



# THE MIX



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## Our Say - The search for truth

On September 14 this year, Pope John Paul published his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*. John Paul the philosopher, representing a particular philosophical tradition, is clearly evident. This will not necessarily please everyone. What should receive universal affirmation, however, is the Holy Father's willingness, in the context of the inevitable tension between faith and reason, to speak so emphatically about "the search for truth".

*Fides et Ratio* uses the expression "search for truth" twenty times. The concept, however, is very evident in many places as is indicated by the fact that the word "search" is used sixty-four times, "seek" - in one form or another - is used thirty-seven times and "journey" is used fourteen times.

The encyclical affirms the respective roles of both faith and reason in this "search". Faith needs reason, reason needs faith. In this creative tension the Church finds herself on pilgrimage, always "in-between": "The Church is no stranger to this journey of discovery, nor could she ever be."

And this is not to say the Church is not the recipient of the truth revealed in Christ Jesus. Nor is it to suggest that we should lose our nerve with respect to the revelation that Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" (cf Jn 14:6). It is, rather, to say that divinely revealed truth, like other truth, demands an ongoing "journey", a "search". That "journey" and that "search" - which will never end - demand both faith and reason. The Church will never cease to "make its pilgrim way". We forget this at our peril.

John Henry Newman is a person the Holy Father holds up as an example of someone who has engaged well in the ongoing dialogue between faith and reason.

Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, written more than a century and a half ago, still stands as a worthy contribution to the conversation the Holy Father is promoting in *Fides et Ratio*. In the first chapter of the *Essay*, Newman discusses "the development of ideas", especially a "great idea":

(The great idea) is elicited and expanded by trial, and battles into perfection and supremacy. ... From time to time it makes essays which fail, and in consequence are abandoned. It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers and at length strikes out in one definite direction. In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; parties rise and fall around it; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles reappear under new forms. It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.

The action of God in Christ has generated or at least radically affected the greatest ideas known to the human family. St Thomas Aquinas, a preeminent Christian thinker, referred to his articulation and explanation of these ideas as so much "straw" compared to the real thing. How sad it is when we believe we have "arrived", when we stop that "search for truth". A wholehearted appreciation of the fact that we are pilgrims will contribute mightily to the conversation for renewal. □

## The Human Face

This journal is one of the works of  
the Sydney-based group  
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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  
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"Let there be unity in what is necessary,  
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and charity in any case".  
(*Gaudium et Spes*, n.92)

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**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.

Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated publishes *The Mix* as one of its forums for conversation. All reasonable expressions of opinion relevant to the renewal of the Church are welcome. The Editor reserves the right not to publish a submitted text. Not all the opinions expressed in *The Mix* are those of Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated.

All items submitted for publication in *The Mix* should reach the Editor no later than the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month previous to publication.

My name is Tony Kelly. I was born and grew up in Newcastle - in the shadow of the Redemptorist Monastery in Mayfield, the eldest of the four Kelly boys who, from their earliest days, were subjected to an early form of Women's liberation by our four sisters. Dad, an artillery colonel in the Middle East, and thereafter continuing the bombardment as State Secondary School teacher, was from an Irish-German family in Tighes Hill; while Mum was a member of the Cranney tribe which had spread from Parramatta to the old beach area of Newcastle. I joined the Redemptorists and went through Galong, Pennant Hills and Ballarat.

On the coldest of Ballarat days, I was ordained at the end of June, 1963, at the very time Pope Paul VI was being crowned in Rome, the great pope being less sure about his infallibility than I was about mine. I had been very well educated for a world and a Church that were about to go out of existence.

Soon after I was sent for doctoral studies to Rome, then in the throes of Vatican II. It was all very exciting; all the great theologians were around, and even available for a chat. Bernard Häring was in the house, and I need merely walk down the street to have a coffee and a cigarette with Edward Schillebeeckx, whom I was busy refuting on some minor point in my thesis! At a weekday Council Mass in St. Peter's, my pride in reading the Gospel to the assembled Council Fathers was humbled when I conspicuously failed to manage the mitre of the grave missionary bishop who was the celebrant: as if spring-loaded, it shot off that venerable episcopal head.

I returned to Australia to teach theology, and that is what I have been doing ever since, mainly here in Melbourne. There were breaks - post-doctoral work in Toronto and Paris, and visiting lectureships in the States and the Philippines, with the odd sabbatical thrown in, such as my recent stint at Boston College as a Research Fellow at the Lonergan Institute; there I lived, improbably, wondrously and very happily with a remarkable Jesuit community.

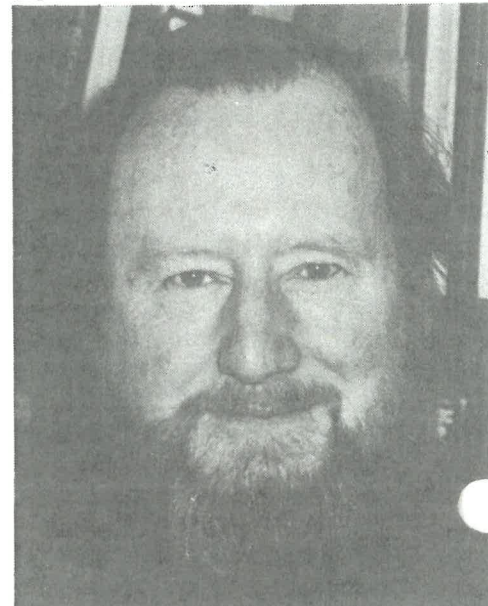
I was President of Yarra Theological Union for ten of its twenty-seven years. At one time we had nearly 500 students studying theology there. Two unpredictable majorities emerged: most of the students were laity, and most were women. With the rise of other theological centres, numbers have dropped, but those proportions remain, a significant fact for the Catholic community of the future.

My own teaching and writing have fo-

cusSED on the big issues: God, Trinity, Christology, Eschatology and so forth, with a special interest in the interdisciplinary shape of theology and its relationship to Australian culture. If I tended to get bored when I wasn't dealing with the big issues - despite the feeling of increasing incompetence they give rise to - I felt that theology was rather out of it if it did not engage more realistically with Australian culture. So about twenty years ago, numerous other colleagues and I initiated a project roughly called 'Theology in an Australian Context'. Quite a bit of my writing has been in this area, with *A New Imagining: Toward an Australian Spirituality* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1989) being the most well known. I like to think that this kind of effort eventually led to splendid initiatives such as *Catalyst* and *Spirituality in the Pub*.

Well, the years have gone on - teaching, writing, administration. Not without grief, for the times have brought separations and divisions I could not possibly have imagined on my ordination day. The experience of being wrong about so much brings its own ironic consolation. Who really knows what we are going through now? Sometimes the dying and collapse are more evident than the growth and renewal. Yet the more I try to be aware of the global Catholic experience of today, and the more I try to find a point of quiet listening in prayer, I still find that Christ 'means the world' to me, even this world in the great groaning - what is coming to be (Cf. Romans 8:19-26).

Sometimes I write poems; perhaps I should have been doing that all along. It is a gesture, however inept, to the great poem of the Gospel, which still inspires and connects us "to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).



Tony Kelly CSsR

# Your Say - Church law and legal positivism

by Brian Donovan

At 11:08am on 3 February 1945, a U.S. warplane in a fleet of bombers above Berlin dropped a bomb which targeted the court building of the People's Court. Judge Roland Freisler, the Chief Judge of the Court, was returning to collect papers. The bomb went through the ceiling of the building and Freisler died instantly.

He was a man described by his contemporaries as the embodiment of evil. During 1944 he sentenced 2,100 people to death - that is more than six people per day. He passed the death sentence on the conspirators who attempted the assassination of Hitler at the Wolf Lair. He sentenced to death the students of the White Rose Movement who placed posters protesting against the Third Reich. They were beheaded within hours of Freisler's sentence.

Hitler's will was his will. There was no law but the law of the State. There was no law but the law of Hitler. Freisler's morality of law was the most extreme form of legal positivism that any century has witnessed. Legal positivism was the legal philosophy which dominated the courts of this country from colonisation to the generation after the Second World War. It dominated Europe. It came out of the secular philosophy which made the State supreme. The source of law was no longer referable to any morality outside that decided by the State or the society.

In its baldest form, the fact that Parliament, the lawmaker, laid down a law was sufficient to make that law unassailable. The authority of Parliament was absolute. Not only was it absolute in fact, it was absolute in theory.

In previous societies there were occasions when the State or the ruler acted with absolute power, but the philosophical underpinning did not grant him that absolute power. The power came from elsewhere. The power was entrenched in the creator of this society. The creator was the God or gods who controlled the society and who imposed upon it a certain morality, albeit sometimes apparently arbitrary, which governed even the ruler. The ruler's power was circumscribed, at least in theory, by this morality. Even the divine right of kings came within this jurisprudential system.

With the decline in belief systems, the authority of the State became the State itself, absolute power. As this developed there were also developed within some societies different imitations of a Bill of Rights model which has been adopted by so many secular (and sometimes non-secular states: Islamic, communist and the like) societies.

The Bill circumscribes the legislative powers. The Parliament might be absolute, but its citizens have certain moral rights provided to them. Some countries, however, do not have this tradition. The power of the State becomes absolute. Thus it was for Freisler, the embodiment of legal positivism. Justice and morality had no place in his court.

It is a most shocking experience to watch film of this man recently shown on SBS in the program "Hitler's Henchmen". His screaming and ranting at the accused must send shivers through any judge or advocate with even the most superficial feeling for justice. Indeed, the People's Court was the high point of the evils of legal positivism which led to the demise of this philosophy in the West after the Second World War. Commonly one hears of the Nuremberg Defence and the undermining of legal positivism by such claims, but Hitler's legal system (if it can be called that) has had a deep impact on the present legal systems of the West. The movement for civil rights in America based upon their Bill of Rights is but one example. The movement for a Bill of Rights in Australia is another.

The impact that legal positivism has had has also been felt in the Church. The destruction of legal positivism has seen the diminution of authority. The recognition of a law higher than the law of the State by analogy has led to questioning of the law of the State. Judges who have felt compelled to represent the higher law have introduced various methods of protection within their legal system. Our Federal Constitution in Australia does not provide many express rights, but implied rights have been developed. Aboriginal land rights is perhaps the most famous illustration, although strictly speaking, it does not flow out of the concept of a Bill of Rights or individual human rights.

The destruction of the power of authority and legal positivism in secular society has had its impact on the way in which the faithful view Church law. If State law is open to be questioned, so is Church law. The role of one's conscience, representing the individual internalised morality of one's experience (religious or otherwise), is a tool in the interpretation and enforcement of secular law; so also is it in the interpretation of Church law.

The green catechism principles of my youth have long since been abandoned. After Vatican II the idea of the exclusive Church of Rome has gone. It has been re-

placed by a more sensitive approach of individual conscience. The legal positivism of the green catechism has disappeared. The recent actions of the Bishops of Britain to impose strict rules again for the reception of the Eucharist may be seen as a step backwards in terms of attitudes to the law.

There may be good reasons in principle for limiting the practice of shared Eucharist. That is for the canon lawyers and the theologians to argue. The recognition of legal positivism involving absolute unqualified rules is a backward step. Law, in its richest form, involves the interplay of various principles to be worked out in the particular circumstances of every case - so that different principles may be applicable or may predominate, depending on the particular circumstances. This is not to say that there are no absolute principles. This is not a relativist morality or a relativist religion. Rather, there are always a number of principles to be applied to every fact situation, whereas legal positivism would have us apply but one principle to all circumstances.

On any view of it, this is a tricky area. The Church, which proclaims that the source is an absolute power, has to exist in a society which has become wary of absolute power and with good reason. Indeed, the Church itself, while asserting the absolute power, has laid down the importance of the procedures and the individual rights which circumscribe the absolute power in the secular society. It has become one of the great advocates of human rights, a position which it rejected utterly until quite recent times. Pope John Paul II's experience of legal positivism in its most vile form transformed his view of that. He is an ardent supporter of secular human rights.

The change in the Church's attitude to human rights in the secular world has not yet been mirrored by a change to human rights in the ecclesiastical world but, if history is any guide, whatever developments there may be with the next Papacy, in the long run legal positivism is dead and must be accepted as dead in all its forms within both the human community and God's community.

Never before now has the world had such suspicion of legal positivism and unfettered absolute power. One hundred years ago this would have been unthinkable. I wonder what is the next surprise God has in store for us?

*Brian Donovan, QC, is currently pursuing a degree in theology.*

# Essay - Divisions, dialogue and the catholicity of the church

by Thomas P Rausch

**What follows is an edited version of an essay that appeared in the excellent journal, *America*, January 31, 1998. After reflecting at length on instances of polarisation within the American Church, the author concludes with suggested principles for the way ahead.**

Recently I was asked to preside at a mass for an assembly of women religious. Before the liturgy began I was given a script to follow for the prayers. The script carefully banished the words "Father", "Lord" and "kingdom" from the text. The blessing at the end was not the traditional Trinitarian formula but an inclusive invocation: "May our God, Creator, Redeemer and Life-giving Spirit, bless us." I am in favor of inclusive language. But one needs to move very carefully when dealing with the historic symbols of our faith. By predicating Creator, Redeemer and Life-giving Spirit of God and by eliminating (however inadvertently) the mutual relationship between Father and Son, this formula seems to eliminate the distinction of persons and, thus, the doctrine of the Trinity. Even more, it depersonalizes God.

Despite my misgivings about the text, it obviously represented a pastoral effort to pray in a more inclusive fashion, one that moved beyond the androcentric character of so much of our God-language. But other examples are more extreme. In a recent issue of the *National Catholic Reporter*, there was a story of a eucharistic ritual called "A Critical Mass." It opened with a priest in traditional vestments processing in and intoning, "In the name of the Father ..." at which point a horn was blown and dancers emerged, a sign that the priest should make his exit so that all the others gathered could take over the service. This is an extreme example, but, as one of the organizers said, similar women's liturgies with non-ordained presiders are being celebrated across the country and around the world.

One could list an equal number of examples of hardened attitudes, separatist practices, actions against the communion of the Church from the right. On some campuses, very conservative Catholic students, instructed by even more conservative faculty members, will not serve at mass as lectors or eucharistic ministers "because that is what priests are supposed to do." This sounds very much like the neo-clericalism of Opus Dei. It is clearly contrary to what the liturgical norms allow. ... On one campus, students belonging to a very conservative institute were accustomed to at-

tend campus ministry liturgies, not to worship but to report liturgical infractions; now they have their own liturgies with their priest advisors.

We all have our collections of anecdotes, from both sides. But beyond these there are serious problems, groups and movements whose members are increasingly locked into angry, no-compromise positions. There are many today who are openly contemptuous of magisterial and particularly papal authority. Others reject the leadership of the US bishops and appeal over their heads to Rome. What is at risk is the life of the church community itself as a community of love and service.

The late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's Common Ground Initiative (cf *The Mix* 1:7, 4-5) was an attempt to deal with the growing polarization that so often characterizes internal Catholic debates and fractures Catholic life. He wrote, "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 bishops". His initiative ... was criticized by four of the U.S. cardinals. Only Cardinal Mahony stood with Bernardin.

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but to listen to each other;  
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I would like to propose some principles that might prove helpful, a way of remembering that the truth is always greater than ourselves, that it encompasses more than our own concerns at any particular moment.

Catholicism by its very nature is inclusive. It erects a big tent. The adjective "catholic", from the Greek *kath'holou*, means "referring to the whole", "total" or "universal". It was first applied to the church in the sense of "whole" or "universal" by Ignatius of Antioch about the year A.D.115. As early as the third and fourth centuries the word "catholic" was being used to distinguish the great or true church from groups or movements separate from it. Those who separated themselves were called "heretics", from the Greek word *hairein*, meaning "to take" or "to choose",

in the sense of taking a part rather than the whole. In other words, heresy means being sectarian rather than catholic.

The opposite of sectarianism is a concern for unity, for holding diversity and unity together in one communion. An old cliché has it that when a Protestant Christian comes up with a new understanding of the Gospel or a new insight into the Christian life, he or she establishes another church, whereas a Catholic in the same position founds a religious order, a community within the church that gives expression to a special charism for Christian life or service.

The important point is that Catholicism is open to all truth and to diverse expressions of the truth. It is not the product of a single reformer or historical movement in post-New Testament Christian history. It does not find its identity in a single doctrine, like Lutheranism, with its emphasis on justification by faith alone. Unlike Reformed or Calvinist Christianity, it is not based on a single theological tradition. It is not defined by a single liturgical text, as is Anglicanism, which finds its principle of unity in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Nor is it bound to a single method of biblical interpretation, like evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism, bound to a confessional notion of biblical inerrancy. To be Catholic is to be open to truth in all its expressions, to whatever is genuinely human or naturally good.

Thus Catholicism includes within itself a wide variety of theologies, spiritualities and expressions of Christian life. It is pluralistic in its approach to the truth. Where the Reformation followed an "either/or" approach, Catholicism prefers to say "both/and". Not Scripture alone, but Scripture *and* tradition; not grace alone, but grace *and* nature; not faith alone, but faith *and* works.

In a time of transition and change, it is important to realize that not every question can be answered by citing the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or *The National Catholic Reporter*. There are many things we simply do not know, and new questions that we are not yet able to answer. The N.C.R. is good for what's going on in the contemporary church, but it is not the font of all wisdom. The new catechism is a useful compendium of Catholic doctrine, but it does not reflect modern scholarship or address all contemporary concerns.

The church today is confronted by many difficult questions that need honest discussion, among them, the shortage of priests and the right of communities to the Eucharist, a more collegial style of church leadership, allowing the laity some participation in

its decision-making processes and the formulation of its teaching, addressing the special concerns of women, minorities, the divorced, and those in mixed marriages, renewing its ethical teaching particularly in the area of sexuality and allowing for greater adaptation and inculturation at local levels and in different cultures. These are challenges as great as any in the church's history; and they arise, not out of a modern secular spirit, but precisely out of those currents of renewal unleashed by the Second Vatican Council. To address them we need to return to the biblical, liturgical and patristic sources of our tradition as well as to take account of what we've learned from the social sciences and from other churches. We need not just to talk but to listen to each other; we need prayer, discernment and the freedom to be led by the Spirit.

Recently Bishop Donald Wuerl of Pittsburgh issued a pastoral letter to his diocese entitled, "Speaking the Truth in Love: Christian Discourse Within the Church". Linking mutual respect with the church's fundamental evangelical mission, he asked: "Who would be drawn to a community whose discourse is filled with rancor, mistrust and hatred? We cannot highlight evangelization and then destroy its fondest hopes by the way we talk with or about one another".

How can we learn to speak the truth as we see it in love rather than in rancor? We cannot do so without the willingness to presume good will on the part of the other, without reaching out in some way to the other party.

In Los Angeles, the widely publicized differences between Cardinal Mahony and the Los Angeles Catholic Worker over the Cardinal's plan to build a new cathedral provides a good example of a tentative but genuine dialogue between opposing parties. The conflict is a classic one. Ever since city engineers ordered St. Vibiana's Cathedral closed because of the damage from the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the Cardinal has been finding land and raising money to build a new one, struggling against a militant conservancy organization that tried to force the restoration of a hopelessly inadequate structure. The Los Angeles Catholic Worker community has opposed his plan from the beginning, arguing that the money, given by donors specifically for the cathedral, would be better spent on the poor.

There have been a number of demonstrations, symbolic "liberations" of the old cathedral and critical articles in *The Catholic Agitator*, the Worker's paper. But the conversation has not broken down. The Workers met with the Cardinal in his office, a rather difficult meeting, judging from the

subsequent article in *The Catholic Agitator*. Later the Cardinal asked if he might not come and celebrate the Eucharist with the Workers in their skid row soup kitchen; when he did, on the Feast of the Transfiguration, he astonished them by acknowledging that their commitment to the poor and their opposition to the cathedral was an important message for the church. He told them that they must never stop speaking it, and expressed his concern that their present conflict would not prevent them from working together on issues that affect the poor.

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The Cardinal's gesture did not resolve the conflict. Some of the Workers were tempted to dismiss his gesture as a political ploy. At the dedication of the new cathedral site, they were there in protest. In a subsequent Op-Ed piece, Jeff Dietrich, one of the leaders of the community, acknowledged that the Workers were flying in the face of 1,500 years of church tradition in opposing the cathedral and admitted as well the part his own unresolved issues with authority played in the conflict. He concluded: "We will continue to reject the cardinal's cathedral.... But this struggle with the church is no mere political battle. It is more akin to a family fight around the dinner table. Passions are high, tensions are personal, unresolved inner demons are ubiquitous. But still there is this sense of an unbreakable bond between ourselves and the cardinal, renewed in the sharing of food and the acknowledgement of mutual humanity".

Dietrich's answer could not be more Catholic. The church needs both its visionary builders and its social activists, its pastors and its prophets; and they need each other. What is important here is that even in intense disagreement, there was mutual respect, gestures of outreach and unbroken communion.

In spite of the divisions in the Catholic community today, the church is still very much alive and healthy. As Charles Morris says at the end of his fine book, *American Catholic*, "the people in the parishes are, in the main, more sensible than extremists in the professorate. They are not radical feminists, cultic 'earth-goddess' worshipers, Marxist poststructuralists, or feckless hedonists who seek an end to all rules". But

neither are they convinced that the ancient structure of the Catholic Church will collapse if Catholics use a more inclusive language in their prayer, stand during the eucharistic prayer, welcome and support their gay and lesbian children or disagree with the Pope over birth control or the ordination of women.

The Rev. Andrew Greeley has argued that as the Catholic population drifts to the left, the real problem is not polarization so much as it is the growing alienation of Catholics from their leadership. The statistical indicators of change he offers suggest that he is right. But as the bishops try to walk the tightrope between their restive flock and Rome, there seems to be far more thunder from the right.

What the church needs, however, is not thunder, but more listening on all sides, liberals and conservatives, theologians and their critics, laity and members of the hierarchy, bishops and Rome. We've got to find a way to turn down the volume and - without abandoning our sense of what is truly important - step beyond our personal certainties and absolutist positions. We need to find ways to acknowledge our own failings and reach out to those who see things differently, so that we may rediscover the good in one another and the truth in positions different from our own.

We need also to find ways to address the theological illiteracy and ignorance of the tradition that afflicts so many young Catholics without having recourse to a non-historical orthodoxy or a magisterial fundamentalism. We need good, critical theology as well as courses in the riches of the Catholic tradition.

In an article in *Theological Studies* in 1996, William Shea of St. Louis University argues that Catholics need to pay more attention to the Protestant fundamentalist critique of Catholic belief and practice, including the charge made by so many Catholic converts to fundamentalist churches that they "never heard the Gospel" in a Catholic church. That charge may sometimes be true. If we continue to reduce our faith to an agenda of issues, whether of the right or the left, we won't have much to offer those who should be the Catholics of the next generation. Worse, we will have missed the chance to bring them and so many others into that personal and profound meeting with the Savior called for by Pope John Paul II. This is the real work of the church, not self-maintenance or even reconstruction, but evangelization. □

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## Words for a Pilgrim People

*For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (Phil 3:8-12)*

□□□

*In the depths of their conscience, people detect a law which they do not impose upon themselves, but which holds them to obedience. Always summoning them to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to the heart: do this, shun that. For people have in their hearts a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of the human person; according to it they will be judged (cf. Rm 2:15-16). Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There they are alone with God, whose voice echoes in their depths. In a wonderful manner, conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbour (cf. Mt 22:37-40; Gal 5:14). In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of the human family in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence, the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for those who care but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin. (Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n.16)*

□□□

*Dare to be true: nothing can need a lie. (George Herbert, Temple: Church Porch, xiii)*

## The Bible - The flight into Egypt

On the last Sunday of the calendar year - the first Sunday after Christmas - the Church meditates on the Holy Family. In Year A - this year - the text of Matthew's Gospel (2:13-15, 19-23) is used. It is a fascinating text, filled as it is with enigmatic and oblique references that call to mind the action of God with and through the Chosen People.

Let us recall first of all one of the essential principles for understanding the bible: Everything in the OT is written after the Exodus and in the light of the Exodus; everything in the NT is written after the new Exodus (the saving death and resurrection of Jesus - the Paschal Mystery) and in the light of the new Exodus. Jesus is the new Moses. So Matthew's Gospel, probably written about 80-90AD, is a faith document that is keen to situate Jesus within the context of salvation history. This Gospel must be understood as a drama. It points unmistakably to the OT, it is not as concerned with historical and functional details as it is with the action of God being played out in the world.

Was the slaying of the innocents an historical event? We do not know. And to ask that question is to forget that we are dealing here with a drama, not an historical account. What is important to the drama here is the character of Herod. This is the sort of thing he would do. The flight into Egypt - we are taken by the drama to that place and lots of memories are evoked. The text quite simply says, quoting Hosea 11:1 and Numbers 23:22: "I called my son out of Egypt." Sit still. Let this sink in. This speaks of the Exodus and the Covenant and the years in the wilderness where God spoke "to her heart" (Hosea 2:16). We are close to the heart of salvation history as we follow this pathetic little pilgrimage out of Egypt.

The "son" who is being called out of Egypt in the prophecy is Israel. Matthew's drama applies the whole Exodus story to Jesus. In Him Israel is to be set free. The essence of the drama described here in this story of the "flight into Egypt" is momentous: This is the beginning of the story of a new Exodus with a new and greater Moses.

Like the infancy of Moses, Jesus' infancy is one of great vulnerability and threat. God must intervene. Joseph is the faithful servant who is available to be the instrument of God's saving grace. The dream is a useful dramatic structure to allow God to appear to Joseph. Joseph's immediate compliance adds to the sense that this drama is focused on God and God's action. No human being is to distract from that. And in his fidelity Joseph becomes, with his wife, Jesus' first disciple. He is also the one who taught Jesus what fathers are like. Perhaps this contributed something to Jesus calling God, "Father"? □

## The Tradition - The holy family

The Tradition includes both *faith* - what we believe - and *form* - the rituals, symbols and various ways we concretise, express, foster and maintain what we believe (see *The Mix*, 2:3, 4-5 and 2:4, 4-5). We could say that central to the task of renewal set by the Second Vatican Council is a review of those *forms*. And questioning the *forms* inevitably causes us to question the very *faith* itself. If we are not clear about what we believe, we will tend not to be clear about how to express that belief. Given the anguish and confusion that accompanies this questioning, if the Council Fathers had grasped the implications of what they were initiating they may never have ventured down that pilgrim path. We can only guess at the consequences of postponing this journey of renewal, which may take generations, even centuries.

Perhaps there is no other part of the Tradition where the *form* is so pronounced as that associated with Christmas and the holy family. It is easy for us to lose sight of the *faith* under the weight of *form*. If, for example, we fail to understand the precise import and intent of the dramatic re-telling of the birth of Jesus as found in Matthew and Luke, we may get lost in less important or even irrelevant details.

St Francis of Assisi, for example, really launched the custom of the Christmas crib in 1223. Promoted by the Franciscans, the crib became an integral part of Christmas celebrations and representations of the holy family throughout continental Europe. Pre-Reformation England developed the custom of baking a mince pie in oblong shape to cradle an image of the Child. The Puritans outlawed both Christmas and the mince pie - "idolatry in crust". In the baroque period (1600-1750) the crib settings became exceedingly ornate in some places (eg Sicily).

A healthy Catholic Tradition will always allow, even foster, such *forms* as the crib. The purpose of such practices, however, will ever be to draw attention to the fact that ultimately any focus given to the holy family or Christmas is another way of affirming the Incarnation - God enfleshed. Any representation of the holy family that reminds us of the Incarnation is good. □

# Bulletin Board

## Catalyst Calendar

(Info: Pauline on 02 9816 4262)

### • Spirituality in the Pub (SIP):

**SIP Promoter** - Sr Marie Biddle rsj is SIP Promoter and can be contacted on (02) 9745 3444(W) or 9712 2109(H).

**SIP for 1998 has now finished.** Our thanks to all those who helped make it happen in the various venues. Some SIPs recommence in March. Please ring the contact person at the relevant SIP for details of the 1999 SIP programmes.

°Ballarat - (Info: Kevin on 03 5332 1697).

°Bowral - The Grand Bar and Brasserie, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: John on 02 4878 5230).

°Campbelltown - The Catholic Club, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: Sr Julianne on 02 9603 3000 (W) or 02 9603 2749).

°Canberra - The Olims Hotel, Ainslie Ave, Braddon, 7.30pm-9pm: [Please note, this is a change of venue]. (Info: Rita on 02 6288 4715).

°Chatswood - Orchard Tavern, Cnr. Victoria Ave & Orchard Rd, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: Helen on 9956 8232).

°Clayton (VIC) - The Notting Hotel, 8pm-9.30pm: (Info: Ann on 9701 7076 or 9701 3740 or Joyce on 9700 1250).

°Kincumber - The Kincumber Hotel, (Info: Sue on 02 4334 3174 (H) or Toni on 02 4341 6986 (H)).

°Newcastle - The Hotel Delany, Darby St, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: Gerard on 02 4979 1211 (W)).

°Paddington - The Bellevue Hotel, 7.30pm-9pm (Info: Marea on 9387 3152 (H)).

°Penrith - Golf Club, 7.30pm-9pm, (Info: Dennis on 02 4773 8429).

°Perth - The Elephant and the Wheelbarrow, cnr Francis and Lake Sts, Northbridge. 7.30pm-9pm (Info: Angela on 08 9337 9224)

°Geelong (Info: Denis on 03 5275 4120).

°Ramsgate - The Intersection Hotel, cnr Rockey Pt Rd and Ramsgate Rd, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: Claudette on 02 9587 3039 (H)).

°Richmond (VIC) - The Prince Alfred Hotel, first Wednesdays, 8pm-9.30pm. (Info: Simon on 03 9497 1631).

°Rouse Hill - The Mean Fiddler on Old Windsor Rd, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: Tim or Margaret on 9634 2927 (H)).

°Waitara - The Blue Gum Hotel on the Pacific Hwy, 7.30p-9pm: (Info: Ruth on 9416 4687)

### • SIP for young adults:

°Dee Why - Dee Why Hotel, Pittwater Rd, Dee Why, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: Fr John on 9905 3022).

°Waitara - The Blue Gum Hotel on the Pacific Hwy, 7.30pm-9pm: (Info: Greg on 9418 4844 (W)).

• Conversation at Chameleon Café, 48 Lackey St, Summer Hill. (Info: Gerard and Lindy on 02 9799 2907)

(Southern Highlands) on 02 4862 1591, Carmel (Newcastle) on 02 4963 1104; QLD - Gabrielle (South East) on 07 3425 3186; Jan (Far North) on 07 4068 1164, Nyree (Central) on 07 4928 5624, James (Sunshine Coast) on 07 5447 4321, John (Gold Coast) on 07 5578 9359; SA - Jill (Adelaide) on 08 8562 8181; TAS - David (Hobart) on 03 6228 4736; VIC - Patricia (Bendigo) on 03 5443 2377, Eileen (Melbourne) on 03 9435 8943, Kate (Point Lonsdale) on 03 5258 4003; WA - Sam & Vesta (Perth) on 08 9444 5810.

## FORUM FOR THE FUTURE PAPERS

Bound in small booklet format  
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*THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH*  
by

Richard Lennan and Teresa Pirola

*THE FUTURE OF WOMEN  
IN THE CHURCH*  
by

Gerald Gleeson and Moira O'Sullivan

• **AudioMIX? The Mix is now available on audio tape, thanks to the generosity of several volunteers.** For further information contact Pauline on 02 9816 4262.

• **The Cenacle Retreat Centre** offers a quiet space of natural beauty that invites to prayer and reflection. Situated at Ormiston about 35 minutes by car or train from the city of Brisbane. We offer group retreats, private retreats, days of prayer and the Thirty Day Retreat of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. (Info: The Secretary, Cenacle Retreat Centre, 267 Wellington St, Ormiston, Q 4160)

• **Mary MacKillop Haven - House of Hospitality.** Do you need peace and quiet, time for yourself, the opportunity to re-focus the direction of your life? The Sisters of St Joseph run this house at 5 Page Close, Wyong NSW - about 1 km from Wyong railway station. (Info: 02 4352 2414)

• **Are you interested in learning how to meditate?** You might like to contact someone in the Australian Christian Meditation Community: ACT - Richard on 02 6286 4670; NT - Ric & Mary on 08 8948 4637; NSW - Jillian (Sydney) on 02 9489 7480, John (Avoca Beach) on 02 4381 1002, Col

## HOW TO MEDITATE

Sit down. Sit still and straight. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Breathe calmly and regularly. Silently, interiorly begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer phrase "MA-RA-NA-THA". Recite it as syllables of equal length. Listen to it as you say it, gently but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything - spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so keep returning to simply saying the word. Meditate each morning and evening for between 20 and 30 minutes.

(The foregoing is taken from the Newsletter of the Australian Christian Meditation Community. They may be contacted at: ACMC, The Hermitage, Mt Mee Rd, Oceanview, Dayboro, Q 4521. Tel/Fax: 07 3425 3186)

• **Preparing for the Christmas Feast:** An opportunity for prayer and reflection in preparation for the Christmas Feast. Directed or private retreats/days of quiet. Tues December 15 to Tuesday December 22. At Mount St Benedict Centre, 447A Pennant Hills Rd, Pennant Hills, NSW. Tel: 02 9484 6208 or 9484 7033.

## NOTE

**THE MIX IS PUBLISHED  
TEN TIMES EACH YEAR  
MARCH THROUGH DECEMBER.  
THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE MIX WILL  
BE PUBLISHED IN MARCH 1999.**

**FROM ALL OF US IN  
CATALYST FOR RENEWAL  
TO ALL OF OUR FRIENDS,  
A BLESSED AND PEACE-FILLED  
CELEBRATION OF THE NATIVITY.**

# Recommended Reading

Mary McAleese, *Reconciled Being - Love in Chaos*, Medio Media/Arthur James, 1997, 122 pages, endnotes, pb, \$23.95. [This book is available from Pauline Books and Media]

Raymond E Brown, *An Adult Christ at Christmas*, The Liturgical Press, 1978, 50 pages, pb, \$12.95. [This book is available from Pauline Books and Media]

Jack Dominian, *One Like Us: A Psychological Interpretation of Jesus*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998, 237 pages, index, endnotes, pb, \$32.95. [This book is available from Pauline Books and Media]

Mary McAleese was born in Belfast in 1951, she lectured for 12 years in the Law School at Trinity College, Dublin, is married with three children, practises daily meditation, after the method taught by John Main, is a committed Catholic and was recently elected President of Ireland. This book is comprised mostly of the text of her presentations at the 1997 John Main Seminar in Dublin. And it makes compelling reading. The style is very readable, emerging as it does from a splendid and, at times, frightening, description of life's experiences. A liberating honesty slowly overtakes the reader. McAleese thus brings the question of reconciliation back to the nitty gritty: "Perhaps deeper than all sectarian divisions and at the root of all human discord is the savagely isolated individual ego, ruthless in its determination to survive at all costs." But McAleese gives the last word to God: "Once you have broken through the barrier of an immature, sensational and superficial relationship with God and have come into the knowledge of a love so blindingly real and illuminating, all previous descriptions of God ... become redundant. You have indeed passed through "the cloud of unknowing" to a more real world beyond the delusions of the ego's pride or sectarian hatred." This little book is a gem.

Before his death earlier this year, Raymond Brown had been one of the world's leading scripture scholars. In this little book - a brief summary of *The Birth of the Messiah* which has 750 pages - Brown offers the best of biblical scholarship in addressing a part of the Bible that all too easily gets lost under the weight of forms that are more the result of our own wishes than God's revelation. Brown notes that, whereas the Gospel descriptions of what Jesus said and did during his ministry draw on obvious witnesses such as the disciples, there are no such obvious witnesses to what happened around the birth of Jesus. He also notes that our understanding of the so-called Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke has undergone development. The focus today is not so much on the historical validity of this or that fact, but on the theological meaning of this or that piece of the narrative. In other words, why did Matthew and Luke deem these stories to be worth telling? Brown observes: "Now we have come to recognise that the Gospels are not primarily biographical in their origins; rather they stem from an apostolic preaching where salvific import determined what was preserved about Jesus." This book will be enjoyed by scholars and non-scholars alike. It is a good source of both information and inspiration.

This is more than a book on the psychology of an historical figure. It is an attempt to shed light on the most momentous event in human history, the Incarnation. The result is a very stimulating and rich reflection on the humanity of Jesus Christ. Unlike many others who have attempted to focus on the humanity of Jesus, Dominian does not lose sight of the divinity. He shows, not only a wealth of knowledge and experience in his proper field of the psychology of the human person, but a good grasp of other relevant disciplines such as theology and history. Dominian situates this book in the context of his own struggle to remain faithful within the Church: "I became critical of (the Church's) teaching on sexuality, its hierarchical structure, which addresses its members at an infantile level, and the gap between its institutional reality and the community of love which Jesus set up. I did not leave the Church. Instead I began a long journey of writing, particularly in the field of marriage and sexuality, which was my contribution to what I think the truth is. My professional training as a psychiatrist has helped me to a better understanding of love, and increasingly my passion for Jesus coincided with this understanding - it is these two realities I have tried to bring together in this book." Highly recommended.

✂----- Detach and post today -----

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