-25). In their forgetfulness they lose their identity. In a sense, they lose their very existence.

***Why do the People celebrate the Passover? Why keep the Sabbath? So that they will always remember, and in the remembering they will grow in the relationship. The celebration of ritual and feast is an act of remembering in itself. That act facilitates living in remembrance. Remembering is a particularly Godly act – it is central to the Covenant and is implied in the emet (faithfulness) of Yahweh. (Eg “Can a woman forget her baby at the breast, feel no pity for the child she has borne?” (Isaiah 49:15).)***

The essential place and intent of remembering is maintained in the New Testament and to the present day in the community of the baptised. The Covenantal act of remembering within the community of the baptized focuses on Jesus and the great action of God in and through His Passover. Each time the community gathers and breaks the bread and shares the cup, we give thanks in remembrance of Him (eg cf Luke 22:19). More than that, the very act of remembering in the Eucharist is also a “proclamation” of His saving death and resurrection (cf 1Corinthians 11:23-27).

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Describe your own experience of the pain of remembering.
2. Describe the pain of forgetting.
3. Reflect on the dynamics of being forgotten/remembered.
4. Reflect on the difference between “Forgive and forget” and “Remember and forgive”.
5. In what way is the reading of the Bible an act of remembering for you?
6. How is the Jewish celebration of the Passover an act of remembering?
7. How is the Christian celebration of Eucharist an act of remembering?
8. What do you do to keep the memory of Jesus alive in your daily living?
9. How do you think remembering well relates to hope?
10. What might it mean to “live in remembrance”?

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #24**

**“LONGING”**

## ENOUGH IS NEVER ENOUGH

Why are we so fascinated with the biggest, the longest, the fastest, the widest, the strongest ... the whateverest? Why do people climb high mountains and explore uncharted places? What is it about competition that excites us? Why do we keep asking questions about ourselves and the world? Why do utopian myths have such power over the human imagination, repeatedly through history provoking people to do some very strange, wonderful, sometimes heroic – from time-to-time tragic – things? From whence come the pathologies of perfectionism, jingoism, racism, sectarianism, greed etc – all twisted manifestations of something that runs very deep in human nature and drives us on, even when it is destructive? Why do we ever get bored and restless? We know, as if by instinct, that a rut is but a shallow grave, that satisfaction contains the seeds of dissatisfaction, arrival implies departure. Enough is never enough. What is it with us human beings that keeps us reaching out for the ‘more than’ and the ‘beyond’? What do we want?

There are a multitude of useful responses to the above questions. One thing seems certain, however: we just cannot stop longing. We are yearning animals, always urging, always leaning into the future, unceasingly reaching for more than we currently are or do or have. Even the cynics and pragmatists among us cannot help the longing, even if they reduce it to something that has no more significance or meaning than an instinct or biological reaction. They differ from the rest of the human family, not in their experience of the longing as such, but in their explanation of it and what they do with it.

Many have tasted the disappointment of assuming that our longing will be satisfied by this or that achievement, the wonderful spouse and bright, well-behaved, healthy children, the right job, the good address, the rewarding career; or that the longing will be satisfied by wealth and possessions, a “good” sex partner, respectability, travel, etc. Sometimes it drives us to do more of the same ultimately unsatisfying things; sometimes the disappointment drives us into despair or despair’s disguised and more sophisticated and socially acceptable expression, cynicism. The disappointment is frustrated longing – a matter of who we are, rather than what we do or have. While there may be much satisfaction in what we do or have, there is a longing that persists, a yearning that will not go away or settle for doing or having one more thing. The question remains: what do we *really* want?

## LIKING AND WANTING

Suppose we were to distinguish between what we *like* and what we *want*, the first referring to the more general manifestations of longing, addressed in what we do and/or have; the second referring to the deeper manifestation of that same longing, and only addressed in our very beings. For example, I might like to pursue this career, marry that person, travel there, eat a certain type of food, associate with so-and-so, play tennis, wrack my brains over philosophical questions, cook pasta dishes, go to the day-night cricket games, etc. There may literally be hundreds of things I *like*. And part and parcel of a healthy life is knowing what I like and being able to satisfy at least some of those likes.

Imagine a world in which every one of my likes is satisfied. It would in fact be boring, probably sickeningly so. Thus, we know that hunger can sharpen our enjoyment of

food, and absence can make the heart grow fonder, whereas constant satiation and persistent presence can be oppressive. It should come as no surprise to us that many of our children, raised in middle-class affluence, show a desire to shake off much of the middle class trappings when they are old enough to assert their independence. Similarly, it should not come as a surprise when a career-oriented person who has been highly functional, perhaps a workaholic, starts to question the validity of his/her life. We actually long for something much more than all those things we like. And having an abundance of the things we like will never give us what we want.

### **WHAT WE WANT GIVES BIRTH TO RELIGION**

Religion, when it is faithful to its best possibilities, emerges out of this realm of the deepest longings of the human heart; religion provides structures that will facilitate the longing and assist us to find what our beings crave. One of the tragedies of recent centuries is the emergence of the mythology that religion is a sign of immaturity, an instrument of control, an obstacle to human growth and therefore something to be vigorously rooted out of society or, at best, left to the weak of mind and spirit.

People, at least in the West at the beginning of the twenty-first century, can be forgiven for espousing this mythology – whether implicitly or explicitly. We, the agents of organised religion – particularly Christianity – are too often guilty as accused. We have reduced religion (ie Christianity) to a system that did preserve many people in a psychologically and morally immature state, and did exercise unwarranted and obstructive control over their lives. This is not the failure of religion as such (or Christianity), but the failure of those of us who misrepresented it. And the result of that misrepresentation might be far more tragic than the obvious rejection of our claims by the citizens of a post-modern world. Listen to the observation of one of the twentieth century's best-known psychiatrists:

‘I have treated many hundreds of patients, the larger number being Protestants, a smaller number Jews and not more than five or six believing Catholics. Among all my patients in the second half of my life ... there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that everyone of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given their followers and none of them has really been healed who did not regain his religious outlook.’ (C G Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 264)

### **THE WISDOM OF MONASTICISM**

Monasticism is perhaps the most simple and profound expression of human existence, and the longing that besets the human heart. Archbishop Rembert Weakland expresses it well when he writes of Thomas Merton:

‘When a monk enters a monastery, what is asked of him is, “Are you truly seeking God?” The question isn’t, “Have you found God?” The question is, “Is he seeking God? Is his motivation highly involved in that search of who and what God is in relationship to us?” It’s not philosophical – it’s existential. And Merton, to me, was a great searcher. He was constantly unhappy, as all great searchers are. He was constantly ill at ease, he was constantly restless, as all searchers are - because that’s part of the search. And in that sense he was the

perfect monk. Contemplation isn't satisfaction – it's search.' (Rembert Weakland in Paul Wilkes, ed, *Merton By Those Who Knew Him Best*, Harper and Row, 1984, p.163)

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Give an example of your own experience that “enough is never enough”.
  2. What do you think it means to say “satisfaction contains the seeds of dissatisfaction”.
  3. Describe in your own words the distinction between “liking” and “wanting”.
  4. What do you think is going on when people “reject religion”?
  5. Reflect on Jung's observation. How might religion offer some healing?
  6. Reflect on Weakland's observation. In what way might “restlessness” be a good thing?
  7. How would you describe your life now, compared with a much earlier period?
  8. What has been and what is your experience of religion?
  9. Describe in your own way the deepest longings of your heart.
  10. In what sense might we say that God longs for us?
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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #25**

“HOPE”

### **HOPE IS NOT OPTIMISM**

Optimism can be a useful thing. It may assist us, for example, to approach otherwise difficult situations in a positive manner and that, in turn, can often mean the difference between success or failure, winning or losing. For instance, a sick person who is able to maintain a positive disposition is probably more likely to get well or, at least, deal with the illness better than someone who becomes overwhelmingly negative about their illness. Our culture, not surprisingly, makes a lot of optimism – so much, in fact, that it is often confused with hope. Optimism is not hope – hope is something much more.

Optimism has nothing to do with reality as such. It is an attitude that may or may not be founded on what is real; it may in fact be generated by telling yourself lies. Or it may be a sign of naiveté or ignorance or even stupidity. Optimism may have more to do with a naturally sunny disposition than with any realistic perception of what is actually going on. Optimism – and its opposite, pessimism – cannot carry the weight of human experience when we get down to what really matters, when reality starts to assert itself and we must respond. Ultimately, the only categories that will work in the face of reality are hope and despair.



Hope, on the other hand, has everything to do with what is real. More precisely, hope is born of our connection with the Real. It is an expression of transcendence, for it sees the immediate in the context of the ultimate. Hope is the confidence that we are participators in an unfolding mystery whose ultimate intent is creative not destructive, good not evil. Hope recognises the “more than” and the “beyond” in every person, event or thing. It is, therefore, able to stand amidst failure and disappointment and even the blatant triumph of evil in this or that situation and remain hopeful. Hope says this world and this life we share are dim echoes of the Great Mystery beyond the mystery. Human existence finds its consummation in communion, the union of all in the All.

## **A STORY**

Last night I dreamt that Pius XII was suddenly and inexplicably possessed by the spirit of John Paul II; just as the latter was later to publicly and deliberately oppose the Communists, so Pius was going to publicly and deliberately oppose the Nazis. He was standing on the balcony overlooking St Peter’s Square. It was 1939 – I am not sure whether the war had been declared or not; it does not matter. Pius announced to the thousands of people gathered below that he had just completed an Apostolic Letter to the bishops of Germany. In that letter he spoke very strongly against Nazism; he forbade any of the German bishops or priests or brothers or nuns or any Catholics, in any way, to support the Nazis; those who did support the Nazis would be excommunicated; he directed the Catholics in Germany to do all in their power to thwart Hitler.

You could have heard a pin drop in that square. Then, as if a signal had been given, the huge crowd fell to their knees and Pius blessed them. I have never seen a blessing like that – so solemn, so full of things to come.

Hitler, in his fury, outlawed Catholicism. He ordered the immediate arrest of bishops, priests, brothers and nuns and prominent Catholics throughout Germany. Like the Christians of old, these Catholics were given an option: Choose the State and live or choose the faith and die. Most took the horrible choice – they chose to die rather than live under Nazism. Trains drawing endless numbers of cattle cars behind them, carrying Catholic bishops, priests, brothers and nuns and prominent lay people, daily went off to places of extermination. In a few weeks the persecution began to round up all Catholics; Catholics were required to wear a yellow cross stitched to their jackets and shirts. Millions were savagely exterminated.

As if that were not enough. Hitler ordered Goering to have the Luftwaffe bomb St Peter’s Basilica and the Vatican. In a matter of days these grand old buildings were reduced to dust, nothing but dust.

And, all of a sudden, as happens only in dreams, there I was. I knelt in the dust, somewhere near where those thousands had knelt to receive the Pope’s blessing in 1939, and I wept; I picked up a handful of the dust and it streamed through my fingers. I wept for the vandalism and the destruction of priceless works of art, magnificent and matchless expressions of the human spirit, destroyed out of sheer nastiness. Never again would there be another ceiling to the Sistine Chapel or another Pieta; gone were the priceless treasures of the Vatican Museum and the sheer majesty of St Peter’s.

Through my tears I looked across to an ancient, small building on the edge of the dust. There was no one else there, except a fragile old man in a white soutane, walking stick, bent double, as if he were intent on finding something he'd dropped. He slowly straightened up, to a half bend – it was Pope John Paul. He looked across at me; slowly his face broke into a smile.

## **ENDNOTE**

This “dream” has a life of its own. Once released onto the page, it is open to all sorts of interpretations and meanings. As author, I do not “own” it, nor can I tell you exactly what it means. It was given to me and I pass it on.

Initially, at least, it prompts me to think a couple of things about hope. The strongest and most real hope springs from despair, or the nearness of despair; it grows out of the dust of our broken dreams, when we have become desperate to do something “real” rather than something “right”. The categories of optimism and pessimism cannot carry the weight of our struggles – the proper categories are hope and despair.

The dust of that place of destruction reminded me – together with the Pope’s smile – to wonder what matters in the end. If the road to hell is paved with good intentions, the road to heaven must surely be strewn with useless baggage. And the emptiness of that place put me in mind of the emptiness of the empty tomb. Maybe our greatest hope is found in our emptiness and the Church’s emptiness? Maybe the Spirit of God is working mightily through purgation, stripping, deconstruction and disintegration? Perhaps the gift of hope is more readily available to our generation than any other generation for a long time? What do you think?

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

11. How would you describe optimism? Give an example from your own life.
12. How would you describe hope? Recall your own experience of hope.
13. What difference does Jesus make to your daily life?
14. What was your first reaction to the story above? Reflect on that.
15. Reflect on some image from the story that caught your attention.
16. How might the Spirit work through purgation, stripping and deconstruction in your life?
17. How might martyrdom generate hope?
18. Do you think there might be some connection between affluence and despair?
19. In your experience, do you think Christians are more likely to be hopeful than others? Reflect.
20. What do you think it means to say “the road to heaven is paved with useless baggage”?

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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #26

### “ANTICIPATION”

#### **WE LIVE SUSPENDED**

The word *anticipation* suggests something fascinating about human nature. The English word comes from the Latin words *ante*, meaning *before*, and *capere*, meaning *to take* or *to seize*. The English word thus implies *taking hold of things beforehand*. Clearly there is something about this process that is automatic, instinctive. Whether we like it or not, we tend to take hold of the future – or at least we try to. Just as our lives are, typically, a constant openness to and appropriation and configuration of the past, they are also a constant openness to and appropriation and configuration of the future.

We live suspended. Even as we are necessarily grounded in the past, we are also, in some mysterious way grounded in the future. We are, as it were, always and necessarily ahead of ourselves, always leaning into the not-yet, lurching towards territory that is uncharted by us – yet, we are “there” already.

Again, just as remembering can evoke a profound sense of the mysterious and wonderful creation that we are, so anticipating can have the same effect. What sort of a being is this that draws past and future into the present? What meanings and implications can such concepts as “past”, “present” and “future” have for this remembering and anticipating being? Where am I? *Who* am I?

Often, when we are dealing with difficult human issues – eg, anxiety or depression – we look to either the past or present or both the past and present for understanding of what is happening. We seldom look to the future for the cause of the way we feel or behave now. My depression, for example, might be telling me something about the past and how I remember it. But it might also be telling me something about the future and how I anticipate it. A failure to anticipate realistically and creatively – a failure to live into the future in accord with my nature, respectful of its needs, possibilities and limits – can cause more or less deformation. The future is, in some measure, already written into my being – it is essential that we listen and pay close attention to what is given and what must yet be created in light of the givens.

#### **A STORY: “THE MAN FELL OVER”**

“Never seen anything like it,” said the man with the hat and the sunburned face. “Went down like a sack-a-spuds, he did. Poor bugger.” And a young woman in a navy pants suit said he was walking towards her and just fell over. “I got the fright of my life,” she said, holding a handkerchief to her mouth with her right hand while she held her stomach with the other hand. A young man with a ring in his ear asked, “Is he all right?” and looked from side to side. Another man just glanced in his direction for a moment and kept walking. An elderly man and a plump woman, both with cameras slung over their shoulders, paused. The man said, “Did somebody call an ambulance?” The accent betrayed someone from America’s mid-West. A man said, “Sorrigh mate. They’re on their way.”

Meanwhile a middle-aged woman knelt beside the man, took his right arm and, with two fingers, gently felt for a pulse. She was trying to speak to him. “Can you hear me?” she asked. The man opened his eyes. He looked confused and disoriented for a moment. Then he smiled faintly. “I’ve been waiting for this,” he said, in a soft, matter-of-fact sort of way. “Are you diabetic? Do you have low blood pressure? Are you on medication?” And so the middle-aged woman gently but definitely spoke to him, as a doctor might talk to a new patient in the surgery.

The sound of a siren was heard at the other end of George Street, and the people who had gathered started to move on, merging with the lunchtime crowd. Like the water in a creek flowing around a sandbank, they passed by and around this woman and this man, she kneeling, he now sitting up, with his arms casually around his knees, his right hand grasping his left wrist.

“Thank you,” the man said. He looked at her, then looked away and said again, as if to someone else who was not there, “Thank you”. “You’ve torn the knee of your trousers,” she said. He looked at the small tear, brushed it with his right hand before returning to hold his wrist again. “What were you waiting for?” she said. He looked back at her, quizzically, as if she had said something he did not understand. “A moment ago, you said you had been waiting for this.” “Did I say that?” He looked away. “Yes,” he said, “I was not aware that I was waiting for it. But now that it has happened, I know I have been waiting for this for some time now.”

If the ambulance had not arrived, they might well have become part of the street, with people now hardly sparing them a sideways glance. The paramedics took over and were very professional in the way they dismantled the human tableau. “Do you know this man?” one of them said to the woman. “No ... uh ... I mean ... well, no I don’t.” She could not understand her stuttering response. She had never seen this man before. He was a complete stranger. “Er, can I go with you?” she blurted out. The paramedic said, “Sure, get in the back.”

And so they drove towards St Vincent’s Hospital. No need for the siren; the man seemed to be okay. He lay back on the stretcher, with his head turned slightly to one side, away from the woman, the smile now confidently on his face. “I’m an accountant,” he said, apropos of nothing. “I have a wonderful wife of twenty-three years, four healthy, intelligent children – good kids. My life is humming.” He turned and looked at the woman and laughed silently. “So what were you waiting for?” she said, sensing that she was being drawn into some place that was at once new and utterly familiar. “What was I waiting for? I don’t know. But it just happened.” And they both began to laugh as they had not laughed for many years.

## **JESUS CHRIST AND HISTORY**

Because of the action of God in Christ, we experience history as moving towards an end point of definitive victory – where good triumphs over evil, the truth over the lie, love over hate, justice and peace over injustice and violence, life over death, being over non-being. The human experience of anticipation is radically transformed by this conviction. We move into the future with a sure sense of hope; my personal history, the history of those I love, the history of the entire human family and the history of the

cosmos, is moving towards fulfilment in the timelessness of the Trinity. Our future, the future of the Church and the world are in the hands of God. All else is relative to this. This sense of history – this anticipation of a triumphant end point, so central to the Christian consciousness – gives me a liberating perspective on every person, event and thing I encounter.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

21. Recall your experience of anticipation as a child. Give an example.
  22. How do you experience anticipation now, as an adult?
  23. Give one example of formative anticipation and one of deformative anticipation.
  24. What does it mean to say, “you have a future”?
  25. What does it mean to say, “you live suspended”?
  26. What struck you about the story?
  27. How do you experience waiting? Give an example.
  28. In what sense might we speak of life itself as waiting?
  29. Can you recall any passages from the Gospels that speak of the way the future will unfold?
  30. What does it mean to you to be a person of hope?
- 

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #26**

### **“ANTICIPATION”**

#### **WE LIVE SUSPENDED**

The word *anticipation* suggests something fascinating about human nature. The English word comes from the Latin words *ante*, meaning *before*, and *capere*, meaning *to take* or *to seize*. The English word thus implies *taking hold of things beforehand*. Clearly there is something about this process that is automatic, instinctive. Whether we like it or not, we tend to take hold of the future – or at least we try to. Just as our lives are, typically, a constant openness to and appropriation and configuration of the past, they are also a constant openness to and appropriation and configuration of the future.

We live suspended. Even as we are necessarily grounded in the past, we are also, in some mysterious way grounded in the future. We are, as it were, always and necessarily ahead of ourselves, always leaning into the not-yet, lurching towards territory that is uncharted by us – yet, we are “there” already.

Again, just as remembering can evoke a profound sense of the mysterious and wonderful creation that we are, so anticipating can have the same effect. What sort of a

being is this that draws past and future into the present? What meanings and implications can such concepts as “past”, “present” and “future” have for this remembering and anticipating being? Where am I? *Who* am I?

Often, when we are dealing with difficult human issues – eg, anxiety or depression – we look to either the past or present or both the past and present for understanding of what is happening. We seldom look to the future for the cause of the way we feel or behave now. My depression, for example, might be telling me something about the past and how I remember it. But it might also be telling me something about the future and how I anticipate it. A failure to anticipate realistically and creatively – a failure to live into the future in accord with my nature, respectful of its needs, possibilities and limits – can cause more or less deformation. The future is, in some measure, already written into my being – it is essential that we listen and pay close attention to what is given and what must yet be created in light of the givens.

### **A STORY: “THE MAN FELL OVER”**

“Never seen anything like it,” said the man with the hat and the sunburned face. “Went down like a sack-a-spuds, he did. Poor bugger.” And a young woman in a navy pants suit said he was walking towards her and just fell over. “I got the fright of my life,” she said, holding a handkerchief to her mouth with her right hand while she held her stomach with the other hand. A young man with a ring in his ear asked, “Is he all right?” and looked from side to side. Another man just glanced in his direction for a moment and kept walking. An elderly man and a plump woman, both with cameras slung over their shoulders, paused. The man said, “Did somebody call an ambulance?” The accent betrayed someone from America’s mid-West. A man said, “Sorrigh mate. They’re on their way.”

Meanwhile a middle-aged woman knelt beside the man, took his right arm and, with two fingers, gently felt for a pulse. She was trying to speak to him. “Can you hear me?” she asked. The man opened his eyes. He looked confused and disoriented for a moment. Then he smiled faintly. “I’ve been waiting for this,” he said, in a soft, matter-of-fact sort of way. “Are you diabetic? Do you have low blood pressure? Are you on medication?” And so the middle-aged woman gently but definitely spoke to him, as a doctor might talk to a new patient in the surgery.

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## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

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  32. How do you experience anticipation now, as an adult?
  33. Give one example of formative anticipation and one of deformative anticipation.
  34. What does it mean to say, “you have a future”?
  35. What does it mean to say, “you live suspended”?
  36. What struck you about the story?
  37. How do you experience waiting? Give an example.
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  39. Can you recall any passages from the Gospels that speak of the way the future will unfold?
  40. What does it mean to you to be a person of hope?
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #27

### “FORGIVENESS”

#### **FORGIVENESS – WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?**

Recall a time when you needed to be “forgiven”. Why was “forgiveness” needed? What were your thoughts and feelings in your need? Assuming you were “forgiven” – by yourself and/or another – how did it happen? What were your thoughts and feelings when you were “forgiven”? Now reverse that and think about a time when you “forgave” someone else. We could approach the subject another way. What happens when a person holds a grudge or harbours resentment or is chronically angry? In other words, what is happening in a person who is unwilling or unable to forgive?

In the light of such reflections, we are reminded of *relationships* and how important they are – our relationship with God, with ourselves, with other people and with the events and things of our world. Our very humanity is constituted – or de-constituted – in and through relationships. The richness of our humanity is defined by the richness of our relationships. When relationships are damaged or broken, we know – as if by instinct – that something must be done. At the very least it is a life-saving reaction, at its best it is a restorative movement that takes us more deeply into relationships and therefore more deeply into our humanity.

And what do we typically do to restore, heal and deepen relationships that have been damaged?

- We *name* what has happened, as best we can;
- We *admit wrong* where that is appropriate and we *apologise*;
- We allow the one who has been hurt to *speak of his/her hurt* and
- We *listen* to them and hear them out with care and concern;
- We resolve to *avoid such hurt happening in the future*;
- We *celebrate the reconciliation* in some way.

#### **THREE PARADOXES OF FORGIVENESS**

When we have been hurt by someone – especially when we are young and vulnerable – the negative feelings may run very deep. In fact, they may stay with us throughout our lives. It can be quite destructive if we add “guilt” to these feelings, berating ourselves for not having “forgiven” the one or ones who hurt us. In such instances, forgiveness is not the issue – psychological healing is the issue. Paradoxically, the path to forgiveness may involve encouraging ourselves to actually feel the anger, feel the resentment, feel the “hatred”. In this way we may gradually expand the margin of freedom to a point where we can say something like: “God, if it was up to me, I would like to see this



person fall under a bus; I would like to want to leave it in your hands though". There is forgiveness, or at least the beginnings of forgiveness.

The second paradox is suggested by Simone Weil: "Amid the multitude of those who seem to owe us something, God is our only real debtor. But our debt to him is greater. He will release us from it if we forgive him. Sin is an offence offered to God from resentment at the debts he owes and does not pay us. By forgiving God we cut the root of sin in ourselves. At the bottom of every sin there is anger against God. If we forgive God for his crime against us, which is to have made us finite creatures, he will forgive our crime against him, which is that we are finite creatures" (Simone Weil, "The Father's Silence" in G. Panichas, *The Simone Weil Reader*, David McKay Co., 1977, 433).

The third paradox is found in the common resistance to forgiveness. Why do we resist it? Perhaps because it makes us feel vulnerable? Maybe we find an identity in our hurts or in having an enemy, and forgiveness threatens to deprive us of that identity? It is amazing how many of us cling to our little bundles of death – our resentments, grudges, favourite hurts – and how we are so ready to bring them out at the appointed time and share and compare them with others similarly clinging to their bundles of death. (And this is not the case with those whose lives have been blighted by deep hurts, people who struggle just to go on, often showing a quiet heroism.) The great paradox of it is that, when we live through the death, we come into a whole new freedom and vitality – a freedom and vitality that resentment blocks.

#### **A STORY: "THE HANDS"**

The other day I had a vision. Well, some images came into my mind. Very interconnected they were, and they told a story. I suppose that's a vision. I was talking to a friend at the time and the vision quite distracted me.

All of a sudden I saw a small boy. About nine years of age, short black hair, wearing a white T-shirt. No one I recognised. He just stood there and looked at me. When he had my attention his face slowly contorted, his bottom lip quivered, tears came into his eyes. He raised his right fist and burrowed his knuckles into his eye, like children often do when they are crying.

At that moment I saw that his hand had a nasty wound on it, red raw around the edges and black in the middle. I looked down towards his chest where he held his other hand – that too carried a similar wound.

I was shocked and went to say something. I didn't, though. Instead I was overcome with the worst rage I have ever known. I was speechless. I jumped to my feet and grabbed a lump of wood that was leaning against the wall nearby and stormed off. I was not immediately conscious of what I was doing or where I was going. It seemed to be out of my hands.

The next thing I knew I was confronting this man. He was an older man. I knew him to be a priest, though I'd never seen him before. I was so wild I believe I would have beaten that man to death with the piece of wood, if it had not been for what happened next.

He looked up at me, startled. Suddenly his eyes were filled with terror and he threw up his hands in self-defence as I moved towards him. I stopped. Or, more properly, I was stopped. His hands had exactly the same wounds as those of the little boy.

I was transfixed. The man still didn't seem to understand and was not quite sure what was happening. As far as I could see, he didn't seem to be aware of those wounds either. Then he was not there any more. I was on my own, left with a strange sense of peaceful sadness.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

41. Recall a time when you were forgiven by yourself/another. What was it like?
  42. Recall a time when you forgave someone. What was it like?
  43. What happens when we nurse a grudge or do not work through our anger?
  44. Reflect on the process of forgiveness outlined in the bullet points. What would you add or subtract?
  45. How do you deal with your negative emotions towards yourself and/or others?
  46. What do you make of Simone Weil's suggestion that we need to "forgive God"?
  47. Can you recall what it was like when you got rid of a "bundle of death" you had been carrying?
  48. Do you think it is possible to say too quickly that you forgive? Reflect on this.
  49. What do you find most difficult about forgiveness – giving it or receiving it?
  50. What was your reaction to the story of "The Hands"?
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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #28**

### **"IMAGINATION"**

#### **IMAGINATION – WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?**

Whatever else we say about imagination, it has something to do with our remarkable ability to form and be formed by images. And this interaction with images opens us to the trans-rational. Because we are able to engage reality through our imaginations – for example, through symbols, stories, rituals etc – we are able to grasp the true and the real far more effectively than pure intellect could ever do.

But Aristotle reminds us that "the soul never thinks without an image". The trans-rational – for better or worse – is always in tandem with the rational. If the truth be told, we are probably more likely to understand a matter and be moved to appropriate action if the imagination is alive and well. We are also less likely to be seduced by

abstractions. There is an old Latin proverb: “Fortis imaginatio generat causam” which, literally translated, says, “A strong imagination generates the cause”. In other words, imagination has the power to set us in motion towards some end – it causes things to happen, for better or worse.

The American Jesuit writer, William Lynch, suggests an even more subtle and powerful role for imagination. He believes it is the basis of hope – without imagination we tend to despair:

One of the permanent meanings of imagination has been that it is the gift that envisions what cannot yet be seen, the gift that constantly proposes to itself that the boundaries of the possible are wider than they seem. Imagination, if it is in prison and has tried every exit, does not panic or move into apathy but sits down to try and envision another way out. It is always slow to admit that all the facts are in, that all the doors have been tried, and that it is defeated. It is not so much that it has vision as that it is able to wait, to wait for a moment of vision which is not yet there, for a door that is not yet locked. It is not overcome by the absoluteness of the present moment. (William Lynch, *Images of Hope*, Notre Dame University, 1974, 35.)

## **IMAGINATION AND THE GOSPEL**

Jesus taught the people primarily through actions and stories. We try to teach primarily through rational propositions. We have largely forgotten the art and power of story and poetry and metaphor. We been so seduced by rationalism that we have largely lost the use of imagination. This loss of imagination makes us vulnerable to despair and in our despair we may do very silly things. Besides, loss of imagination is a door shut against the wonderful surprises that lurk in the shadows of our ordinary days.

**A STORY: “THE MAN FROM THE PARK”** [Best read out loud, with appropriate emphases.]

“That concludes our guided tour of the cathedral, ladies and gentlemen. You should feel free to stay and look more closely, perhaps say some prayers. Thank you.” At this point, the guided tours generally drifted into a moment or two of informality before the people dispersed and the tour guide prepared for the next group. That would certainly have happened this time too, if it was not for Christine – or Chrissy, as her parents called her. She was eight years old, Downe Syndrome and much loved by her family – you could tell that by the confident and quiet way she smiled and spoke. Everyone listened: “Tell us about the gosht”, Christine said. “The ghost?” asked the guide, bending down towards the chubby girl. “What ghost?” “You know,” she said, leaning into her father’s stomach and taking his hand in both of hers.

“Well, as a matter of fact, there is a story,” the guide said, straightening up. The group was keen to hear, fixing their eyes on the guide; he was now committed to telling the story. He quickly warmed to his task, and people lurking around the edges of the group moved closer.

“In the park opposite there are a number of men; they live there,” said the guide. “And nobody loves dhem,” chimed in Christine, entwining her father’s fingers in her own. “I don’t know about that,” said the guide. “But I love dhem,” she continued, with the

confidence of one who has an important part in the story. “Anyway,” continued the guide, “it was the night of the bishop’s installation. Inside the cathedral all was ready; every seat was taken with the guests. There was an air of expectation in the crowd waiting outside. Then the bishop approached in his large, white stretch limousine. The moment had come; a murmuring swept through the crowd; like children at a performance, they all struggled to get closer and see, maybe touch him. It was wonderful; so much pomp and circumstance, as befits the installation of a bishop of the Church.

“Now, it happened that a young woman had been down at St Joseph’s Hospice, a few blocks from the cathedral, visiting her dear friend. He would die, the doctors said, in a week or two. You see, he was suffering from AIDS. As she walked along the street, by the park, opposite the cathedral, she noticed a few of the men of the park looking across towards the cathedral. One of them, she said, walked out from the trees – perhaps a man in his early thirties, tall, wirey, straight back, long hair and beard. He walked towards her, said nothing, but stopped and caught her eye, as if he knew her. She said he had the most extraordinary face; she says she will never forget the eyes – so powerful yet so gentle, as if, in that glance he said, ‘I understand. Everything is okay.’ The young woman said he then began to cross the road as the bishop’s limousine approached, seeming to pay no attention at all to the traffic. He walked right into the path of the oncoming limousine, turned and held up his hand, in a gentle sort of way, as if he thought the occupants of that car would recognize him and stop. They didn’t. The bishop’s limousine knocked him to the road and drove on, apparently unaware of what had just happened. And the strangest thing of all was that there was no sign of the man anywhere after the limousine moved on.

“Several men in the park say they too saw it all happen. Occasionally people say they see a young man, fitting his description, walking around the cathedral, as if he is trying to get inside but can’t find the entrance. And the young woman? She doesn’t want to talk about it. She just looks at you, smiles and shakes her head. Her friend who was dying of AIDS is in remission, she says. He lives somewhere in the suburbs with another man; she keeps in touch.”

The guide stopped. He appeared just a little awkward, because the group kept looking to him for more information about this strange event – as if the story had just begun, rather than just finished. Slowly they all moved off in silence. Christine followed her parents out, crossed the road and began walking through the park a few paces behind them. They all seemed strangely distracted. It was some minutes before her parents realized that Christine was not with them. Her father turned and began to run back, but stopped almost before he’d begun. Christine was sitting on the grass, talking and laughing with a group of the men. One of them, in particular, seemed to enjoy her company – he was a young man in his early thirties, tall, wirey, straight back, long hair and beard.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

51. What is it like when you use your imagination?
52. In what way might we imagine “for better or worse”?
53. When was the last time you heard a good story? What effect did it have on you and others?

54. Do you agree that the faith has largely been presented in “rational propositions”?  
Reflect.
55. What was your gut reaction to the story of “The Man from the Park”?
56. What ideas or insights came to you as a result of that story?
57. Apart from story-telling, how else might we use our imagination?
58. Do you agree with William Lynch that imagination is necessary for hope?
59. Do you think it is possible that we, as a culture, lack imagination?
60. Is it possible that the aboriginal people of this land might teach us how to recover imagination?
- 

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #29**

### **“FACING”**

#### **THE MADONNA AND CHILD**

Consider a typical statue or painting of the Madonna and Child. The child is held very loosely, responsively; the mother’s arms are ready to accommodate the movements of the child; the initiative is graciously surrendered to the child. The maternal face is open, responsive and free of preconceptions; she is utterly given over to facing her baby. The mother’s face is evocative; her face asks the child to respond, to make his needs known, to present his gifts or to ask for hers.

This loving gaze draws the child forth, inviting him into the world where he can face others and others can face him. The baby’s face is serene and confident in the look of the mother. The mother’s face is the child’s point of entry into the human journey. The maternal face introduces the “beyond” which evokes the child’s “towards”; henceforth, his life will be a self-transcending movement towards his very self.

Paradoxically and necessarily, that compassionate and honest facing enables the child to turn his back on his mother and walk where he must walk – away from her (eg Luke 2:22-52 & 8:19-21).

#### **LEARNING TO FACE WHAT MUST BE FACED**

One of the first things we want to do when a child is born is look into the face. “Who does he/she look like?” “He’s got his mother’s nose ....” “She looks just like her father ...” And so the child’s face is explored and discussed for the first of many times. The other side of this process is that the child is *being faced*. This facing of the child is – hopefully, but tragically not always – one of compassion and truth.

The way we are faced has much to do with the way we are, in turn, able to face – ourselves, other people and the events and things of our world. The face of the other is either – more or less – hospitable and inviting or – more or less – inhospitable and uninviting. Thus we learn to look towards people, events and things, face to face, eye to eye, as promise or threat. We may, for example, face others expecting an honest encounter, or perhaps we may face them with fear or greed or the intention of manipulation or even violence; then again, we might not be able to face people at all – because we are too shy, too vulnerable, too dishonest or too fearful or too distracted.

### **THE CRITICAL OPTION: FACING OR FLEEING**

Much of what we call “living” is actually about facing what must be faced. Some of us do this well, some of us not so well and some of us fail quite badly, spending too much of our lives turning our faces away from what we should face. “Facing” is the major point of entry into our humanity. When we refuse – implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously – to face what must be faced, we withdraw from the truth of who we are. We become less real, less human than we might otherwise be.

The great religious traditions are united in reassuring us that we all have a genius for self-deceit – for avoiding the real issues of life. We can even be so good at it we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are actually being truthful when we are deceiving ourselves. If we are not working honestly and constantly and effectively at facing ourselves and what is happening in our lives, we are bound to drift into some pretty clever modes of flight and evasion. Again, the great religious traditions are united in promoting attentiveness, mindfulness, remembrance, awareness and wakefulness. They cry out with one voice: “Listen! Pay attention! Wake up! Hear and heed!”

## THE TEN WEDDING ATTENDANTS

Matthew's Gospel tells a story about "facing" and "not facing". It is the story of the so-called "Ten Wedding Attendants" and comes just before the passion narrative. There is a sense of urgency; time is short and the disciples are called to live with focused minds, seeking out and committing to what is essential. There is no room here for trivialities or distractions.

"Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom" (25:1). The bridegroom is late in coming and they all fall asleep. When the cry is raised – "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him" (25:6) – those who brought extra oil are able to light their lamps and fulfil their duties, while those who had brought no extra oil were left in the dark, unable to do what they were there to do. "Stay awake because you do not know either the day or the hour" (25:13).

Am I too weighed down with this and that to "go out and meet (face) him"? Have I grown lazy about the source of "light" in my life? Am I willing and able to daily face myself?

## THE GIFT OF THE OTHER IN FACING US

"Facing" is evocative. At its best, when we are faced, we are invited to a response in faith, hope and love. The transparent face of the other calls us out of bondage and oppression. Like Lazarus of old, the truthful and compassionate facing of the other says, "Come forth!" The killing oppressions that we grasp to ourselves – our anxious pretenses and petty illusions that we mistakenly believe make us into "somebody" – can fall away like the bandages of Lazarus under the compassionate and understanding face of the other. Perhaps Les Murray implies something of this in his brilliant epic poem, *Fredy Neptune*, when, in Book IV, "Lazarus Unstuck", Fredy recalls the baptism of his daughter Louise:

In life there's nearly always at least one face  
between us and God's face, I remember the priest saying.

We are, as it were, given ourselves by others facing us honestly and lovingly. "Facing" overcomes the shame we might feel in the presence of other human beings. "If only you knew ...." When you do know and you still obviously face me with compassion and honesty, you set me free.

The Other who faces us every moment of every day, in every circumstance, is the only One who is able to face all with unwavering compassion and honesty. Facing God and facing self are the one turning. And this is the turning that we call "conversion" – not something we do, but something that happens within when we discover that we are always being faced with infinite Compassion and Truth.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

61. Get a picture or statue of the Madonna and Child. Study it in the light of the above reflection.
62. What has been your own human experience of facing and being faced? Reflect.

63. What is it like to be with someone who cannot look you in the eye? What is happening?
  64. Can you name different ways you have been faced?
  65. What is it like when you must face something unpleasant?
  66. Have you ever felt the consequences of evading what you should have faced?
  67. In what sense might “facing or fleeing” be a critical option in our lives?
  68. Do your own reflection on Matthew 25:1-13.
  69. Have you ever felt the freedom of being faced in compassion and honesty? Reflect.
  70. What is the biggest obstacle for you in facing and being faced?
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #30

### “ILLUSIONS”

#### **LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARK**

Few novelists have managed to capture the spirit of Catholicism with the genius of Graham Greene. Like Oscar Wilde before him, he knew from personal experience that we generally get a better view of the heavens when we are in a hole. Wilde himself had commented that we are probably at our finest when we are kneeling in the dust and confessing our sins. God is sometimes better seen, for some perverse reason, in the dark. Shadows could not happen if there were no light, and they happen precisely because there is light. Light often reveals itself most powerfully by its absence.

In his novel, *The Power and the Glory*, Graham Greene portrays a man – a “whisky priest” – who has come to see the light because his own life has become so dark. This “whisky priest” had earlier exemplified “the good priest” of his time and place, a man who fitted easily into a false self. Priesthood was a role he played rather than an expression of the truth of who he really was as a human being:

A well-shaved, well-powdered jowl much too developed for his age. The good things of life had come to him much too early – the respect of his contemporaries, a safe livelihood. The trite religious word upon the tongue, the joke to ease the way, the ready acceptance of other people’s homage ... a happy man.

In the face of his impending death, the “whisky priest” explains to the Lieutenant who has arrested him and is about to execute him, that his life fell apart when all those external factors supporting his false self were taken away. The “success” of his illusions prevented him from facing the truth of himself. The disintegration of those same illusions – amidst much scandal and irresponsible behaviour – was in fact the greatest blessing of his life. Ironically, he was more the priest, more of a *man*, in the



depths of his misery than he had ever been as “a happy man”.

The night before his execution the priest talks with the Lieutenant:

They lay quiet for a while in the hut. The priest thought the lieutenant was asleep until he spoke again. ‘You never talk straight. You say one thing to me -- but to another man, or a woman, you say, “God is love”. But you think that stuff won’t go down with me so you say different things. Things you’ll know I’ll agree with.’ ‘Oh,’ the priest said, ‘that’s another thing altogether -- God *is* love. I don’t say the heart doesn’t feel a taste of it, but what a taste. The smallest glass of love mixed with a pint pot of ditch-water. We wouldn’t recognize *that* love. It might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare us – God’s love. It set fire to a bush in the desert, didn’t it, and smashed open graves and set the dead to walking in the dark. Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around.’

A modern commentator, Maurice Friedman, observes:

One of the singular aspects of the Modern ‘Saint’ is the contrast, of which he (ie “the whisky priest”) himself is aware, between the time before the persecution of the priests, when he was innocent of any but the most venial sins and yet felt no love for anyone, and now, when in his corruption he has learned to love. This is the central paradox of the book. Saintliness is not identified with moral perfection here. Man is sinful as such. It is identified with humility and with that genuine love and concern for others that enables one to forget even one’s own salvation and damnation. Grace consorts more easily with evil than with good. (*To Deny Our Nothingness*)

## **DYING – LIFE’S BEST GIFT**

It is a truism that we do not appreciate things until they are taken from us. Familiarity breeds contempt. Death and the nearness of death can make us appreciate life like nothing else. Death and the nearness of death can also help us to shed illusions and become more real. It is characteristic of those who know they are about to die – literally or metaphorically – that they begin to see life differently. Priorities change. Life finds a new focus, a more honest focus.

“Lord, let us know the shortness of our days that we may gain wisdom of heart” we pray in the Psalms (90:12). Contemporary novelist Walker Percy addresses the role of death in being true to oneself. The main character in his novel, *The Second Coming*, reflects:

“How did it happen that now for the first time in his life he could see everything so clearly? Something had given him leave to live in the present. Not once in his entire life had he allowed himself to come to rest in the quiet center of himself but had forever cast himself forward from some dark past he could not remember to a future which did not exist. Not once had he ever been present for his life. So his life had passed like a dream. Is it possible for people to miss their lives in the same way that one misses a plane? And how is it that death, the nearness of death, can restore a missed life? Why is it that without death one misses his life?”

Yes, it is possible “to miss your life”. We can become so absorbed in trying to be “someone” that we do violence to the person we are; we can be so busy about life’s “necessary” projects that we never have time for relationships; we can create so much noise and activity that we are never still enough or quiet enough to hear what is happening; we can be so busy about the “right thing” that we miss the “real thing”.

And so the thicket of illusions finds fertile ground and flourishes. Our lives can become more a matter of seeming than being. We can become more interested in what is “right” or “necessary” or simply “expected” or “expedient” than what is actually true and good.

Religion and spirituality, honestly and effectively engaged, are an antidote to such unreality. Tragically, however, these too can become instruments of self-deception. Idolatry is as much a part of religion and spirituality as it is part of the general marketplace of existence. Herein lies the gift of darkness and the awareness of our sinfulness, the stripping of death and the incomprehensibility of dying. We find it difficult to maintain our illusions under such circumstances. This is why we are generally at our most honest when we have been exposed in our nakedness and vulnerability, when we have got no power, no leverage to deceive ourselves and others. The other’s look cannot successfully seduce us into lies any more.

Through the darkness we see the light, in our brokenness we become whole, in dying we live. The journey towards the Real and the True – the Living God – is not one of mastery and conquest. It is not even one of knowledge in the normal sense of that word. It is rather a journey of emptying and letting go, of honest and often painful submission to the truth about ourselves and about other people, events and things, a journey of abandonment to the mercy and love of God.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

71. Name some of “the cracks” in life through which the light might shine. Reflect.
  72. Are you at ease in acknowledging yourself as “sinful”? Reflect.
  73. What is your reaction to the description of the priest early in his life (see paragraph 3)?
  74. Do you know the experience of “falling apart”? What is it like? What happens?
  75. Reflect on the whisky priest’s appreciation for the love of God.
  76. What might Maurice Friedman mean when he says “grace consorts more easily with evil than good”?
  77. Do you think it is possible to “miss your life” as the Walker Percy character suggests?
  78. Reflect on Psalm 90:12.
  79. How might illusions and idolatry emerge in *our own* religious life and spirituality? Reflect.
  80. Reflect on the last sentence – “It is a journey of emptying and letting go .....”.
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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #31**

### **“SEXUALITY”**

#### **LOOKING IN THE MIRROR**

Bishop John Heaps, in his very helpful little book, *A Love That Dares To Question* (1998), has a chapter entitled “Courage to Look in the Mirror”. There he writes:

It is impossible to know, and of no use to know, whether this age is better or worse morally than any previous time. .... The thing that does not seem to have changed is the way we have of justifying our actions. We have always been good at believing that God is on our side. Now, people are more likely to use terms such as ‘my freedom, my rights and justice’ as the god which justifies their actions. It has always been difficult for us to admit that, in satisfying the voice of my god, I may be destroying the freedom, happiness, or even the life of others. The Pharisees, Pilate and the others who justified their action in getting rid of Jesus, the enemy of religion and the state, acted no differently from the people of every age. Jesus continues to be crucified by self-centredness.

We are all geniuses at self-deception. Sexuality is certainly one part of our lives where we – consciously and unconsciously, driven by prejudice, fear and ignorance – deceive ourselves and others. Any good conversation about sexuality must not only recognise this, but also recognise the fact that we are constantly up against a mystery here. Human sexuality is an ultimately incomprehensible mix of body, mind and spirit, as much a primeval, blind dynamism as it is a medium of radical, adult communion.

Sexuality can easily be sorted out in theory, leading us to believe we do actually understand it. There is nothing quite like human sexuality, however, to mock our rationality and put the lie to claims of control and comprehension. In human experience, sexuality is always ambiguous and paradoxical and self-revelatory. It behoves us to tread warily, listening attentively and honestly to the concrete facts before us, especially those of our personal lives. Experience is a mirror. “What is going on?” is a question that must never be far from our consciousness. The Desert Fathers were aware of this: “An elder said: Do not judge a fornicator if you are chaste, for if you do, you too are violating the law as much as he is. For He who said ‘thou shalt not fornicate’ also said ‘thou shalt not judge’.”

#### **AN HISTORICAL NOTE**

Our medical knowledge of sexuality has grown over the centuries, especially during the past one hundred and fifty years or so. With the growth of medical knowledge, our cultural, social, political and moral perceptions pertaining to sexuality have rightly

changed. For example:

- prior to the early nineteenth century, medical science did not know that the female had ovaries and that these are an essential factor in the begetting of new life; in the absence of such knowledge, the male assumes an unrealistic role in the procreative process and, consequently, an unrealistic role in other domains;
- for many centuries, it was assumed that when a male had a nocturnal emission, it was the result of intercourse with ghostly creatures (*succubi* and *incubi*); it was commonly spoken of as “pollution”; perhaps similar thinking gave rise to the ceremony of “Churching” women who had given birth?
- masturbation was generally regarded as exclusive to males; it was called “onanism”, following a false understanding of Genesis 38:6-11, where Onan’s “sin”, in fact, was a cultural rebellion: he refused to beget children by his brother’s widow; furthermore, given the fact that it was once thought the male implanted the new child in the female in sexual intercourse, male masturbation would be equivalent to abortion;
- it is only in recent times that we have begun to fully appreciate the fact that there are a variety of given possibilities pertaining to sexuality when we come into the world; for example, we may be physiologically male but, in every other way, experience life as a female, and vice versa; we may be sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex or the same sex or both; we may be born with uncertain genitalia, and the medical staff may make a decision, for better or worse, concerning our gender identity.

### **THE DISTURBING PRESENCE OF DEATH**

The psychiatrist, Rollo May, reminds us of a factor pertaining to sexuality we would do well to remember:

The relationship between death and love certainly is clear in the sex act. Every kind of mythology relates the sex act itself to dying .... What a different light this throws on the human problems in love than does all our glib talk about the art of loving, about love as the answer to all our needs, love as instant self-actualization, love as contentment, or love as a mailorder technique! No wonder we try to reduce eros to purely physiological sex or try to avoid the whole dilemma by playing it cool, by using sex to drug and vaccinate ourselves against the anxiety-creating effects of eros. ("The Daemonic: Love and Death", *Psychology Today*, 1 (1968) 20)

Perhaps, since science has enabled us to disconnect sexuality from procreation, we are now vulnerable to the illusion that sexuality is something that can be easily used to our advantage, as and when we like it, and then simply set aside, without serious consequences. And does the unaddressed connection between sexuality and death have something to do with the common inability today to commit to one person and remain faithful to that person?

### **A WAY OF THINKING**

There are no simple answers or formulae to direct us as we struggle with our sexuality, whether as individuals or as a community. No-one can promise us an unambiguous experience of sexuality or a sexuality without paradox and a certain dying at its very heart. However, for those who profess to be followers of Jesus, there are some radical

pointers:

- Love God, love yourself, love people – see for example: Mt 22:34-40; Mk 12:28-31; Lk 10:25-28; Jn 13, especially 34-35 and 1Jn 4:7-5:4;
- for Jesus, people and relationships are primary – see for example: Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4, the woman who was a "sinner" in Luke 7:36-50 and the rebuke of the religious authorities in Luke 11:37-54;
- we are members of the Body of Christ – see for example: Rom 6:3-4 ("baptised in Christ Jesus ...") and 1Cor 12:12-30 ("In the one Spirit we were all baptised. ... Now you together are Christ's body.") and Rom 8:1-17 ("the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free ... the Spirit of God has made his home in you."); Galatians 2:15-21 (" ... the life of Christ who lives in me.") and 1Cor 6:19 ("Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.").

It makes a world of difference if we focus primarily on people and relationships, in Christ, rather than behaviours and rules and social conformity. Paradoxically, the outcome of this focus is a much more mature and intelligent commitment to responsible behaviour. What is primarily at issue here is not conformity, but personal integrity: "The truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32). "I am ... the Truth ..." (Jn 14:6).

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

81. What has most influenced your understanding of and attitude towards sexuality?
82. Is it true to say that we easily deceive ourselves in matters pertaining to sexuality? Reflect.
83. In what ways might sexuality be "ambiguous"? "Paradoxical"? "Self-revelatory"?
84. Reflect on the saying of the Desert Fathers: "Do not judge ..."
85. Reflect on the connection between medical knowledge, cultural norms and moral injunctions.
86. Reflect on the connection between sexuality and death.
87. What do you think is the significance of our ability to disconnect procreation from sexuality?
88. Is there any connection between perceptions of sexuality and the inability to commit to a relationship?
89. Reflect on one or more of the Scriptural texts indicated above.
90. How is personal integrity more important than social conformity? Reflect.

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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #32**

### **"VOCATION"**

## THE WORD “VOCATION”

Talk about “vocation” in the Catholic tradition tends to prompt the general question: “What am I going to do with my life?” or “What is God calling me to do with my life?” Beyond this general question of “doing something”, we tend to think of “vocation” in terms of religious life or priesthood. This line of thinking and questioning is reasonable enough. After all, the English word “vocation” comes from the Latin word *vocare*, meaning “to call”. And in the Gospel we are familiar with “the call” of the first disciples – a call to action:

As he was walking by the Lake of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast into the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Come after me and I will make you fishers of people.’ And at once they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-20. See also 4:21-22 and Mark 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11.)

This customary focus, however, on *doing* something and *doing* it within the structures of *religious life* and/or *priesthood* has some serious limitations. There are two very significant factors that tend to be missed in this focus:

- In the first place, the focus on *doing* something tends to bypass the more fundamental reality of *being* the human person God called you to be in creating you;
- In the second place, the focus on the particular forms of *religious life* and *priesthood* tends to bypass the more fundamental reality of being *baptised into Christ*.

## BEING WHO YOU ARE

Shakespeare points to a foundational truth when he has Polonius say to Laertes in *Hamlet*:

This above all – to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man (Act One, Scene 3).

You are your vocation. Your duty – first and last – is to be who you are called to be. That “call” is found in your very being. Thomas Merton summed it up:

For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and discovering my true self. (*Seeds of Contemplation*)

When Jesus says “Follow me!” – as he does more than twenty times in the Gospels – he is reminding us of our fundamental vocation. It is *incarnation*. Jesus is entering the human condition, and that journey of incarnation will find its climactic expression on Calvary. He goes to the utter limits of being human and says to each of us: “Join me! Come with me on this journey of incarnation. Discover the liberty and life and love my Father has in store for you in and through your humanity.”

“Aye, there’s the rub!” – as Hamlet would say. If the truth be told, the last thing we want is that human journey. T S Eliot was probably close to the truth when he observed: “Our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world”. (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*) We resist incarnation – in ourselves and in Jesus Christ. Invite us to believe this or that proposition, engage in various rituals and embrace symbols, even perform feats of heroism, high orders of self-sacrifice, climb a mountain .... anything but be simply, and simply be who we are.

Being simply and simply being who I am requires work. It is the work of facilitation rather than mastery. It is an inside-out process, rather than an outside-in process. We must learn to listen, pay attention, become aware of what is going on in and around us. We must hear and heed the concrete facts of life. They are sacramental, they speak to us of eternity if we know how to listen. So we gradually learn to submit to the truth of who we are and what life asks of us. And that word “submit” is a rich one. It comes from the Latin words *mittere*, meaning “to send”, and *sub*, meaning “under”. In this process we have been describing, we slowly learn, bit by little bit, to become part of God’s will manifest in and through creation. We are sent into the world under the loving intention of God.

## **THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION**

The specifically Christian vocation meets that fundamental human vocation with a resounding affirmation. For we are “baptised into Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:3). That challenging invitation – “Follow me!” – is not an appeal to the heroic or the wilful. It is rather a call to awaken to the new reality, discover in the depths of your being who you are in Christ. Your spirit and the Holy Spirit bear a united witness that you are a child of God (cf Romans 8:16). Become what you are! John’s Gospel puts it beautifully in the prayer of Jesus:

As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth. I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me. May they all be one just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognise that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you have loved me. (John 17:18-23).

It is our communion with the Father in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit that constitutes our specifically Christian vocation. It is baptism that introduces us to this life in Christ. And this life in Christ is the full flourishing of our humanity and our communion with ourselves, other people and our world. The second-century bishop, Irenaeus, sums it up very well when he says: “For the glory of God is a living human being; and the life of a human being consists in beholding God”. (*Against the Heresies*)

Whatever work we do, whether we join a religious congregation or become a priest, live here or live there, is no more nor less than the context within which the human and Christian vocation can thrive. And it is well, therefore, that we choose the context carefully. It is not better, universally, to do this or do that, live here or live there, get

married or join a religious congregation. It may, however, be better for *you* to choose one of these contexts, in so far as you are free to do so.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

91. What has been your experience of talk about “vocation”? Reflect on the pluses and minuses of that.
  92. How do you understand the expression “you are your vocation”?
  93. What do you see as the pluses and minuses of saying “be who you are”?
  94. Reflect on Thomas Merton’s statement, “For me to be a saint etc.”.
  95. What does “incarnation” mean in relation to both Jesus and yourself?
  96. Do you think it is true that we resist “incarnation”?
  97. What for you personally are the practical implications of “being simply and simply being you”?
  98. What does baptism mean to you?
  99. Spend some time meditating on Jesus’ prayer from John’s Gospel. Share your reflections.
  100. What do you understand by the “context” for your vocation?
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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #33**

### **“SYSTEMS”**

#### **WE NEED SYSTEMS**

Human beings necessarily form structures when they come together for a common purpose. If the truth be told, we probably do this even when we act on our own. We are system-making animals. We cannot live without systems. We need them for the obvious practical value of enabling us to live and work and play together more or less successfully. But we also need them for a much deeper purpose: Systems enable us to preserve our sanity. They carve out a patch of meaning in a world that would otherwise overwhelm us with meaninglessness. Systems are like a spotlight in the dark. Initially at least, we find our identity and sense of security through systems.

We could say systems are structures that more or less govern our thoughts, words and deeds. The structures may be constituted and manifested in many ways, for example in ideas, images, symbols, written rules, architecture, rituals, customs, modes of dress etc. Some systems are bigger and more complex than others (eg a national culture versus a school culture), some are very informal (eg a social tennis group) while others are more formal (eg a Lions Club or the Masonic Lodge). The same system might occupy a large part of one person’s life and a tiny part of another person’s life (eg a parish will ask



more of the pastor than most of the members of that parish). Typically, we all belong to many systems. Systems are always and everywhere imperfect.

## **NECESSARY FICTIONS**

The structures that constitute any system are, for the most part, human fabrications. They are, if you like, mostly fictions – necessary fictions but fictions nonetheless. Take, for example, the way we dress. Can you think of any human system in which the mode of dress is an absolute, an objective given, an utterly indispensable necessity? Of course not. And the same applies to the various rituals, symbols, customs and so on that constitute any system. That we have structures and systems is an indisputable and necessary fact of life. That those structures and systems take this or that form is a negotiable fact of life.

If we say the structures constituting a system are fictions we are not thereby saying those structures do not really count for anything. Start changing or violating those structures and you will realise very quickly how important they are. Withhold a handshake when the other holds out his or her hand, for example, and you will probably get an angry reaction. Or consider culture shock: We are vulnerable to culture shock precisely because these structures actually leave an imprint on our nervous system when we live them for long enough. Very easily we think of the culture of our youth as the normal way for human beings to live. Systems, such as culture, routinise our behaviour and create blind spots to other possibilities.

We tend to find our identity and security through systems. Some of us never outgrow this need. Thus, common human phenomena such as resistance to change, racism and religious prejudice can be better understood if we realise the place of systems in our lives and the particular hold a system and its fictions might have over this or that individual or group.

## **THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS A SYSTEM**

The Catholic Church too must develop and maintain credible structures and appropriate fictions. A most serious question arises: In the structures of the Church, what is “an utterly indispensable necessity” and what is not? Too easily we have allowed ourselves, over the centuries, to become terribly confused about this. In addressing that question we need to bear in mind the absolute necessity we have for structures of some kind or other and how deeply they establish themselves within us. Consider the Eucharist. The Eucharist is an essential part of the Christian life. It is a non-negotiable. However, the *form* we give that celebration is definitely negotiable. We might consider, further, whether unleavened bread and wine from the grape are “an utterly indispensable necessity”. And even if we, as a Church, decide they are not, we might then ask whether we should stick with those ingredients anyway. And so the discernment should be promoted through ongoing conversation throughout the Church from generation to generation.

One of the functions of authentic religion is to provide us with a system through which we can find the Ground beyond systems. Paradoxically, the purpose of religious systems is to help us live with detachment within any and all systems. Religion will fail in this critical work when it invests too much time and energy on its structures and not

enough on God. Thus the structures may cease to be recognised as fictions and the means may become ends and the ends may become means, the relative things may get absolutised and the Absolute may be relativised. Thus the system, which is called to bear witness to God, may become a god. Hence the need for ongoing critical reflection and discernment within the Church.

A word of warning needs to be sounded at this point. Renewal of the Catholic Church is not primarily a matter of reforming the system, changing the structures, valuable and necessary as this is. It is possible to change structures for the better but be actually worse off if minds and hearts do not change for the better. And vice versa, it is possible to be better off with the same old inadequate structures if minds and hearts change. Life is not what happens to us but what we do with it. Failure to realise this simple truth can leave people frustrated and chronically angry. This in turn may lead to despondency and even despair.

## **JESUS AND SYSTEMS**

Jesus respected the human need for systems and their fictions. “Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets” (Mt 5:17-19); he taught the people in their synagogue (cf Mt 13:53-58; Mk 6:1-6; Lk 4:16-30); he urged his disciples to pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar and God what belongs to God (cf Mt 22:15-22; Mk 12:13-17; Lk 20:20-26); he instructed his followers to remember him in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup (Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:19-20). But there is no evidence that Jesus had in mind any particular system with particular fictions. In fact, he conflicted with the religious authorities because they had focused on a particular system and lost sight of the Covenant that system was supposed to serve. Jesus’ vocation as the Son of God become human, was to set us free by winning the victory over the source of all oppression. He did that through the Cross. His resurrection is the affirmation of his victory. He says to us: “You must have systems, so make sure they serve you well. Let them be instruments of liberty rather than oppression, let them bear witness to the prodigal love of my Father rather than your own anxieties and fears, let them enable you to live in communion rather than hostility, let them be the instruments whereby you come to know that you are called to be in Love!”

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

101. Describe a system and some of its structures which you have experienced in your life?
102. Contrast those structures that have served you well with those that have not? Reflect.
103. Can you imagine living without structures? Reflect.
104. In what sense can we say systemic structures are fictions?
105. Do you understand the difference between Eucharist as such and the form of celebrating it? Reflect.
106. What do you think is absolutely necessary in the life of the Church?
107. Reflect on a passage from the Gospels which shows Jesus’ respect for human systems.
108. Can you imagine yourself thoroughly committed within the Church yet grounded beyond it? Reflect.

109. Have you ever experienced being trapped (happily or not) within a system? Reflect.
110. Good attitudes, bad systems = good outcomes; bad attitudes, good systems = bad outcomes. Reflect.
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #34

### “OBEDIENCE”

#### **THE GROUND OF OBEDIENCE**

Recall a time when you ate or drank too much, or you got too much sun because you did not bother to take precautions that you knew you should have taken or you simply did something contrary to good advice. These are moments when we refuse to listen, or if we do listen we do not hear and if we do hear we act in defiance of what we hear. Put bluntly, this is disobedience. Our English word “to obey” has its roots in the Latin word *audire*, meaning “to hear”.

Apart from the psychodynamics of this sort of disobedient behaviour – so typically human and perhaps more likely to occur in the young – we might ask: “What is happening here?” Approach it from another angle: “What *should* I have done?” I should have paid attention to what my body told me, what experience had taught me; I should have attended to the factors involved in the situation and submitted to what “life” was suggesting to me, or I should have listened to the advice of wiser heads, and so on.

Such mundane situations will be more or less trivial or more or less significant in their consequences. I might pass off the occasional incident of eating or drinking too much with a little embarrassment; I cannot pass off so easily the fact that I have defied the voice of my conscience and wilfully lived out a script contrary to the deepest urgings of my very being and the genuine desires of my heart.

#### **THE PURPOSE OF OBEDIENCE**

Life calls us into a certain rhythm here. We might call that rhythm the “obedience rhythm”. It consists of three interdependent movements:

- We *listen*,
- We *hear* and
- We *submit*.

Consider any human life of depth and wisdom, one of compassion and radical honesty, and you will find this rhythm is a significant part of that life. (And the reverse is also true.) The truly human person is an obedient person and the obedient person actively listens, is keen to hear and heed what is true and real.

Ultimately, what is at issue here is the truth of who I am. The former Secretary General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjold, sums it up nicely:

“At every moment you choose yourself. But do you choose your self? Body and soul contain a thousand possibilities out of which you can build many ‘I’s’. But in only one of them is there a congruence of the elector and the elected. Only one – which you will never find until you have excluded all those superficial and fleeting possibilities of being and doing with which you toy, out of curiosity or wonder or greed, and which hinder you from casting anchor in the mystery of life, and the consciousness of the talent entrusted to you which is your ‘I’.” (Dag Hammarskjold, *Markings*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1964, 19.)

The truly obedient life, Hammarskjold suggests, will lead one inexorably into a deep sense of vocation, the sense of being necessarily and invulnerably part of an expanding mystery. We could call this the discovery of an existential “must” within one’s depths. All the great men and women of history know this “must” and respond to it with passion. Hammarskjold writes:

“What must come to pass, should come to pass. Within the limits of that *must*, therefore, you are invulnerable. (Op cit, 48.)

## **CONFORMITY AND OBEDIENCE**

In the concrete human situation it is not always easy to embrace that rhythm of obedience. Within us and around us there are a multitude of forces making listening to what is true and real very difficult. If the listening is interrupted, what we eventually hear and submit to may put distance between us and that existential “must” of our lives. Our lives may thus become radically dishonest, literally unreal, disobedient.

In 1945 the world became aware of The Holocaust and the horrifying depths to which the human race had sunk in and through the Nazi ideology. At the Nuremberg trials – begun on November 20, 1945 – the world heard an utterly rational but totally unacceptable defence: “We were only obeying orders”. It was worrying to hear this same appeal to “obedience” used by the two French military operatives who had sunk the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland Harbour on July 10, 1985, killing a photographer on board.

The “obedience” spoken of here bears little resemblance to true obedience. True obedience lies beyond social conformity or merely doing as one is told – though it may, as a matter of fact, include both these. Obedience is a process that seeks the True and the Real as such, beyond what this or that person or group might maintain. Obedience does not deny or dismiss the given social order, be it ecclesiastical or secular, it merely relativizes that order in the context of a bigger order. Social conformity is a process which seeks the maintenance of a certain social order, ecclesiastical or secular. Social conformity is also a process by which the individual seeks to be part of that social order. Whether that social order is in any way a manifestation of what is true and real is not

relevant to mere social conformity.

Consider, by way of contrast, the “civil disobedience” – the “social non-conformity” – of people like Jesus of Nazareth .... Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edith Stein, Mahatma Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa and thousands of others who listened, heard and chose to submit to a higher order, sometimes at great personal cost. Who would not recognize, for example, in the choices made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Edith Stein, something far more deeply true and good – a far more genuine obedience – than the choices made by those Nazi officers in their “obedience”?

Cardinal John Henry Newman knew the obedience rhythm, he was a man who felt the demands of life’s “must” and he submitted:

“I am what I am or I am nothing. .... My first elementary lesson of duty is that of resignation to the laws of nature, whatever they are; my first disobedience is to be impatient at what I am, and to indulge an ambitious aspiration after what I cannot be.”  
(*A Grammar of Assent*, Image Books, 1955, 272f.)

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

111. Describe the obedience rhythm in your own words. Give an example from your life.
112. Describe a simple experience in which you defied the obedience rhythm of life. What happened?
113. Have you ever known someone who entered generously into the obedience rhythm of life? Reflect.
114. Have you ever experienced the peace that comes when you are in harmony with life? Reflect.
115. Do you think you know how to listen to the “higher order” in your life? Reflect.
116. Has the call of obedience ever placed you in a situation of social non-conformity? What happened?
117. Reflect on your experience of life’s “must”?
118. What is the most difficult thing for you in embracing the obedience rhythm at depth?
119. What helps you to be an obedient person in the deepest sense of that word “obedience”?
120. Express John Henry Newman’s thought in your own words. Give an example from your life.

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### **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #35**

## “OBEDIENCE IN THE BIBLE”

### **HEAR, O ISRAEL**

In the Gospels we read that Jesus was asked, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” In reply, he quotes from a prayer which would have been very familiar to him and his listeners: “Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart ...” (see Mark 12:29, also Matthew 22:37 and Luke 10:27). The prayer is known as the *Shema* and begins as follows:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the door posts of your house and on your gates.”  
(Deuteronomy 6:4-9.)

The word *Shema* – the first word of the prayer – may be translated as either *hear/listen* or *obey*, depending on the context. Scholars tell us that the Old Testament concept of obedience contains both the sense of intelligent listening and willingness to submit to the will of God that is heard in this way. And the listening and submitting are done with the knowledge that God has intervened in history, set the people free and invited them into a Covenant of love.

In the biblical world, *listening* and *hearing* are profoundly significant. The word must be heard and heeded. The phrase “Thus says the Lord” recurs again and again. Moses is a model: Yahweh has a conversation with his servant Moses (see Exodus 3:1-15). Later Moses is referred to as the one with whom “the Lord used to speak face to face” (Exodus 33:11). He listens, hears and goes forth. Because the Covenantal life is a conversation, God too is expected to hear. Thus in Psalm 94:9 we read: “He who planted the ear, shall he not hear?”. (See also, for example, Psalm 4:1; 39:12; 69:16; 102:1.) Listen to Isaiah 1:18: “Come let us talk this over ...”

What distinguishes Yahweh from the false gods is precisely that Yahweh is willing and able to pursue a conversation with us. The false gods are incapable of conversation. In Psalm 115:6 we read: “(The idols) have mouths but say nothing, have eyes but see nothing, have ears but hear nothing, have noses but smell nothing”. (Pope Paul VI’s first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 1964), might be read against this backdrop. There he speaks of *colloquium salutis* (“the dialogue of salvation”) as the context for the Christian’s ongoing dialogue within the Church and beyond.)

We could say that the notion of obedience in the Old Testament is summed up in the willingness to enter and remain in the conversation God has initiated. This willingness is expressed in constant and attentive listening, hearing and heeding. That is the essence of obedience in the Old Testament.

### **JESUS LISTENS TO THE ONE WHO SENT HIM**

The Greek words for obey and obedience in the New Testament are grounded in the verb *akou*, meaning “to hear”. The verb *hypakou*, meaning “to obey”, and the noun *hypako*, meaning “obedience”, literally mean “hear beneath”. Thus the Old Testament understanding of obedience as intelligent listening, with a view to effective hearing and heeding, is continued in the New Testament.

Jesus is clearly one who seeks to listen and hear that he might “do the will of the one who sent (him) and complete his work” (John 4:34). Each of the synoptics tells of Jesus’ withdrawal to the desert, where he is tested and comes to a deeper conviction concerning the will of the one who sent him (see Matthew 4:1-17, Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13). The desert is a particularly good place to listen and hear. Luke suggests something habitual in Jesus’ life: “... he would go off to some deserted place and pray” (5:16). Luke also notes that, on the occasion Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do the crowds say I am?” (see 9:18-21), “he was praying alone”. This is a man grounded beyond the social fictions of his culture and its demands. He is attentive, always listening that he might hear what must be heard, and submit to what must be. On this basis he proceeds.

St Paul, probably citing an early Christian hymn, says, he proceeded even to death: “He humbled himself and became obedient (*hupkoos* – literally “attentively listening”) unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8).

This is in direct contrast with Adam: “As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). (The Greek verb Paul uses here to describe Adam is *parakouo* and it literally means “to mishear” or “to hear beside”. In other words, in Adam’s case there is a failure to listen and hear and therefore a failure in attentiveness and awareness. This is the root of the failure to act rightly and is, in sum, what we call, disobedience. By way of contrast, the verb used of Jesus is *hypakouo*, which, as we have noted above, literally means “to hear beneath”. Jesus’ right action is grounded in his attentiveness to the Father. It is also worth noting here that, for Paul, we participate in the obedience of Jesus and the effects of that obedience, just as we participate in the disobedience of Adam and the effects of that disobedience. Which brings us to our response.

## **WE BECOME PARTY TO A CONVERSATION**

Jesus is the focus of our obedience: “This is my Son the beloved: Listen to him” (Matthew 17:5; see also Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). John’s Gospel reminds us that Jesus is God’s Word spoken in the flesh (see John’s Prologue). We are set free when we “make our home in” the Word (see John 8:31-32). Through him, with him and in him, we become party to a conversation. This is the conversation of the communion of persons that God is, a conversation that is expressed in and through creation, a conversation made explicit to the people of old through the Covenant and now brought to fulfilment in our world through the Incarnation. This is the conversation Paul VI refers to as *colloquium salutis*.

Obedience is the natural response to our being drawn into this conversation, both as individuals and as community. Having encountered God in Jesus Christ, we turn and face God and we say: “You see before you the Lord’s servant, let it happen as you have said” (see Luke 1:38). And our obedience is nothing less than our participation in his obedience. Our obedience is not so much an act of will on our part as an act of God in us.

We become obedient by allowing ourselves to be swept up in the gracious goodness of God. So what does it mean for the Christian to be obedient? It means to respond, within the limits and possibilities of daily living, and to say from the heart with as much alacrity and joy as possible, “let it happen as you have said!”.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

121. Reflect on the passage from Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What do you hear there?
  122. What do you think it means “to listen” in the sense used above?
  123. What do you think it means “to hear” in the sense used above?
  124. What do you think it means “to heed/submit” in the sense used above?
  125. Compare and contrast your own understanding of obedience with the above.
  126. Reflect on the idea of the Christian life as a “conversation”. Note Paul VI’s *colloquium salutis*.
  127. Reflect on the suggestion that the desert is a good place to listen and hear.
  128. Recall an example of Jesus’ obedience. Reflect on that.
  129. In this context, can you suggest why Jesus might have conflicted with the religious authorities?
  130. What structures or practices do you have to enhance your ability to be obedient?
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## **CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #36**

### **“OBEDIENCE IN THE CHURCH”**

[This material should be studied in conjunction with the previous two Suggestion Sheets:  
“Obedience” and “Obedience in the Bible”]

## **PUTTING DOWN SOME MARKERS**

There is story from the Desert Fathers: “One of the monks complained to an elder that a brother had committed fornication. The elder said: ‘He who said do not fornicate, also said do not judge’”. That is probably good advice when it comes to obedience. Who can say for sure whether this or that person is truly obedient? And we all have a genius for self-deception, so the most any of us could say of ourselves is that we have done our best to be obedient. None of us can say, with absolute confidence, that we have acted without any taint of selfish intent or pride, for example. We leave the rest in the hands of God.

Genuine Christian obedience – the ongoing, deliberate commitment to listening, hearing and heeding, through Him, with Him and in Him – will always lead us into truth and



goodness, it will never lead us into the lie or evil. Such a claim cannot be made about mere conformity or simply doing as you are told. While Christian obedience and conformity may indeed overlap often enough, obedience is a much deeper human commitment than conformity. Christian obedience, in the end, is Other-centred and leads us along the path of self-transcendence. Christian obedience leads us ever deeper into the rhythm of dying and rising until our final passover into Life. Christian obedience is the servant of the paschal rhythm of the Christian life. Christian obedience is the enemy of the ego-centred life.

## **THE OBEDIENCE OF JESUS**

The evidence of the Gospels suggests Jesus conformed, for the most part, to the normal customs and rituals of Jewish life in his time. Obedience demanded that he resist the religious authorities, however, when the Covenant was at stake. Thus he eats with tax collectors and sinners (eg Mark 2:15-17, Luke 5:29-30, 15:1-2 & 19:1-10 and Matthew 9:10), he touches people with skin diseases (eg Matthew 8:3), he forgives sins (eg Mark 2:1-12) and he violates the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5). He tells parables that back up this non-conforming behaviour. For example, the priest who, fearful of ritual contamination “walks by on the other side” and leaves the Samaritan – a man despised by the authorities – to show compassion to the one who fell among thieves (see Luke 10:29-37) and the foolish young son who breaks all the laws, is welcomed home and is portrayed in stark contrast to the “obedient” older son (see Luke 15:11-32). At times Jesus openly attacks the religious authorities (eg Luke 11:37-54) and warns the people against them (eg Mark 18:14-21, Luke 12:1 and Matthew 16:5-12).

Mere conformity to the demands of the religious authorities and their example and dictates would have led Jesus to disobedience. Reality begins and ends with God’s liberating love, not human rules and rituals. In Jesus’ view of the world, people and relationships are primary, rules and rituals secondary. We should never forget this when we are talking about obedience among the community of believers, those baptised into Christ, followers of the Way.

## **OBEDIENCE AND CONSCIENCE**

There are some very good reasons for conformity. For example, I would like to think that the other drivers on the road will conform to the rules of the road when I am out there, that the people who run the banking system will conform to the regulations, that the people with whom I have associations of one kind or another will conform to the normal courtesies of daily living, that when I am part of the liturgical assembly, we all will conform to a certain level of respect and reverence for what we are engaged in. In other words, some level of conformity is not only acceptable but a necessity. However, there clearly are times when Christian obedience demands that we refuse to conform. For example, what if the banking regulations demand we acquiesce in something we believe is immoral or the leader of the liturgical assembly begins to behave in a way that is insulting and disrespectful or we believe the designated Church authority is misrepresent the Gospel in some significant way?

This necessarily takes us into the complex and difficult area of conscience. The Second Vatican Council reminds us: “For human beings have in their hearts a law written by

God; to obey it is the very dignity of the human person; according to it we will be judged (cf. Rm 2:15-16). Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a human being. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our depths” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16); “... our human dignity demands that we act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 17); “In all our activities we are bound to follow our consciences in order that we may come to God, the end and purpose of life” (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 3). Pope John Paul II is in accord with the best of the Church’s tradition when he says: “People are obliged to follow their conscience in all circumstances and cannot be forced to act against it.” (Pope John Paul II, Message for World Peace Day, 1999.) The publication of *Humanae Vitae* (1968) gives us a practical example. The Australian Bishops wrote, in a special message to their priests in 1974, apropos *Humanae Vitae*:

“It is not impossible, however, that an individual may fully accept the teaching authority of the Pope in general, may be aware of his teaching in this matter, and yet reach a position after honest study and prayer that is at variance with the papal teaching. Such a person could be without blame; he would certainly not have cut himself off from the Church; and in acting in accordance with his conscience he could be without subjective fault.”

## **DISOBEDIENCE AND OUR RESPONSE**

As was indicated above, we are all born with a genius for self-deception. None of us is exempt. We can easily rationalise our position, be driven by unacknowledged personal agendas, get caught up in peer group pressures, and so on. Selfishness, egotism and pride can diminish our willingness and cloud our ability to listen and hear and heed.

Christian obedience demands constant work, work that will never end. The desire to be obedient will be expressed in a persistent willingness to enter the paschal rhythm of daily living, to die to selfishness and pride. Christian obedience will be expressed in a commitment to prayerful listening to the Gospels, to celebration of the liturgy with the community, to study and reflection on the wisdom of the tradition, to meeting people in a spirit of compassion and forgiveness, to seeking honest self-awareness.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

131. What do you see to be the difference between “conformity” and “obedience”? Give an example.
132. Reflect on why we should never judge others or ourselves. What do you think Jesus means.
133. Have you encountered your genius for self-deception? Give an example.
134. Reflect on the statement that genuine Christian obedience will always lead to the true and the good.
135. Go to the Gospels and read one example of Jesus’ non-conformity. How does that affect you?
136. Reflect on the parable of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son as an example of obedience.
137. Recall a time when conscience demanded you act in a way that was difficult. What happened?

138. Under what circumstances are you most likely to be disobedient?  
139. What do you find most helpful in fostering deep and effective listening in your life?  
140. What are your biggest helps/hindrances in fostering a prayerful lifestyle?
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## CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #37

### “OBEDIENCE IN THE MESS”

[This material should be studied in conjunction with the previous four Suggestion Sheets:

“Systems”, “Obedience”, “Obedience in the Bible” and “Obedience in the Church”.]

### THE OBEDIENCE OF JESUS

Matthew’s Gospel has a telling description of what Jesus expects of his disciples:

“One of the scribes then came up to him and said to him, ‘Master, I will follow you wherever you go’. Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’. Another man, one of his disciples, said to him, ‘Sir, let me go and bury my father first’. But Jesus replied, ‘Follow me and leave the dead to bury their dead’”. (See also Luke 9:57-60.)

Matthew’s text needs to be read with other similar texts. For example, texts like:

- “Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth etc” (see Matthew 10:34-36; also Luke 12:51-53).
- “Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me etc” (see Matthew 10:37-39);
- “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me etc” (see Matthew 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-9:1; Luke 9:23-27).
- “The Son of Man is master of the Sabbath etc” (see Matthew 12:1-8; also Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5).
- “Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother etc” (see Matthew 12:46-50; also Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21).

In the light of such texts, it ought not come as a surprise when we read in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus’ relatives tried to take him into custody because they thought he was mad (see Mark 3:20-21). The record of the person and teaching of Jesus found in the

Gospels strongly suggests that obedience will inevitably bring us into conflict, sooner or later, with the accepted norms of the surrounding society and its institutions. This ought not be read as an encouragement to seek out conflict as if there was something good about conflict. The Gospels do not canonise dysfunctional behaviour. They do however emphasise, explicitly and implicitly, that being obedient to the will of God will take you beyond mere conformity. God is not bound by human structures or strictures. If we seek to listen to God's presence in our midst and hear and submit to God's ways, we will find ourselves, from time to time, out of step with those around us. When a crowd moves in a particular direction, experience tells us that most will merely move with the crowd in the prevailing direction. Those who are alert to a deeper truth may find themselves moving in another direction. This may look like madness or betrayal to the crowd.

## THE EVIDENCE OF HISTORY

Sometimes it is said: "The Church is like a club. If you don't like the rules, get out!" The assumption seems to be that fidelity demands conformity. The very opposite may at times be the truth. There have been occasions, for example, when the Church has taught one thing in one era and the opposite in another era. We could note some recent examples, like the changing attitude of the Catholic Church towards Protestants or the change from believing that eating meat on Friday is (potentially) a sin unto eternal damnation to believing now it is not a matter of any concern. But there are other more significant cases. Consider, for example, the Church's teaching on usury – ie looking for profit on a loan. Usury was consistently condemned by the Fathers of the Church and during the four centuries from the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, three ecumenical councils condemned it as did numerous bishops and the greater majority of theologians. Usury was regarded as a mortal sin. Today, no bishop or theologian would hold to such a teaching. There are other examples. Pope Gregory XIII ruled in 1585 that, in the cases of slaves separated from their African spouses and transported to South America, if they accepted baptism they were free to re-marry. And, notwithstanding Pope Gregory XVI's condemnation of the slave trade in 1839, as late as 1866 the Holy Office ruled that the buying and selling of slaves was permissible – something Leo XIII regarded as a moral outrage in his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. For many centuries it was standard practice – upheld by St Thomas Aquinas – for those regarded as heretics to be handed over to the secular authorities for punishment and even execution – something Vatican II condemned in its Declaration on Religion Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*). No bishops or theologians today would agree with Pope Pius IX's teaching, expressed in his encyclical of 1854, *Quanta Cura*, that states must recognise the Catholic Church as supreme and submit to its influence and that freedom of conscience and freedom of worship are "madness". As late as 1952, Cardinal Ottaviani, Head of the Holy Office, gave a ruling which referred to freedom of conscience as an illusion. Vatican II, in a number of places (eg *Gaudium et Spes* #16 & #17 and *Dignitatis Humanae* #3), upholds the teaching of freedom of conscience, as has Pope John Paul II on a number of occasions (eg *Veritatis Splendor* #3 & #31-2 etc).

It is a matter of no little sadness, and a good deal of embarrassment, that the Catholic Church has not been more forthright down the ages in defending the rights and freedoms of individuals and communities. Thus, instead of being at the forefront of the great social movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – for example, the struggle for democracy, for the abolition of slavery and for the rights of workers – the Catholic Church was too

often on the side of those who resisted such movements. Would that the Catholic Church had had more men and women of obedience and fewer conformists.

### **OBEDIENCE LEADS TO THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL**

Obedience is active listening for the movement of the Spirit in every moment, everywhere; obedience hears, sees, feels and becomes imbued with Being beyond mere seeming; obedience yearns to submit to the ways of the Community of Love we call God. Obedience is a lifetime commitment, as the Benedictine nun, Maria Boulding, notes: “Like Jesus, you have to listen and listen. It will take you all your life to hear the Father's word of love for you; indeed it will take you all your eternity”. Obedience leads us into the human community full of freedom and possibility, it enables us to be in any human society or system without becoming its prisoner. Obedience inevitably leads us into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St Paul knew it better than most: “I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:22). And this obedience is lived out in the broken, terribly messy reality of human society, civil and ecclesial. Obedience enables us to thrive in those human systems and become active contributors to them, by grounding us beyond them and situating the very systems themselves within the embrace of God’s mercy.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

141. Take time to meditate on the Gospel passages mentioned in paragraph one above. Reflect.
142. What do you see as the main theme coming through those Gospel passages?
143. Can you recall any other passage from the Gospels that has a similar theme? Reflect.
144. What is the difference between being obedient and being merely confrontationist?
145. How do you deal with the inadequacy and inconsistencies of Catholic Church government?
146. How might obedience lead Catholics to be more proactive and effective in social movements?
147. How might lack of obedience manifest itself in your life today?
148. Reflect on the implications of obedience outlined in the last paragraph.
149. In what way might obedience be helpful in dealing with your frustration and anger?
150. How might obedience enable you to thrive within a terribly messy and inadequate system?

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