



THE MIX



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Our Say - An eye for the big picture

Good leaders all have at least one characteristic in common: an instinct for the big picture. They always see and deal with things in context, they never take things out of context. Even as they give themselves wholeheartedly and, at times, with intense focus to this or that task, they never lose a sense of the whole. So each task supplements the overall mission, each part complements each other part. Every action carries, as it were, the genetic code of the whole, the dynamism that relates it to every other action within that system. Their instinct for the big picture keeps them very much in touch with this genetic code, this unifying dynamism.

The Catholic Common Ground Project recently launched by Cardinal Bernadin in the United States - and featured on pages 4 and 5 of this issue of *The Mix* - is an attempt to recover a sense of the big picture and the unifying dynamism that specifies our Catholic tradition. This Project arises from a recognition of some hard facts:

The Catholic Church in the United States has entered a time of peril. Many of its leaders, both clerical and lay, feel under siege and in-

creasingly polarized. Many of its faithful, particularly its young people, feel disenfranchised, confused about their beliefs, and increasingly adrift. Many of its institutions feel uncertain of their identity and increasingly fearful about their future.

Much the same could be said of the Australian Church. And we ought to be clear as to the true nature of "the peril". The most immediate peril is that we will fail to engage in honest and open conversation - because of fears, hurts, unresolved personal conflicts, vested interests, power struggles, willful attempts to force solutions etc. More deeply still, the peril is that we will quite simply cease to be the community of disciples, gathered by Word and Sacrament, a pilgrim people that is a sign of God's saving love in the world and an organisational system that actively and effectively proclaims the Good News. As Bernadin's document notes:

Unless we examine our situation with fresh eyes, open minds and changed hearts, within a few decades a vital Catholic legacy may be squandered, to the loss of both the Church and the nation.

The times call us to be proactive, positive, honest and creative rather than reactive, negative, evasive and defensive. We must hold everything up to the Gospel as the measure. The Gospel is the unifying dynamism. Every issue must be addressed, at least implicitly, in the light of the big picture of God's saving love revealed in Jesus Christ. This of course requires that we, both individually and collectively, take the Person and teaching of Jesus seriously. We must re-discover the Gospel in and through an honest and rigorous conversation with each other and with all people of goodwill.

We all feel variously frustrated, angry, anxious, sad, fearful and confused. We must live through these experiences in union with our Paschal Lord, rather than act out of them. The common ground we seek ultimately lies in our relationship with God in Christ. Our best time, energy and effort must go into that. There is where we will see the big picture and get in touch with the unifying dynamism that makes us Church and enables us to respond to the challenges as faithful disciples. □

This journal is one of the works of
the Sydney based group
Catalyst for Renewal.

These are the founding members:

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Kate Englebrecht, Michael Kelly S.J.,
Robyn Lawson, Stephanie Long,
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Tony Neylan, Josephine Scarf,
Martin Teulan, Ruth van Herk,
Michael Whelan, S.M.

The following is its mission statement:

We are believers who are attempting
to establish a forum for conversation
within the Catholic Church
of Australia.

Our aim is to prompt
open exchanges
among the community of believers,
mindful of
the diversity of expression
of faith in contemporary Australia.

This springs explicitly from
the spirit of Pope John XXIII
and Vatican II:

"Let there be unity
in what is necessary,
freedom in what is unsettled,
and charity in any case"
(*Gaudium et Spes*, n.92).

This journal is published eight times
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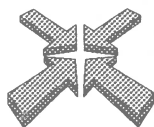
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The Four Arrows & the Cross symbolise
diversity giving rise to communion in and
through the Paschal Mystery. Those who are
diverse by nature & culture, in and through
Christ find life-giving unity.

The Human Face

MY NAME IS CLOVER MOORE. I
grew up in Gordon and after at-
tending Loreto Kirribilli and the Domini-
can College Elm Court in Moss Vale I put
myself through Arts at Sydney University
by working in the Fisher Library. I majored
in Archeology, English and History.

I met my husband Peter at university
where he was studying architecture and
after we married we went to London for a
year and stayed for five. Our daughter So-
phie was born there and she travelled
through Europe with us. Travel, 'The
Guardian' and the BBC contributed to my
political and social awareness, but it wasn't
till we returned to Australia, had our sec-
ond child Tom, and moved to Bourke
Street, Redfern that I became actively in-
volved.

Even though our local Council charged
the highest rates in the State, services and
facilities for women with young children
were abysmal; through traffic came down
every street, local parks were barb wire,
asphalted compounds. The comparison
with my experience in London was stark,
where even though I had been a visitor
with a baby in a city of 18 million, I had
been able to use brilliant facilities, attend
classes and be intellectually challenged and
socially satisfied.

So urged on by my Greek neighbours,
who also weren't happy with the impover-
ished environment, I started a self-help
community group; I took up petitions about
the polluting through traffic, started a baby
sitting club, a vegetable co-op and other
support services and was thus inducted
into the inner city community. Three years
later when the same do-nothing Aldermen
put themselves forward for office I decided
enough was enough and to everyone's
amazement - particularly mine and Peter's
- I was elected to possibly the toughest lo-
cal Council in Sydney and thus began my
political career. I loved local government.
It was empowering to influence outcomes
and see improvements in the neighbour-
hood. It was not something I had planned
but I took to it like a duck to water.

Apart from a Great Grandfather who
had been appointed to the Legislative
Council there was nothing in my family
background that indicated a political car-
eer. I had found growing up on the North
Shore lonely and boring. When I was at
university I stayed in a flat in the eastern
suburbs for three months and found the
difference dramatic. It was cosmopolitan
and alive. Later, when Peter and I arrived
in Europe I felt as if we had arrived home.

I loved family and community life centring
on the village. Cafe life seemed vital after
stultifying, lonely, Australian suburbia.

We are the most urbanised country in
the world yet governments in the past have
failed our cities. High rise development
and polluting traffic have contributed to
destroying community life. One of my ma-
jor roles has been to defend and protect the
urban environment so communities can
thrive and the loneliness of big city life can
be overcome.

My Catholic faith gives structure and
meaning to my life. It has been a positive
force in our marriage as our faith has al-
ways been important, and we have shopped
around for parishes with inspiring priests.
We have never felt it is enough to just go to
Mass. Thus we went to Farm Street in
London and when we returned to Australia
we followed Fr Frank Lopez from the Ma-
rist Chapel to Millers Pt. My job is tough,
and an inspiring sermon can be reassuring
and supportive. For many years now we
have attended the St Francis parish at Pad-
dington, where at a time of dwindling con-
gregations, Fr Geoffrey Plant, who in-
spires and stimulates, has a growing flock
with encouragingly lots of young people.

I believe the Church is making an in-
valuable contribution to an increasingly
troubled society through the work of people
like Fr Geoffrey and the Brown Nurses.
David Leary and Fr Nick Lucas at the
Come In Centre care for abandoned and
abused street kids - they are the Church in
the front line, doing the real work of Christ
and as an inner city representative I am
very grateful.

*(Clover Moore MP is the State Member for
the inner Sydney electorate of Bligh.)*



Ms Clover Moore MP

Your Say - We need more adult education

by Terry Harvey

I abhor fundamentalism. The biblical span of three score years and ten having passed I anticipate with pleasure whatever remains. I have been granted the privilege of riding the rough waters of a rapidly changing world and Church with my vision becoming clearer, and its goal more attainable as I surface to draw breath after each wave.

"Myself when young did eagerly frequent Doctor and Saint and heard great argument, around it and about and ever more came out by that same door as in I went.".... At least, I *think* it may have been the same door, but like Alice's corridor in Wonderland, they all offered great promise at the time. Of course, when I was really young - that is, until I was well into my thirties - I relied heavily on the advice of those whom I presumed knew better than I. If one is brought up in a strong enough tradition it seems foolhardy to break from it.

Being now surrounded by a world mostly younger than my own children, it would seem a great pity that what little of my experience can be called wisdom should not be communicated to the advantage of others.

From a seminary, where the words of the good Rector repeated day after day at

the midday prayer session '...become holy and zealous priests of God...' still ring in my ears as a pious exhortation to a race that proved to be the beginning of the end, to the coarse language and behaviour of a common airman, was sufficient shock to have brought me down to earth. Such was my background and training that I closed my eyes to the reality of the world and continued to live in the pattern of righteous conviction laid down by those who trained me.

I am quite unable to explain or justify how my spiritual development stopped in that rigid track all through my university years and beyond. Of one thing I am sure - that I trusted implicitly in the power and knowledge of an hierarchic church to guarantee my eternal salvation if only I kept to its divinely inspired direction.

Once knew a good Catholic man whose father having committed suicide, gave orders to the undertakers to have his body interred without the rites of the Church, and did not even attend the funeral himself. Understandable I suppose when that same man had to ask special exemption from the priest to attend a sporting dinner on a Friday where only meat was served (without which the penalty at the time was

hell for all eternity if one died unrepentant). He was a daily communicant with Sunday Mass and benediction.

I mention these extraordinary cases because they were very real to those of my generation and many have found it hard to make the break. It may also serve to demonstrate the tremendous relief I experienced in surfacing from such deep waters.

My disappointment over the slow process of the reforms promised by Vatican II has caused me to feel that one of the priorities we should be addressing is Adult Education. I have been able to attend to this locally by persuading those of like mind to take an active part in those ministries which can lead to an understanding of the changes and in the support of Small Christian Communities within the neighbourhood.

Of this I am certain, that protest made from outside the framework of the church itself is no protest at all.

What I was does not matter - what potential I have for good must be used to the full while there is time. □

Terry Harvey, Townsville.

Letters

I have been reading *The Mix* since on holidays in Sydney over the last few weeks. Congratulations. I find it a very stimulating and thought provoking publication.

Terry Holland, Bondi, NSW

It has been a tonic to read *The Mix* and I hope it continues to encourage conversation within the Catholic Church in Australia and then perhaps between the Churches and the community at large.

F. Carroll, Miles, Qld

I was delighted to receive my first copy of *The Mix*. I had heard of *Spirituality in the Pub* from my sister in Sydney and I think it is a great idea. I was particularly impressed by your Mission Statement where you say that "our aim is to prompt open exchanges among the community of believers" through a "forum for conversation". I believe there is a real thirst for conversation among the community of believers. Conversation does not mean that we all have to agree. But true conversation does mean that we really try to lis-

ten to the other. It is that kind of conversation that develops a sense of belonging, an experience sorely lacking for many believers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: "The first service that one owes in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love of God begins by listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.... Listening can be a greater service than speaking. Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and his own follies." I learn much these days about what the church needs to do by listening to those outside the community, especially ex-members. There is an extraordinary awakening of spirituality amongst all peoples today. Can we fine-tune our listening to hear the call from those 'outside the walls' so that our conversation will include them too! Listening presumes the old style virtue of humility. We are never the expert on anyone else's life. The therapeutic sciences today, when speaking of listening to others, use phrases like "listening from a not-

knowing and non-expert stance". Such listening doesn't mean that we surrender our own values system. But it does mean that we respect 'someone else's'. Again congratulations! Let's hope for the right Mix!

Peter Cantwell, Franciscan, Kew, Vic

I am delighted to make contact with your group. Our Parish Priest, Frank Martin, read snippets from *The Mix* at Sunday Mass and I guessed it might have come from the group I heard Geraldine Doogue mention on TV some months ago. I am a senior teacher in a Melbourne Catholic Girls' College and would value the support you offer. These are hard times to teach RE to young women.

Judy Corderoy, Dingley, Vic

Having just read your journal for the first time today I would like to become a subscriber. There is indeed much food for thought and discussion.

Tom Brophy, Terang, Vic.

Essay - Called to be Catholic

Presented by Joseph Bernadin

Called to be Catholic: The Church in a Time of Peril, was prepared by the National Pastoral Life Center (New York) and presented by Cardinal Bernadin in Chicago on August 12th this year. It marked the launch of the Catholic Common Ground Project (CCGP). Following are some excerpts from the document, representing about three quarters of the whole.

Will the Catholic Church in the United States enter the new millennium as a church of promise, augmented by the faith of rising generations and able to be a leavening force in our culture? Or will it become a church on the defensive, torn by dissension and weakened in its core structures? The outcome, we believe, depends on whether American Catholicism can confront an array of challenges with honesty and imagination and whether the church can reverse the polarization that inhibits discussion and cripples leadership. American Catholics must reconstitute the conditions for addressing our differences constructively - a common ground centered on faith in Jesus, marked by accountability to the living Catholic tradition, and ruled by a renewed spirit of civility, dialogue, generosity, and broad and serious consultation.

It is widely admitted that the Catholic Church in the United States has entered a time of peril. Many of its leaders, both clerical and lay, feel under siege and increasingly polarized. Many of its faithful, particularly its young people, feel disenfranchised, confused about their beliefs, and increasingly adrift. Many of its institutions feel uncertain of their identity and increasingly fearful about their future.

Those are hard words to pronounce to a church that, despite many obstacles, continues to grow in numbers, continues to welcome and assist the poor and the stranger, and continues to foster extraordinary examples of Christian faith and witness to the Gospel. The landscape of American Catholicism is dotted with vital communities of worship and service, with new initiatives, and with older, deeply rooted endeavors that are kept alive by the hard labor and daily sacrifices of millions of Catholics. In the face of powerful centrifugal forces, many Catholic leaders have worked to build consensus and cooperation.

We hesitate to say anything that might discourage them or add to the fingerprinting and demoralization that, in too many

cases, already burden these exemplary efforts. But this discordant and disheartened atmosphere is itself one of the realities which cannot be ignored. For three decades the church has been divided by different responses to the Second Vatican Council and to the tumultuous years that followed it. By no means were these tensions always unfruitful; in many cases they were virtually unavoidable.

But even as conditions have changed, party lines have hardened. A mood of suspicion and acrimony hangs over many of those most active in the church's life; at moments it even seems to have infiltrated the ranks of the bishops. One consequence is that many of us are refusing to acknowledge disquieting realities, perhaps fearing that they may reflect poorly on our past efforts or arm our critics within the church. Candid discussion is inhibited. Across the whole spectrum of views within the church, proposals are subject to ideological litmus tests. Ideas, journals, and leaders are pressed to align themselves with preexisting camps, and are viewed warily when they depart from those expectations.

Many of us are refusing to acknowledge disquieting realities, perhaps fearing that they may reflect poorly on our past efforts or arm our critics within the church

There is nothing wrong in itself with the prospect that different visions should contend within American Catholicism. That has long been part of the church's experience in this nation, and indeed differences of opinion are essential to the process of attaining the truth. But the way that struggle is currently proceeding, the entire church may lose. It is now three decades after Vatican II. Social and cultural circumstances have changed. The church possesses a wealth of post-conciliar experience to assess and translate into lessons for the future. There is undiminished hunger for authentic faith, spiritual experience, and moral guidance, but many of the traditional supports for distinct religious identities - or for the institutions that convey them - have disappeared.

Meanwhile, positions of leadership in the ministries of the church are passing to those with little exposure, for better or worse, to the sharply defined institutional Catholicism of earlier decades. Still younger Catholics, many with absolutely no experience of that pre-conciliar Catholicism, come to the church with new questions and few of the old answers.

The church's capacity to respond to these changed conditions may be stymied if constructive debate is supplanted by bickering, disparagement, and stalemate. Rather than forging a consensus that can harness and direct the church's energies, contending viewpoints are in danger of canceling one another out. Bishops risk being perceived as members of different camps rather than as pastors of the whole church.

Unless we examine our situation with fresh eyes, open minds and changed hearts, within a few decades a vital Catholic legacy may be squandered, to the loss of both the church and the nation.

There are urgent questions that the church in the United States knows it must air openly and honestly but which it increasingly feels pressed to evade or, at best, address obliquely. These issues include:

- the changing roles of women.
- the Eucharistic liturgy as most Catholics experience it.
- the meaning of human sexuality, and the gap between church teachings and the convictions of many faithful in this and several other areas of morality.
- the image and morale of priests, and the declining ratios of priests and vowed religious to people in the pews.
- the succession of lay people to positions of leadership formerly held by priests and sisters, and the provision of an adequate formation for ministers, both ordained and lay.
- the ways in which the church is present in political life, its responsibility to the poor and defenseless, and its support for lay people in their family life and daily callings.
- the capacity of the church to embrace African-American, Latino, and Asian populations, their cultural heritages and their social concerns.
- the survival of Catholic school systems, colleges and universities, health care facilities and social services, and the articulation of a distinct and appropriate religious identity and mission for these institutions.
- the manner of decision-making and consultation in church governance.

- the responsibility of theology to authoritative church teachings.
- the place of collegiality and subsidiarity in the relations between Rome and the American episcopacy.

As long as such topics remain inadequately addressed, the near future of American Catholic life is at risk. Yet in almost every case, the necessary conversation runs up against polarized positions that have so magnified fears and so strained sensitivities that even the simplest lines of inquiry are often fiercely resisted. Consider, for example, just two of these topics.

On every side, there are reports that many Catholics are reaching adulthood with barely a rudimentary knowledge of their faith, with an attenuated sense of sacrament, and with a highly individualistic view of the church. Some of us are tempted to minimize the seriousness of this situation out of an attachment to young people and an appreciation of their generosity - or out of loyalty to those who work, often with insufficient resources and scant rewards, to provide religious education. Others among us rush to reduce complex questions of pedagogy, theology, limited time, turnover in teachers, and the pressures of an aggressive and pervasive youth culture to some single factor and some simple solution.

The practical realities of our young people's needs are quickly lost amid accusations of infidelity to church teachings, reflexive defenses against criticism, or promotion of pet educational approaches. It is an atmosphere unlikely to generate the massive and creative effort required to meet today's crisis of religious illiteracy or link it with young people's search for a sense of participation and belonging. Or consider the church's public prayer. The faith thrives where the Eucharist is celebrated worthily, drawing the Christian community into its mystery and power. Yet in many parishes Mass attendance has plummeted; congregational participation is indifferent; and liturgies are marred by lack of preparation, casual or rushed gestures, unsuitable music, and banal sentiments in hymns and, above all, in homilies. ...

But again polarization blocks a candid and constructive response to the situation. An informal or "horizontal" liturgy, demystified and stressing the participation of the congregation, is pitted against a solemn or "vertical" liturgy, unchangeable and focused on the sacerdotal action of the priest. The former is rightly feared as unable to carry the weight of the transcendent, and as opening the liturgy to the trivializing currents of the culture. The

latter is rightly feared as becoming a concert, a show, or a spiritless exercise in rubrics, closed to the particular needs and gifts of the community. No effort to assess the state of worship or develop new translations or refresh liturgical skills escapes suspicion of moving to one extreme or the other - or pressure to move in the opposite direction as a safeguard.

The same dynamic of fear and polarization afflicts the church's discussions of other topics, from efforts to accommodate language or practice to the changing consciousness of women to efforts to define theology's relationship to the hierarchy. Unnuanced positions are espoused without encountering moderating criticism from sympathizers. Then these positions loom even more powerfully as fears in the minds of opponents, generating or justifying their own unnuanced positions. The end results are distrust, acrimony, and deadlock.

*Jesus Christ, present in
Scripture and sacrament,
is central
to all that we do;
he must always be
the measure
and not what is measured.*

What will it take for the Catholic Church in the United States to escape from this partisanship and the paralysis it threatens to engender?

Jesus Christ, present in Scripture and sacrament, is central to all that we do; he must always be the measure and not what is measured.

Around this central conviction, the church's leadership, both clerical and lay, must reaffirm and promote the full range and demands of authentic unity, acceptable diversity, and respectful dialogue, not just as a way to dampen conflict but as a way to make our conflicts constructive, and ultimately as a way to understand for ourselves and articulate for our world the meaning of discipleship of Jesus Christ.

Chief among those (basic) truths is that our discussion must be accountable to the Catholic tradition and to the Spirit-filled, living church that brings to us the revelation of God in Jesus. Accountability to the Catholic tradition does not mean reversion to a chain-of-command, highly institutional understanding of the church, rather than Vatican II's vision of a communion and a people.

Nor does accountability mean conceiving of faith as an ideology, an all-encompassing doctrinal system that produces ready explanations and practical prescriptions for every human question. Now, as historically, there has always been wide room for legitimate debate, discussion, and diversity. But accountability does demand serious engagement with the tradition and its authoritative representatives. It rules out the pop scholarship, sound-bite theology, unhistorical assertions, and flip-pant dismissals that have become all too common on both the right and the left of the church. Authentic accountability rules out a fundamentalism that narrows the richness of the tradition to a text or a decree, and it rules out a narrow appeal to individual or contemporary experience that ignores the cloud of witnesses over the centuries or the living magisterium of the church exercised by the bishops and the Chair of Peter.

Authentic accountability embraces the demands that the Gospel poses for our public life and social structures as well as for our private lives and personal relations. This accountability implies that the church, for all its humanness, cannot be treated as merely a human organization. The church is a chosen people, a mysterious communion, a foreshadowing of the Kingdom, a spiritual family. One implication of this is that the hermeneutic of suspicion must be balanced with a hermeneutic of love and retrieval. Another is that an essential element of Catholic leadership must be wide and serious consultation, especially of those most affected by church policies under examination. The church's ancient concept of reception reminds us that all the faithful are called to a role in grasping a truth or incorporating a decision or practice into the church's life.

Finally this accountability recognizes that our discussions about the Catholic Church take place within boundaries. Exactly how the boundaries of Catholic Christianity should be formulated will inevitably be open at times to reexamination and debate. So too will our attitudes toward whatever falls outside those boundaries. But the very idea of boundaries is a necessary premise, without which no identity can exist. Inclusivity, a concept that can operate at many levels, becomes a catchword and even a self-contradiction when it impugns any efforts to make distinctions or set defining limits. □

Cardinal Bernadin is a past President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and is currently Archbishop of Chicago and the senior active Cardinal in the US.

Words for a Pilgrim People

Let all speak the truth with their neighbours, for we are members one of another. Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. ... Let no evil talk come out of your mouths but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4:25-27 & 29)

One of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of people one on the other, a development promoted chiefly by modern technical advances. Nevertheless familial dialogue among people does not reach its perfection on the level of technical progress, but on the deeper level of interpersonal relationships. These demand a mutual respect for the full spiritual dignity of the person. Christian revelation contributes greatly to the promotion of this communion between persons, and at the same time leads us to a deeper understanding of the laws of social life which the Creator has written into each person's moral and spiritual nature. (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [Gaudium et Spes], n.23)

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 crimes 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).

Nothing is ever completed ... Incompleteness is a part of nature and it takes great art or great wisdom to know when to lay down the brush ... we should always avoid perfectionism. (Jean Monnet, *Memoirs*, Trans. R. Mayne, Doubleday, 1978, p. 521.)

The Bible

The Christian tradition has always held that the Bible is *inspired*. The Second Vatican Council says of biblical inspiration: "The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 20:31; 2Tim. 3:16; 2Pet. 1:19-21; 3:15-16), they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. To compose the sacred books, God chose certain people who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their powers and faculties so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written and no more" (*Dei Verbum*, n.11).

Inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures was simply taken for granted until the nineteenth century. The first formal statement by the Church was Leo XIII's Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893. In the nineteenth century inspiration became an issue as questions were raised by the study of history, archaeology and ancient texts. The central issue was not whether the Sacred Scriptures were inspired but what we actually *mean* by making this claim.

Scholars continue to debate this matter. At its very least, inspiration implies a fulfillment of the great promise: I am with you! By engaging that word in faith we engage God. That word is "alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword only more finely" (Heb. 4:12). When we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word we quite rightly say "This is the Word of the Lord".

This is not to say that the Scriptures can be taken on a simple, literal reading. Each and every text of Sacred Scripture demands careful examination and interpretation. As Pius XII notes in his Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943): "What is the literal sense of a passage is not always as obvious in the speeches and writings of the ancient authors of the East as it is in our own times" (n.35). One of the key roles of the Church, and thus tradition, is that of discernment and teaching to ensure right interpretation and to guard the deposit of faith.

Suggested Reading: See under *Inspiration* in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (65:1-72); Wilfrid Harrington, *Key to the Bible, Volume 1: Record of Revelation*; Image Books, 1976, 36-51; Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction*, Paulist Press, 1984, Ch. 1; PHEME PERKINS, *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction*, Paulist Press, 1988, Ch. 1.

The Tradition

The first recorded incident of persecution of Christians by the Roman Government was in 64 by Nero. However, it was not until the third century that the Roman Government decided to deal in a serious and systematic way with the threat of Christianity. Emperor Septimus Severus (193-211) was the first to issue a decree forcing provincial governors to persecute Christians. The intensity or otherwise of the persecutions depended on the dispositions of the Emperors. Decius (249-251) was a fierce persecutor as was Diocletian (284-305) in the last years of his reign. In Milan in 313 Emperor Constantine promulgated an Edict giving religious freedom to all. The Edict of Milan was a watershed moment in the tradition.

These persecutions produced new categories: *apostates* (who denied their faith); *confessors* (those in prison for their faith) and *martyrs* (those who bore witness to their faith by submitting to death). "The importance of martyrdom in the early Church would be difficult to exaggerate" (Louis Bouyer). The links with the saving death of Jesus are obvious. Martyrdom also implied a deep faith, vision and moral commitment - qualities largely absent from that world. Thus martyrdom played a significant part in the expansion of Christianity. As Tertullian noted: "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians".

There are three distinct groups of texts that bear the record of the persecutions and the details of particular confessors and martyrs. The first group comprises official court proceedings and are generally referred to as *acts of the martyrs*. These provide details of the questions addressed to those on trial, their answers and the sentences given. They are invaluable historical documents. The second comprises the reports of eyewitnesses or contemporaries and are generally referred to as *passiones* or *martyria*. Perhaps most interesting of these is *The Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons to the Churches of Asia and Phrygia* describing the sufferings and deaths of the martyrs in Lyons in 177 and 178, including Bishop Photinus "being over 90 years of age and very sick in body, scarcely breathing from the sickness, but strengthened by zeal of the spirit from his vehement desire for martyrdom". The third comprises legends of the martyrs composed for the purpose of edification long after the actual martyrdoms took place. These texts are of varying value and interest.

Suggested Reading: J. Quasten, *Patrology, Volume 1*, Christian Classics 1986, 176-185; Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality, Volume 1*, Seabury Press, 190-210; Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin Books, 1988, 116-124.

• **Cardinal Bernadin said recently that he had received many letters after he launched the Catholic Common Ground Project on August 12th with the *Called to be Catholic* document.** "With rare exceptions" he said, "they thanked us for spelling out fears and hopes about the Church that they have long entertained." Bernadin said he was "particularly gratified by the support of Bishop Anthony Pilla, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops." Bernadin also noted there were some criticisms: "As I see it, three major criticisms have been made about the statement. First, that it does not adequately acknowledge Scripture and tradition as the actual common ground of the Catholic Church and reduces the Magisterium to just one more voice in a chorus of debate. Second, that it places dissent on the same level as truth and seems ready to accept compromise of the truth. Third, that it insufficiently acknowledges the centrality of Jesus. My response to the first criticism is that Scripture and tradition are the foundational sources of Church teaching and, therefore, the basis for the "common ground". The primacy of Scripture and tradition is fully recognized in the statement. The statement also clearly calls for accountability to the Catholic tradition and rejects any approach that would ignore the "living Magisterium of the Church exercised by the bishops and the chair of Peter". In regard to the second criticism, the statement's call to dialogue within the Church no more legitimates dissent than does dialogue with other faith traditions. In

fact, the question of dissent in the Church and whether it is ever justified is a complicated and theologically technical one, and our statement did not pursue it. The premise of our statement is that many serious disagreements among Catholics – for example, about the state of the liturgy or religious education or the role of women in the Church – do not necessarily involve dissent in the sense of a clear departure from authentic teaching. But the statement also shows full awareness that such departures do exist. The statement recognizes the legitimacy, even the value, of disagreements, but it also insists that dialogue about them must be accountable to Catholic tradition and the Church's teaching authority. Likewise, the statement insists that "discussion about the Catholic Church take place within boundaries" and "defining limits." It explicitly challenges two of the most popular reasons for dismissing tradition or boundaries, the appeals to "experience" and to "inclusivity." In a few paragraphs the statement tries to capture both the demands and the dynamism of orthodoxy. It is willing to consider the new but insists that it be accountable to tradition and the Magisterium. This clearly is not establishing truth by compromise or accommodation. In regard to the third criticism, the statement begins by asserting that the very first condition for addressing our differences constructively must be "a common ground centered on faith in Jesus." Moreover, in the statement's section proposing a solution it again begins with the profession: "Jesus

Christ, present in Scripture and sacrament, is central to all we do. He must always be the measure and not what is measured."

• **Bishop Gregory Singkai of Bougainville died suddenly on September 12th.** He was 61 years of age and had been recently re-installed Bishop of Bougainville.

• **The funerals of two consecrated women and the Archbishop of Gitega, Burundi, were held on September 19th.** They were assassinated on September 9th, although their bodies were not discovered until the 17th. Cardinal Jozef Tomko, Prefect for the Congregation of the Evangelisation of Peoples, went to Burundi and presided at the requiem Mass.

• **Christians in Solidarity with East Timor have vowed to do everything in their power to assist the 1300 East Timorese refugees currently in Australia.** Sr Kathleen O'Connor RSJ, one of the founders of the group set up to coordinate Josephite aid to East Timor, said recently she and others were prepared to go to jail if that is what is required to defend the rights of the refugees. In particular, Sr Kathleen is helping to organise a nationwide sanctuary network to protect the refugees from deportation. Something similar happened in the 1980's in the US with South American refugees fleeing dictatorial regimes and more recently in Paris when Catholics sheltered and protected African immigrants in St Bernard's Church. For further information contact 02 9745 3444.

Bulletin Board

• **Catalyst for Renewal is holding a morning of reflection for Volunteers on Saturday November 9th, 10am-1pm,** at the parish hall, cnr of Mary St and Gladesville Rd, Hunters Hill. It is an opportunity to discern how we might co-operate in promoting conversation for renewal within the Church. No charge. BYO lunch. Tea/coffee provided. (Info: Michael 02 9816 3614)

• **Catalyst for Renewal is holding a morning of reflection for all Friends on Saturday November 30th, 10am-1pm,** at St Ignatius College, Riverview (Memorial Hall). There will be input with the opportunity for prayer and quiet time. Participants will also meet other Friends and help to promote conversation for renewal. No charge. BYO lunch. Tea/coffee provided (Info: Michael 02 9816 3614)

• **The people of Parramatta Diocese CALLED TO BE God's Action in the**

World - an invitation to attend a Twilight Seminar, Wednesday October 23rd. Keynote Address by Steve Raymond, Director of Current Affairs, 2WS, with Sr Margaret Shepherd RSM and Rev John Hirt, with Fr Gerry Icerson as MC. (Info: Sue 02 9831 4911)

• **The Catholic Adult Education Centre (Revesby, Sydney), has begun a new program called Outreach.** Eight regional centres have been set up in eight parishes across Sydney. October sessions include "Spirituality for Family Life" with Chris Toohey at St Joseph's, Belmore; "Teach us to Pray" with Patty Fawcner at St Mary's, Concord; "Starting Parish or Community Coping Groups" with John Hosie & Team at the CAE Centre, Revesby. (Info: The Outreach Coordinator 02 9792 3144)

• **Towards 2001: Challenges to Australian Catholics - 3 Wednesday evening**

lectures, October 16, 23 & 30, 8pm-9.30pm, by Ed Campion in the Veech Library at Catholic Institute of Sydney, 99 Albert Rd, Strathfield. Topics: "The Challenge of 2001", "Where to, the Social Justice Tradition?" and "A Declericalised Church?"

• **Three Personal Stories: Geraldine Doogue, Deirdre Rofe & Dorothy Lee speak of their spiritual journeys.** Wednesday November 13th, 7.30pm in the Xavier College Chapel, Barker Rd, Kew. (Info: Kate 03 9818 3960)

• **Men's Spirituality: An Evening with John Menadue, Morris West & Jim Macken.** Thursday November 7th, 7.30pm at St Mary's Church, North Sydney. All welcome. Michael Whelan will be MC. (Info: 02 9955 1183).

[For advertising on this page, have information to the Editor by the 1st of the month]

