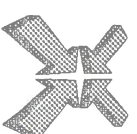




# THE MIX



JOURNAL OF CATALYST FOR RENEWAL

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 9

NOVEMBER 1997

**Ted Kennedy**  
The human face 2

**Gary Stone**

Marriage and ministry: Parish communities in the future 3

**Richard Lennan**

Church of the future and future of the Church 3

**The Bible**

The Church and the Kingdom 6

**Tradition**

The Church is the Kingdom? 6

## Our Say - The ironic revelation

One of the most powerful means by which truth is revealed in daily living is irony. The English word comes from the Greek word *eironia* meaning simulated ignorance. Irony is about layers of meaning. What seems to be "this" is also "that", what seems not to be, is; what we say, is also not what we say and so on.

It takes a certain amount of sophistication to use irony deliberately and constructively in language. More often it is used in not so constructive ways, being simply sarcasm or even cynicism in another dress, and is meant to cut. When we harbour unacknowledged and unprocessed resentment, hurt, anxiety and anger we are particularly prone to a sort of chronic irony in dealing with the world. This ironic mode is very common in our culture.

Irony, at its potentially most constructive and revealing, is not used deliberately by us. That is an essential part of the irony. At its best, irony simply emerges. We find ourselves caught in the ironic - accused,

bemused, amused, revealed. When we thought we were doing and achieving "this", we discover we were actually doing and achieving "that", what we thought was virtue we discover is not quite so; what we thought an awful frustration we discover to be an advantage. And so it goes.

Such moments of irony are always laced with echoes of the tragicomedy that life is. They can be, at once, sad and funny. In them the Spirit calls us to a humble recognition that we are not in charge, were never meant to be and never can be; that we are called to be gracious participants in life rather than controllers of it.

Whether these ironic moments are in fact constructive or destructive depends on us. We may try to hide from these ironies of life, pretending that we are above them. Or we may turn and embrace them in gratitude, pleased that we have been called back to reality, saved - for the moment at least - from the illusions of egocentricity.

We might perhaps be blessed by some of these ironic moments in which the Spirit speaks to our spirit, if we reflect on our own lives as Christians, women and men who profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ. In particular, we may discover moments of irony in the way we deal with those within the Church whose positions and opinions differ strongly from our's. When we confront each other out of unacknowledged or unprocessed anger and anxiety, we are prime candidates for irony.

Thus, in fighting autocracy we can become autocratic, in challenging dogmatism we can become dogmatic, in exposing lack of openness we can become manipulative and surreptitious. Driven by strong emotion we tend to become what we fight.

The ironies of life might be amongst our best companions in the long journey of renewal. Through them the Spirit might save us from some unfortunate successes, whereby we replace one bad situation with another at least as bad if not worse. □

# The Human Face

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

These are the current Members:

Marie Biddle RSI, Kevin Barges,  
Dr Ann Bye, Marie Byrne,  
Aidan Carvill SM, Mareta Donovan,  
Geraldine Doogue, Kate Englebrecht,  
Francis Gross, Catherine Hammond,  
Sam Hammond, Michael Kelly SJ,  
Robyn Lawson, Stephanie Long,  
Maryellen McLeay, John Menadue,  
Dr Chris Needs, Carmel Sharples,  
John Sharples, Martin Teulan,  
Joanna Thyer, Ruth van Herk,  
Michael Whelan SM

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).

The Patrons are:

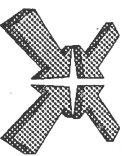
Mr Robert Fitzgerald  
Mr Gerald Gleeson  
Prof Francis J Moloney SDB, AM  
Dr Richard J Mulhearn OAM  
Most Rev Geoffrey Robinson  
Sr Deirdre Roife IBVM  
Sr Ann-Marie Webb SM

This journal is published ten times each year, March to December. It is sent to all Friends of Catalyst for Renewal. (See coupon on back page for Friends' Application.)

The Editorial Committee is:  
Michael Whelan SM, Joanna Thyer,  
Geraldine Doogue, Michael Kelly SJ,  
Kate Englebrecht, Catherine Hammond

Registered by Australia Post  
Publication No. 255003/02125

Address correspondence to:  
PO Box 139, Gladesville NSW 2111  
Australia  
Tel/Fax: 61 2 9816 4262



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

**M**Y NAME IS TED KENNEDY. I was born in Marrickville, the third of four children. My brother died earlier this year and one of my sisters died two years ago. My sister Marnie and I are left now. Marnie is a Sacre Coeur nun.

I came from a medical family. My father was a doctor, my brother kept the practice going and now his son has the practice. I also had two uncles and an aunt who were doctors. My mother came from an Irish family and had a strong faith. My father had a lower key kind of faith. From them both I got a rich spirituality, one free of legalism or religious show of any kind. Dad did a lot of honorary work. He never charged poor people for his services. My mother, too, was very sensitive to the poor. She would ask us to give one of our Christmas gifts to a poor person - and it had to be someone we knew personally, and it had to be one of the best of our gifts.

Two people who had a great influence on me were Monsignor Tuomey and Fr Tom Dunlea. I'll never forget going to see Tuomey at Dulwich Hill in February 1947, just before I entered the seminary. It was a hot afternoon and my cousin Bishop Tom Fox was there. He embraced me and wept as he spoke of my uncle, Ted McMahon, who had been his curate at Erskinvilla and died a young man. Then he bade me kneel, and in his resonant Irish brogue, made me say after him: "I, Edward Kennedy, do solemnly promise, in the presence of his Lordship Thomas Fox, Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes, that before I am ordained to the priesthood, I will have broken every rule in the college". I remembered that years later when Bishop de Smedt of Belgium appealed from the floor of the Vatican Council for an end to the Church's legalism, clericalism and triumphalism.

As a university chaplain I had greater freedom of lifestyle than most priests. I was out of the system somewhat. It was a time of great questioning for me, especially of priesthood. During this period - in the mid-60's - I went overseas. I was aware that the Church was fading from the lives of many of the young. I thought I had a solid faith in the Church, until I got to Rome. There I think I lost all the faith I ever had in the Church. But when I got to Ireland I found a greater academic freedom. I found that exhilarating and it enabled me to recover a lot of my faith in the Church again.

After 7 years of university chaplaincy, I was led to join a group of 15 priests in Sydney - among them a number of younger

men who soon left the ministry. We were trying to get permission to live an alternative lifestyle and develop new ways of ministering in the inner city.

We wanted, in particular, to reach the poor who were alienated from the Church. Three of us - myself, John Butche, and Fergus Breslin - got permission to come to Redfern 25 years ago. We opened the presbytery and it was amazing how quickly we made contact with the poor and the aborigines.

Living and working with the poor has changed the way I see things. It transfers you into another dimension altogether. The Scripture comes alive in a most stark way when you are rubbing shoulders with the poor. The more open you are to the poor, the more open you are to the pages of the Scriptures.

Some time ago, after I visited a place near Mt Isa called Dajarra, I wrote an article on what seemed to me to be the standard missionary practice reflected in the ministry of a wonderful priest and sisters working with the aborigines there. Despite their generosity and their openness, it seemed to me that the Church was going nowhere in terms of actually being identified with the poor. The priest came every couple weeks, performed the prescribed ritual, the nuns driving the little kids to participate in the Mass. There seemed to be no ownership by the people and no long term positive effects either. That was a turning point for me.

A person who has had a great influence on my understanding of Church is the Maryknoll priest, Bill Frazier. Some years ago I read his article on the shifting understanding of the Church as "sign in the world" rather than "sanctuary from the world". It made a deep impression on me. Living with the poor has also deeply affected my understanding of Church.



Fr Ted Kennedy

# Your Say – Marriage and ministry: Parish communities in the future

by Gary Stone

The Catholic Church in Australia faces a chronic shortage of clergy to lead it into the future. Despite energetic efforts to fit new candidates for the priesthood, the bottom line is that our ability to regularly provide the sacraments of the church to our people diminishes daily. The irony is that the vocations we need are available in our communities - but they are currently ineligible for ordination because they have celebrated the sacrament of marriage.

The matter of leadership and pastoral care of our people is such a major one that we cannot continue hoping this situation will sort itself out. We have had 25 "lean years" in attracting vocations. For the first time in its history Banyo Seminary in 1997 has had no new candidates. This drought will have a long-term impact on our church. In the western area of Brisbane where I live, we have been asked to plan to make do with 3 priests for our 8 parishes by the year 2001. Practically this means eliminating 18 Sunday masses in the area and increasing other sacramental ministries threefold for the priests who remain.

In struggling with this issue, an Assembly of the parish of St Johns Wood/The Co. on 17 November, 1996, brought forth an ecclesiology for the future church they desired. Two key points that emerged and were endorsed by 9 of the 10 discussion groups included:

- The maintenance and continued nurture of

## Letters

I will not be renewing my subscription to *Catalyst for Renewal* as I find your agenda for renewal too narrow. In the writings of at least one member of your editorial team I have consistently noted the thinly-veiled dogma of institutional control. Small Christian communities will continue to gather around the Eucharist because, in order to be church, both Word and Eucharist are essential. These ecumenical communities do not see themselves as 'breakaway groups' nor as 'diminishing the Tradition' (Essay: Tradition, June 97); rather as honouring the foundational tradition by re-jecting the Eucharist with meal and fellowship. Breaking bread with Christians of different denominations is part of a universal movement towards radically inclusive christian community across denomi-

existing Eucharistic communities was paramount, irrespective of the number of priests available. "We don't want to be amalgamated or relocated".

- An ordained clergy is very much the desired form of pastoral leadership, but married priests, deacons and deaconesses (who were part of our early church structure) should be permitted.

Significantly they pointed out that the priest shortage will get far worse beyond 2001. The briefest look at the age profile of our clergy might indicate that in 2011 we will have 1 priest for 8 parishes! By 2021 there might be none!

We are and want to remain a sacramental church. We believe that the Eucharist is the source and summit of our life. Our rapidly decreasing ability to provide these sacraments to our people should thus be of great concern. Our people have a right to this (cf Canon 243).

We are not short of potential ordinands. Gifted people abound. Within my parish there are a number of spirit-filled men and women who have gifts and experience in leadership and who have the charism and witness of a joy-filled sacramental marriage to bring to ordained ministry. We need to be discerning, calling and equipping them now, so that when our current priests retire (or die on their feet due to overload), we have someone who can take over from them.

The Eastern rites of our church have

maintained a tradition of both married and celibate priesthood without detriment. In the UK, hundreds of former Anglicans are being ordained as married Catholic priests. It is just unbelievable that we cannot make this available to "cradle" Catholics as well. To continue to hold marriage as an impediment to priestly ordination is denying the church the vocations it needs. It is saying to our people that maintenance of the rule of celibacy takes precedence over provision of the sacraments.

Many people, myself included, see this current situation of decreased vocations as the work of the Holy Spirit leading the church to a return to its former discipline. The Church has been wise not to make any impulsive decisions, but surely the 30 years since the Council have been sufficient to see that the needs of people for priestly leadership can be met by both married and celibate clergy.

Surely it is not unreasonable to petition Rome on this issue for the good of our Church. Leaders of our Australian Church, could you please respond to this call? □

*Gary Stone is a deacon of the Military Ordinarie, currently serving in Brisbane. Gary spent 26 years as an infantry officer before being ordained in 1994. He is married with 4 children.*

nations (eg L'Arche, Taizé). Any legitimate agenda for renewal today must be open to, if not embedded in, the bigger ecumenical picture. The closing paragraph of the same article exhorts your readers to 'work within the system (and) on the basis of the possible rather than the ideal'. This theme strikes me as being at odds with the charism of the founder. Had Jesus worked on the basis of what was *possible* for his day and age, rather than what was *ideal*, his vision of the kingdom would have been vastly diminished. Indeed such a choice would never have led him to the cross. Those who work prophetically for change have often found themselves outside the system's boundaries. It is not always a deliberate choice so much as a consequence of being true to oneself and working pas-

*Rosemary Hamerton*

*Catalyst* chooses to promote conversation, rather than confrontation or politicisation or lobbying, as the focus of its mission. We endeavour to bring a foundational perspective to that conversation, highlighting the basic principles wherever possible. We also choose to remain within the historical-social reality we call "the Catholic Church". We believe this is the best place from which to build the Body of Christ in unity. Others may take a different approach. We respect that. (*The Editor*)

# Essay — Church of the future and future of the Church

by Richard Lennan

In the October issue of *The Mix* we published the first part of a paper on the Church by Richard Lennan. This is the second and final part of that paper.

The future begins when we face the reality of the present. Too often, people in the Church are outraged that not only does the world fail to provide the perfect set of conditions for the reception of the Church and its message, but that the Church itself is less than perfect. Too often, members of the Church, individually and collectively, prefer to take their bat and go home rather than play on a field they judge not to be level. This outrage can mask a desire to build our reign, a reign which requires perfect conditions, rather than God's reign, which can come about even when we would judge the conditions to be less than perfect.

We need, therefore, to be self-critical. This requires us to acknowledge our desire to remain where we are, to acknowledge our tendency to repeat our long-practised rhetoric even after it has ceased to find a resonance in the contemporary world, to acknowledge our inclination to accept no standard higher than what we like or dislike. Lest such an exercise become simply the self-criticism which totalitarian rulers make mandatory for supposed enemies of the regime, we need to situate it in the context of the God who calls us to conversion, to be a pilgrim people, and to recognise in our lives the pattern of the paschal mystery of Jesus by which life comes from death. What is required of us is that we neither despair nor flee from reality, but seek to live our truth whatever the conditions. Such a response is possible only when the love of God revealed in Jesus is indeed our truth and our passion.

From such a foundation, it is possible for us to affirm that the present is good because it is in the present and nowhere else that God is to be found. Paradoxically, it is this affirmation of the present which is the key to the future. Our affirmation of the present, our willingness to respond to whatever conditions we experience, enables the future to emerge organically. A failure to value the present condemns us to a life either fixated on the past or tied to an imaginary future which can never come into being because it had no real past.

The affirmation of the present as the place where God is to be found, as the place where God's reign is unfolding, also provides us with a perspective on the past. It means that no period of the past, however grand its claim might be, was an unsurpassable golden age. The past was neither as good as it could get nor was it worthless. The past was rather somebody's present, a time when people sought to respond as well as they could to the God who invited them into communion through the Spirit of Jesus. We need to ask what there is from our past that must abide, what we have inherited that, because it is foundational to how we understand God to be for us, can continue to shape the way we present ourselves to the world. We need also to ask how these foundational elements are to be lived today in order that their value might become apparent to others, especially the young.

*What is required of us  
is that we neither despair  
nor flee from reality,  
but seek to live our truth  
whatever the conditions.  
Such a response is  
possible only when  
the love of God  
revealed in Jesus  
is indeed our truth  
and our passion.*

We are, inextricably, bound to the present. That fact does not, however, erase our capacity to relate to those who have lived before us. We cannot and must not simply repeat the past as this would imply that God's creative spirit is absent from our present, but neither must we pretend that God's relationship with humanity has begun only with us, that we have not been enriched by others, that they have not taught us how to recognise and name God. There is a response to God which only we can make, because only we experience God in this present. Our response will add to what we have inherited and will become the inheritance of those who follow us. If we deny that we are dependent on our in-

heritance, or if we refuse to make our response in the present because that present seems less significant than our past, if we act as if no further construction will be needed after us, we are endangering the future of the Church.

The fact that, in response to the conditions of the present, we can build on the past in order to move into the future, reminds us that the tradition of the Church is best understood not as a set of doctrines, but as the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Such a tradition is not, therefore, merely backward-looking; not something that is merely to be preserved.

Our tradition is capable of development. Indeed, unless that tradition develops, unless the past is brought into dialogue with the present, revelation is reduced to information about God, rather than being the self-disclosure of God.

In order to value the present as the place where God is, we need to be aware of the shape of the present. True, not everything in the present will speak of God, but even our critique of the present ought to proceed from a base of sympathy for the present. Those who represent the Church in the public forum tend, too often, to speak in a way that implies they believe modern society is guilty until proven innocent. If that is our attitude, if we regard the contemporary world as one for which Jesus would no longer choose to give his life, then we have forgotten that the Incarnation was always a gift, never something that was earned.

Given our belief that God calls human beings to be co-creators with God, it is puzzling how often the members of the Church have failed to appreciate the value of human creativity when this creativity has been exercised outside the confines of the Church. Perhaps this failure reflects the fact that we have defined catholicity far too narrowly, that we have interpreted the existence of the Church as the sacrament of God's reign to mean that God does not operate outside the boundaries of the Church. To suggest that God is not bound by baptismal certificates is not to demean the value of membership of the Church, it is not to forget that an explicit relationship with God opens us to a level of richness which is not present where God is known only implicitly, but it is to affirm that the spirit of God is present in the lives of all people. The incarnation is the paradigm-

matic catholic event; a Church which loses sight of the God present in all people, ceases to be catholic.

The need to broaden our understanding of catholicity applies not only to the relationship between the Church and the world, it applies also to our understanding of life within the Church itself. If the Church of the future is to reflect the inclusivity of God, we must learn that fullness requires diversity and that diversity is not inimical to unity. In this, there is a challenge for all of us. For some, it will be the challenge to learn that a monochromatic Church cannot reflect the reconciled diversity of a trinitarian God, anymore than a monochromatic Australia can reflect the reality of life in the 1990s. For others, it will be the challenge to learn that genuine catholicity cannot be equated with the assertion of my right to be different where this implies that I have no need for communion. For still others, it will be the need to learn that structure is not necessarily destructive of freedom or, conversely, that freedom is not necessarily destructive of structure.

The recovery of an authentic catholicity is an urgent need. The heart of the catholic genius has always been its ability to eschew "either/or" perspective in favour of a "both/and" perspective. In the last generation we have come close to the loss of this insight. If we lose it definitively, it would be a sure sign that the Spirit has abandoned the members of the Church to their in-fighting.

Until we are renewed in our desire to respect difference within the Church; until we learn to listen to, and talk with, the range of views within the contemporary Church; until we learn that, although the Church's teaching authority does indeed have the right to declare that some views are irreconcilable with the unity of the Church, the rejection of others must not be our first response to difference — we will not be a united Church into which we can initiate new members. The level of sophistication of our contemporaries and the range of options which life presents us all, mean that none but the most dysfunctional will want to join a divided Church. The Church's future depends, therefore, on the Church — meaning each and all of us — becoming one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

Let us stress on the need for unity within our own communion is, of course, an aspect of the broader question of the unity of the whole Church. Christianity has a future only as the one Church of Christ.

We must, therefore, give priority in our actions to what expresses the degree of communion which exists already between the churches. This means that we must first be dissatisfied that the one Church of Christ remains divided. Although ecumenism now has a status in the Church it has never previously enjoyed, it tends still to be regarded as what we attend to when everything in our own backyard is completed. Ecumenism will become the passion of the Church only when each of us becomes convinced that the well-being of our own denomination cannot be secured independently of the well-being of the whole Church.

*We need to ask what there is from our past that must abide because it is foundational.  
We need also to ask how these foundational elements are to be lived today.*

To some people, *Angst* about the future might seem to be a waste of time and energy. Surely, it might be asked, the future is simply what comes about if we keep getting out of bed each morning? It might even be suggested that concern about the future expresses a refutation of the Gospel's call to trust in God. On one level, both of those observations are true. We cannot will God to bring about the future we want, just as we cannot will the weather we want. Faith in God is not, however, a synonym for passivity. Our ability to analyse our present and to imagine our future is a God-given ability, as is our capacity to change in order to help that future be realised. A failure to dream, a failure to plan must not be promoted as an evangelical virtue. The fundamental truth of the Incarnation is that God's self-disclosure does not bypass the human. If that has been true of the past, if it is true of the present, there is no reason to suggest that it will not be true of the future. The future is what results from the marriage between the preservation of our essential past and our response to the new challenges which incarnate the Spirit of Jesus in the present.

In order to help that future come about, we must continue to be open to the presence of the Spirit who moves in the lives of each of us, but who is also present in the

Scriptures, our living tradition of faith, the signs of the times, and in the Church's teaching authority. Even with such a paucity of resources, planning for the future remains an act of faith rather than the following of a blue-print.

In concrete terms, that faith requires of us that we be willing to experiment. As a Church, we are often reluctant to venture a response to contemporary needs, reluctant to acknowledge that we do not have all the answers. The truth, however, is that we can never do more than venture a response. A Church with all the answers is a Church which no longer needs to live by faith. A Church which is willing to experiment, willing to suggest a possible answer which may have to be revised later, is the only Church to which it is possible for human beings to belong. In the future, no less than in the past and present, we will be in fact a Church which lives by faith and not by knowledge; authenticity demands that we also act as such a Church.

Authenticity also demands that we be willing to evaluate our present strategies and structures in order to ascertain whether they are leading us into the future or whether they are seeking merely to repeat the past. We must not be seduced into thinking that a well-run bureaucracy suffices for the fulfilment of the Church's missionary mandate. Similarly, we must question how well we engage with our world, how well we know it, learn from it, and affirm its creativity as the expression of the Spirit. If our attitude to the world is merely that of a critic, then we cannot be good news for that world, and if we cease to be good news for the world, then the purpose of the Church is lost.

The future of the Church does depend on the Spirit of God, but that Spirit works through us. If the future of the Church is to be more than mere survival, then we must rediscover our experience of God's love for us in Jesus, the experience which initially gave us hope and drew us to want to live as members of the Church. In other words, we must recover our passion and enter into our "second naiveite". Such a response does not obliterate the difficulties which the Church faces in the present, but it does ensure that our response to those difficulties is a response founded in Jesus. We can do no more; we ought to do no less. □

*Fr Richard Leman is the Editor of Redefining the Church (E J Dwyer, 1995).*

## Words for a Pilgrim People

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. (Mt 13:44)*

*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. (Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, n.45)*

*Indeed, it is better to keep quiet and be, than to make fluent professions and not be. No doubt it is a fine thing to instruct others, but only if the speaker practises what he preaches. One such Teacher there is: He who spoke the word and it was done (Ps. 33:9); and what He achieved even by His silences was well worthy of the Father. A Man who has truly mastered the utterances of Jesus will also be able to apprehend His silence, and thus reach full spiritual maturity, so that his own words have the force of actions and his silences the significance of speech. (Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Ephesians", n.15, in Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers, trans. Maxwell Stanforth, Penguin Books, 1975, p.80)*

*The living Truth, the great breaker of idols and destroyer of false gods, is easier to live with than the most comforting of lies. It is better to lose the God we found it easy to envisage, and the faith that was only a protection from our fears, and stand naked and unknowing in the presence of the One who can only really be known when he is lived with. At least with that God we can and, indeed, must begin from where we are. There can be no becoming that does not start from something that already is. (Aelred Squire, Asking the Fathers, SPCK/Paulist, 1973, p.11)*

## The Bible - The church and the kingdom

At the time of Jesus' birth, if any mention was made of the messiah or king or kingdom, it would have meant only one thing: liberation from political, religious and social oppression. Scripture scholar N T Wright notes: "Twentieth century Western Christians need to shed a few ideas at this point. When people downed tools for a while and trudged off up a hillside to hear this Jesus talking, we can be sure they weren't going to hear someone tell them 'be nice to each other; or that if they behaved themselves (or got their minds around the 'great theological scheme) there would be a rosy future waiting for them when they got to 'heaven'; or that God had decided at last to do something about forgiving them for their sins. First-century Jews knew that they ought to be nice to each other. In so far as they thought at all about life after death, they believed that their God would look after them, and eventually give them new physical bodies in his renewed world. (The phrase 'Kingdom of Heaven' which we find in Matthew's gospel, does *not* mean 'a Kingdom-place called 'heaven'. ' It is a reverent way of saying 'the Kingship of God'.) There is no sign that first-century Jews were walking around gloomily wondering how their sins were ever going to be forgiven. They had the Temple and the sacrificial system, which took care of all that. If Jesus had only said what a lot of Western Christians think he said, he would have been just a big yawn-maker.

"What he in fact said was so revolutionary that it woke everybody up. It was so dramatic that Jesus seems to have adopted a deliberate policy of keeping to the villages, always moving quickly on. ... Why? What was so different?" (*Who Was Jesus?*, p.97f)

The kingdom preached by Jesus - on the face of it at least - is a disappointment. It includes more than Jews, it is catholic, and it sweeps away many of the old laws (eg food laws). Jesus' behaviour is challenging, even affronting - he frequently celebrates and generally with "the wrong people", he heals and forgives people right where they are (outside "the system"), he goes to Jerusalem and chooses to die. In and through the Cross is the kingdom finally brought about. This kingdom, if we dare to listen, is as revolutionary and dramatic in contemporary Western culture as it was in first-century Jewish culture.

The *ekklesia* of the NT - the Church - comes into being as disciples gather around Jesus, summoned by His Spirit. Thus, the Church in every generation, that community of disciples gathered in and by the Spirit of Christ, must bear witness to this Kingdom by the power of that same Spirit. This is what a renewed and renewing Church always seeks.

## Tradition - The church is the kingdom?

It has been claimed that Jesus preached the Kingdom and the early Church preached Jesus. The French Jesuit Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) commented with more than a little cynicism concerning those first generations of Christians: "The Kingdom of God was expected and it was the Church that came". Both comments have a grain of truth even though both are gross oversimplifications.

Throughout Christian history various interpretations of the Kingdom have held sway. One of the key issues has been the relationship of the Church with the Kingdom. Is the Church to be considered co-extensive with the reign of God, the Kingdom? St Augustine identified the Kingdom with the Church in heaven. In medieval times it was not uncommon to find theologians identifying the Kingdom with the Church on earth. Pope Boniface VIII, for example, manifests something of this thinking in his Bull of November 18, 1302, *Unam Sanctam*: "We declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff."

The simplistic identification of the Church with the reign of God went hand in hand with medieval feudalism and gave rise to much of the grandeur and triumphalism that was a feature of the Church coming into the Second Vatican Council. The Cardinals who went to that Council with trains (shortened from 30 feet to 10 feet by Pope Pius XII) and the status of princes, came away much less encumbered. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, we read: "The Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind" (n.1). (See also Ch 4 of *Gaudium et Spes*.) The Council never developed a clear and unambiguous ecclesiology. It could not have done that. However, it definitely invited a more realistic exploration of the nature of the Church as a community of disciples who give witness to and promote the Kingdom.

In 1974, the Synod on evangelization continued that exploration amidst vigorous debate. Unable to agree on a joint statement, the members of that Synod left their notes with Pope Paul VI who produced the fine document *Evangelii Nuntianti* (1975). The conversation continues. Clearly this conversation is absolutely foundational to renewal.



