

**“PASSIONATE ABOUT THE PROCESS,  
DETACHED ABOUT THE OUTCOME:  
LIVING CREATIVELY WITHIN OUR INSTITUTIONS”<sup>1</sup>**

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*“I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.”<sup>3</sup>*

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Change is an accepted part of our lives these days, at least notionally. However, the concrete day-to-day effects of that change may not be so accepted. If the truth be told, most of us live under a fair degree of stress. And a major focus of stress is found in our institutions. The various organizational structures and systems we have inherited were shaped by historical forces that were in so many ways different from those we experience today. The following lament reflects this experience:

‘The world is losing touch with the art of government,’ says Simon Jenkins (in *The Sunday Times*). All our most powerful institutions – the United States, the European Union and the United Nations – stand accused of letting down ordinary people.<sup>4</sup>

Simon Jenkins, in fact, could have referred to every major institution in the world today, including the Catholic Church. Predictably, given that the Catholic Church is an institution that embraces more than one billion people from all parts of the human family, it is a place of considerable stress.

The title of this presentation declares my hand. I am going to put a case that it is entirely possible to live creatively and happily within the Catholic Church today, the considerable stress notwithstanding.

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<sup>3</sup> T S Eliot, “East Coker,” III, *Four Quartets*, A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1943/1971, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Report on “Best Articles: Britain,” in *The Week*, September 17, 2005, 14. Simon Jenkins goes on to argue that one of the manifestations of this new situation is the unreal expectations people have of their leaders. We will return to that theme later in this presentation.

## The irony of freedom

In 1953, the psychiatrist Rollo May, published a book called *Man's Search for Himself*.<sup>5</sup> He tells a little parable there about a man who is put in a cage.<sup>6</sup> At first the man is simply bewildered. Then he protests vehemently, "his voice was strong and his eyes full of anger." Then he becomes silent but there is "hatred glowing like a deep fire in his eyes." Then the man begins to talk about "how it was a useful thing if a man was given food and shelter and that man had to live by his fate" etc. Then he develops a friendly disposition towards those who have imprisoned him and he explains to visitors that "he had chosen this way of life, that there are great values in security, and being taken care of" etc. When there is no one around, however, he sits sullen and morose, his movements are heavy and clumsy, his talk one-track and simplistic. Finally, the man becomes like a zombie, empty and expressionless, he no longer uses the word "I." To all intents and purposes, this man has ceased to live.

Living is a constant giving and receiving. We live by freely playing our part in that mutuality. We neither dominate nor allow ourselves to be dominated. Like ballroom dancers we move to the rhythm of a cosmic tune which strikes a deep resonance within us, we did not write that tune, we do not conduct it, and we do not know where the music and the dance will take us. But when we pick up the resonance and let it vibrate through our beings we know a profound synergy and a wonderful harmony that is pure grace.

In fact, such synergy and harmony and rhythm are probably fairly rare for most of us. We are perhaps more likely to find ourselves dodging people rather than dancing with them, life seeming more akin to a jungle than a ballroom, we feel pushed here and there by competing demands rather than gently summoned by music to a graceful response. In fact, we might sometimes think that we are more like the man in the cage than the ballroom dancers.

Rollo May introduces that parable with a question: "What would happen to a person if his freedom were entirely and literally taken away?" In fact, I think the parable, in the end, is about *how we use our freedom when we feel powerless*. Listen to another psychiatrist, Victor Frankl, reflecting on his experience in the concentration camps of World War II. He was one of many people put in a cage, though his imprisonment was no parable, it was a harsh historical fact:

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they were sufficient proof that everything can

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<sup>5</sup> Rollo May, *Man's Search for Himself*, Delta, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Op cit, 145-148.

be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way. ....

“The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity – even under the most difficult circumstances – to add a deeper meaning to his life. He may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation, he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for a man either to make use of or to forgo the opportunities of attaining the moral values that a difficult situation may afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not.”<sup>7</sup>

It is true, the man in the cage had certain freedoms taken away. But he did not lose his freedom as such. Ironically, it was his own act of freedom that undermined his freedom. He chose – at least implicitly – to respond in a certain way. He could have responded in a more creative way, extraordinarily difficult as that response would have been. When we find ourselves in a system that we experience as disempowering, and it is a system from which we cannot realistically or easily withdraw, the potential for both destructive and constructive responses and behaviours is considerable.

### **What moves us?**

We are moved to respond or react in different ways about different things at different times. Take for example the common occurrence of eating food. The infant sucks the mother’s breast. We might surmise that what moves the infant is both pleasure and pain – the pleasure of satisfaction and the pain of hunger. The child is weaned and begins to eat solid foods. Choices must be made, good and/or bad habits are formed. Eventually the thoughtful adult might wonder: “What moves me to eat?” The most obvious answer is: “I eat to stay alive.” And? “I eat because it is satisfying.” And? “I eat because it’s an enjoyable social activity.” And?

With some prodding, most of us would have at least one other reason for eating. Some of us, for example, might, on reflection, discover that a certain amount of our eating is prompted by the wish to be consoled. In other words, when we are anxious or stressed or lonely or sad, for example, we feel moved to eat. Physical activities – typically eating (including other ingesting activities like drinking alcohol, drug-taking and smoking cigarettes), sleeping and having sex in one form or other – are readily available avenues of escape, places we may go when we are distressed or confused or lonely or sad or angry and so on. It is not for nothing that alcoholics say: “If you feel like another drink, ask yourself if you are sad, angry or lonely.” The

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<sup>7</sup> Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1974, 65 & 67.

presenting feeling or idea that moves us towards some action, is not always the actual or real or only feeling or idea moving us towards that action.

Tied up with motivation is expectation. Again, our real expectations might remain hidden, even from us. If, for example, I – consciously or unconsciously – expect you to satisfy my emotional cravings for nurturance or expect my work to always be satisfying or expect myself to be perfect in every task I attempt, then I am headed for strife. And there may be some contemporary cultural forces at work here too. American historian, Daniel Boorstin, thinks so. Some forty years ago he said of American culture:

“Never have people been more the masters of their environment. Yet never has a people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people expected so much more than the world could offer.”<sup>8</sup>

Motivations and expectations are critical to our wellbeing. It may be useful for us to reflect on our own motivations and expectations when our way is barred in a system, such as the Church. Drawing these concrete conclusions about motivations and expectations is, however, a very personal thing which I will leave to you. If Boorstin’s analysis also applies to Australia today, and I believe it does in some measure, then it is entirely possible that our expectations of ourselves and our systems – the Catholic Church included – may have some elements of unreality about them.

Further, a normal part of growing to maturity includes some significant adjustment in the areas of motivation and expectation. Over time our motivations and expectations change in the face of sometimes hard experience. We come to a certain practical wisdom that is beyond the impractical enthusiasm and urgency of immaturity and naïve assumptions about life being fair or rewarding you if you do the right thing. We are thus enabled to outgrow cynicism and chronic anger. A sign that this is happening is good humour, we are able to laugh at ourselves and the absurdities that are passed off as necessities, by us and others. This is, in fact, the wisdom of realism and compassion:

“Life is not so much beginnings and endings as it is middles, middles that don't measure up – and our happiness depends on how we come to terms with the pale reflections of our dreams.”<sup>9</sup>

Often enough the transitions that we make as we grow slowly into this wisdom of realism and compassion, are made when the old motivations and expectations fail

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<sup>8</sup> Cited by W. Lynch, *Images of Hope*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1965, 258f.

<sup>9</sup> Paul D. Zimmerman, “Middles and Muddles,” review of film “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” *Newsweek*, September 27, 1971, 106.

us or lead us to some kind of crisis or impasse. We are forced by life to ask: “Why am I doing this?” and “What do I expect?”

### **Let light shine out of darkness**

Moments of crisis and impasse are good places to discover all sorts of truths about ourselves and our world. Being lost is a good place to find yourself. Some of our biggest successes in our human journey present themselves initially as failures or disappointments or frustrations. Apart from challenging our motivations and expectations, such a moment might help us to see a little more clearly the truth of what we really believe – beyond our pretenses and easy convictions – and the truth of what matters in the end – beyond what we merely like or hold on to out of fear or respectability. While such moments can reveal us to ourselves, they can also reveal God to us. The cracks can let in the Light, the moment of ego-desperation can lower the defenses long enough for an epiphany to occur. St Paul says it beautifully:

“For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.”<sup>10</sup>

The tragic-comic image of our original parents standing before God wearing fig leaves is most insightful. We human beings are geniuses at self-deceit. We are probably most the genius when we convince ourselves that we are not deceiving ourselves. Associated with this genius is the anxiety and fear-driven propensity we all have to re-arrange reality to suit our various motivations and expectations. Thus we turn means into ends and ends into means and we relativize the absolute and absolutize the relative. All this re-arranging is about control. The illusion of control allays our anxieties and fears.

Our interface with God strikes at this nerve, at the very point where the self-deceit and evasion is likely to enter. There we must choose how we are going to deal with the pain of our anxieties and fears. Will we deal with that pain by continuing to construct illusions of control? Or will we deal with the pain by surrendering to love?

And does not this same decision lie at the very heart of every loving relationship? We must choose between surrender and control. Can I love you and control you? Love – authentic love – draws me into a world of reality in which the very reasons for my anxieties and fears are taken away, thus rendering unnecessary, even unthinkable, the sad and destructive band aid measures of fabricating illusions

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<sup>10</sup> 2Corinthians 4:6-7.

of control.<sup>11</sup> A mere taste of this truth is generally enough to help us choose surrender over control. Again, some wisdom from a psychiatrist:

“We love out of leisure from self-concern, and we are always self-concerned unless we know that someone other than ourself is prepared to maintain the significance of our being.”<sup>12</sup>

Love always comes as gift and our part is surrendering and participating. We feel that cosmic music within and we begin to dance. Only in love can we let go of our anxieties and fears. And only in letting go of our anxieties and fears can we fall into love. This may in fact be the central tension of our lives. It is a paradoxical process in which we gain the initiative by surrendering, we are most active in our receptivity, we find ourselves by losing ourselves. All of which demands a certain courage and daring and sturdy persistence. It is, however, the path to what we desire most in this world.

### **Our real journey**

Maybe at root, this whole business of anxieties and fears is about a matter we would rather not admit or name. I am speaking of the matter of our own relationship with ourselves. Set aside contemporary discussions and debates about “self-esteem.” They have their own usefulness. I am, rather, pointing to something more radical. Despite our fond wishes and protestations to the contrary, I believe none of us is completely at ease with what he or she finds within, all of us are in some measure ill at ease with ourselves. If we do not face this inner tension and endeavour to look at ourselves as we are, we end by trying to resolve the tension “out there,” perhaps hating other people and things, even if we disguise it. Jean Vanier sums it up:

“As I feel more and more the injustice, the inequalities and the exploitations of this world, I understand better why so many people throw themselves into political activity which aims to destroy the power-structure of our society. I understand better why people who are frightened of losing their possessions and power try to defend themselves and the structures which support them. Our world is moving towards universal conflict, pushed by the jealousies and hatred which come from fear. Jesus came to destroy hate and to lead all men into fraternity, universal love and peace. But this means that we must all reject our individual and group egoisms; we must all learn to die to ourselves and, reborn in the Spirit, to live for our brothers and sisters and for God our Father. I believe that the world will only change as people’s hearts change and as people open themselves to love and

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<sup>11</sup> Thus John writes: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.” (1John 4:18)

<sup>12</sup> Shirley Sugerman, *Sin and Madness: Studies in Narcissism*, Westminster Press, 1976, 54f.

tenderness. Our political and economic structures reflect our inner fears; they can only be changed as hearts change. This does not mean that we must not struggle against injustice on a political level, for we must. But above all we must become sources of love for others; we must become attentive to the little people, the wounded, the fragile and the lonely people. It is as this current of life grows stronger that structures will change.”<sup>13</sup>

This is not a goal we can simply achieve by self-discipline or by psychological strategies or even by other people loving us, though these help. Coming home to ourselves in love is ultimately a work of grace, as Simone Weil points out:

“God's love for us is not the reason for which we should love him. God's love for us is the reason for us to love ourselves. How could we love ourselves without this motive?”<sup>14</sup>

Authentic love is always liberating, never entrapping. It is unconditional, it is not earned or given with expectation of reward. There is no such thing as conditional love. And because authentic love is a participation in the life of God, it never ends. This love is available to each of us in each and every moment, no matter how dark and painful that moment might be. Such dark moments can awaken unresolved issues within us and move us to choose badly. Authentic love and only authentic love – can break that cycle. Love restores us to ourselves and prevents us from keeping evil in circulation through revenge, resentment, cynicism, chronic anger, petty point scoring, gossip and so on. John urges us:

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”<sup>15</sup>

There is a great paradox here. In order to go out to the world in a life-giving way, we must come home to ourselves in a life-giving way. Solitude<sup>16</sup> is the true and necessary ground of compassion. The pain we inflict on the world is the pain we are not dealing with in ourselves. We each have gifts to bring to our world, whether the

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Vanier, *Be Not Afraid*, Paulist Press, 1975, pp.viii – ix. We might wonder about the negative anthropology that has bedeviled Christianity over the centuries. St Augustine's role in this is probably exaggerated, but nonetheless real. St Augustine's heir, Martin Luther, probably did not help with his image of fresh-fallen snow on dung to describe the human being redeemed through grace. Calvinism and Jansenism have also taken their toll. Much of this negativity got channeled into teachings about “original sin.” Is it possible that much of what was passed off as “Christian anthropology” – explicitly or implicitly – was more an expression of self-hatred than a proclamation of the Good News? And has self-hatred grossly deformed our understandings of the Cross and “salvation,” our understandings of Christian commitment and holiness?

<sup>14</sup> Simone Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*, Ed. George A. Panichas, David McKay, 1977, 351.

<sup>15</sup> 1John4:7.

<sup>16</sup> By solitude I mean the process in which I face within what must be faced and what I alone can face.

gifts be our functional skills or our ideas or our money or our contacts or our intelligence or our time and effort or just a positive disposition. However, the best gift any of us can bring, in any moment, is purity of heart, a transparent presence through which love is encountered in any and all its many manifestations – goodness, truth, graciousness, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, self-control, and so on. Thomas Merton, a short while before he went on his final journey in 1968, summed it up nicely:

“Our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts. Never was it more necessary for us to respond to that action. I pray that we may all do so generously.”<sup>17</sup>

### **The breath of God**

John the Baptizer proclaimed that one was to come who “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”<sup>18</sup> References to the Spirit of God at work in and through Jesus and his disciples abound in the Christian Scriptures.<sup>19</sup> The outpouring of the Spirit of God is celebrated by us in the liturgy each year with the Feast of Pentecost. There we hear the story proclaimed in the assembly:

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”<sup>20</sup>

John reminds us that the Spirit is incomprehensible in its nature and ways:

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<sup>17</sup> Robert E Dagg, editor, *The Road to Joy: The Letters of Thomas Merton to New and Old Friends*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 3:11. Luke 3:16 uses the same expression while Mark 1:8 leaves out the reference to fire.

<sup>19</sup> For example: The whole Incarnation is a work of the Spirit: “... she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18. See also Luke 1:35); Jesus’ ministry is Spirit-led: “And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3:16-17. See also Mark 1:10 and Luke 3:22.); the disciples will be similarly Spirit-led: “When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” (Matthew 10:19-20. See Mark 13:12 and Luke 12:12 for similar references.) Luke’s Gospel finishes with the instruction: “And now I am sending upon you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city, then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) The Greek word translated here as “power” is *dunamin*, the same root word for “dynamite.”

<sup>20</sup> Acts 2:1-4.



“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

Most mysteriously and wonderfully, John tells us that:

“This is the Spirit of truth, .... he abides with you, and he will be in you.”<sup>22</sup>

This is also the Spirit who causes the works of Jesus to be repeated, Jesus’ word to be proclaimed,<sup>23</sup> Jesus’ thanksgiving to be perpetuated in the breaking of the bread. This Spirit is also the true source of the community of disciples,<sup>24</sup> and the One in whom and through whom we come to know our true identity, for the Holy Spirit and our spirit bear united witness that we are God’s children, all of us calling God our Father.<sup>25</sup>

St Paul reminds us that “the Spirit is our life.”<sup>26</sup> The Spirit of the Living God, the Creator Spirit, the Breath of God, the Spirit of Eternal Love, the One who moves where She will, replacing alienation with communion, oppression with freedom, violence with grace, hatred with reconciliation, the lie with truth. This is ours, unmerited, freely given by God. This is the Kingdom for which we pray daily. Therefore, continues St Paul, “let us be directed by the Spirit.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Where the rubber meets the road**

The former leader of the Federal Labor Party, Mr Mark Latham, recently gave a public lecture at Melbourne University.<sup>28</sup> According to a report on the front page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* the next day, Mr Latham advised “young idealists who wanted to change society to have nothing to do with organized politics.” The paper went on to report that Mr Latham “had spent an hour outlining 10 reasons to steer clear of a system that was ‘fundamentally sick and broken.’” The report also noted that not every member of the audience was willing to accept Mr Latham’s advice, with one young man saying, “if people like himself retreated .... who would uphold the traditional values of the party on the national stage?”

It is not my intention to attempt an analysis of Mr Latham and his advice. I simply note what I believe is a common experience for many today. Our institutional systems are places of considerable tension and conflict. If we are not adequately

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<sup>21</sup> John 3:8.

<sup>22</sup> John 14:17.

<sup>23</sup> See Acts 4:30; 5:42; 6:7; 9:20; 18:5; 19:10-20.

<sup>24</sup> See Acts 2:42 and 4:32. See also Ephesians 4:4ff.

<sup>25</sup> See Romans 8:15-16. See also Galatians 4:6.

<sup>26</sup> Galatians 5:25.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Tuesday September 27 2005.

prepared, they can provoke in us a crippling anger. I believe this is why many in our culture withdraw to private lives over which they can exercise a modicum of control. I also believe this is very unfortunate and potentially highly destructive. As the young man indicated in response to Mr Latham's advice, if we all withdraw to our own private existences, what will become of the public reality?

The same dynamics are manifest in the Catholic Church. Many Catholics who seek to be actively engaged in the public life of the Church, find their way barred by pettiness, silliness, incompetence, dysfunctional personalities, a refusal to consult, an inability to engage in conversation and, at times, acts of injustice and even terrible corruption.<sup>29</sup> Given the peculiar structure of the Catholic Church, most often these obstacles come from the clergy. And given the emerging involvement of the lay faithful in the life of the Catholic Church – frequently in paid positions on which they and their families depend for their livelihood – the ones most likely to bear the frustration of these obstacles are the laity. And the frustration is normally an experience of powerlessness. There is, typically, in most of these incidents of conflict, a significant abuse of power.

We can understand this a little better if we understand Catholic Church Law as it applies to the Parish situation. The Parish is a microcosm of the total situation within the Church. The New Code of Canon Law gives a lot of power and authority to the pastor in the local parish. For example, Canon 534 – §1 speaks of the pastor “taking possession of his parish.” Canon 527 – §1 speaks similarly. And Canon 532 makes it clear that “the pastor represents the parish in all juridic affairs.” Canon 536 – §1 declares that, if a pastoral council is to be established in the parish, “the pastor presides over” that council. The second part of that Canon says: “The pastoral council possesses a consultative vote only and is governed by norms determined by the diocesan bishop.” Similar prescriptions apply to the establishment of a finance council.<sup>30</sup>

The Code assumes the pastor is going to act reasonably. If he does act reasonably the system can work very well, if he does not act reasonably, there is plenty of scope for conflict. This is the way it is with any human system. No matter what law you have or what system you construct, it is people who will make or break it. Relationships, not laws, are the key to making any system life-giving. That said, the laws pertaining to the structure of parishes do leave wide open the possibility of clerical abuse of power. There are too few checks and balances, too little demand for

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<sup>29</sup> I do not for one minute suggest this is the only experience of the Church we Catholics have! This is on occasions the experience that many of us have had. It needs to be acknowledged. Further, it is precisely the experience that prompts the reflection we are engaged in here.

<sup>30</sup> Canon Law demands that a finance council be established in the Parish. The pastoral council is optional.

accountability. The emphasis at the Second Vatican Council on dialogue, collegiality and subsidiarity is not adequately reflected in these laws.

We cannot change the Code of Canon Law but we can change the way we think about the law and the nature of power and authority in the Catholic Church. We could follow the lead of Pope John Paul II, for example, and begin to re-think our understanding of the role of the Pope. In his encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), Pope John Paul II called for assistance in developing the ministry of Peter “in this new situation.” It was a brave and necessary call.

In Catholicism, a primary text for understanding the ministry of Peter is found in the Gospel of Matthew, 16:13-23.<sup>31</sup> Catholicism has tended to only cite half this story in support of the authority of Peter. It is essential that we look at the full story and recognise the complex and practical revelation that comes from the tension of opposites.

In the first part of the story, Jesus asks the disciples, “Who do people say the Son of man is?” The disciples give various responses – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets. Then Jesus becomes more pointed and asks the disciples who they say he is (16:15). Peter replies on behalf of the others, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16). Matthew then has Jesus say to Peter:

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (16:18-19).

There are two particularly significant moments in this part of the story, each of which is about to be immediately countered in the second part:

- Firstly, Simon is affirmed, he is “The Rock” – neither the Greek word *petros* nor the Aramaic word *kepha* – both meaning “the rock” – are used as a personal name before Jesus confers it on Simon;
- Secondly, Jesus declares that the Father has spoken through Simon.

In the following verses Jesus prophesies his passover (16:21). Peter rebukes Him, saying “this must not happen to you” (16:22). Jesus then says to Peter:

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<sup>31</sup> See similar passages in Mark 8:27-33 and Luke 9:18-22.

“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (16:23).

There are two particularly significant moments in this part also, and they create a tension with the two moments that have gone before:

- Firstly, Simon is rebuffed, the rock has become a stumbling block;
- Secondly, Jesus declares that he is acting for Satan, not thinking as the Father does but as human beings do.

We might paraphrase Matthew’s story as follows: “He is the Rock, cling to him, he speaks the words of the Father, listen to him, he can be a stumbling block, watch your step, he can think and act inappropriately, be discerning.” Above all, this understanding of the authority of the Pope calls for realism and compassion. It also helps us to accept the sometimes scandalous truth of power and authority as it has been exercised within the Catholic Church, by Popes and others. Often enough the Catholic Church has stood, Uluru-like, in the midst of history, serving and defending the poor and the needy, proclaiming the Good News faithfully in both word and deed. Sadly, the Catholic Church has too often also been a stumbling block, acting with the mind of Satan rather than the mind of God.

### **Catholic and thriving, thank you very much**

So how can we be passionate about our faith and detached about the outcome of our efforts within the actual Catholic community of which we are part? Put simply, how do we thrive in the Catholic Church today? In the light of the foregoing discussion, I am going to suggest four ways that might assist us.

The first way is to commit yourself to a deepening relationship with God. Such a relationship requires you to listen at depth to what is going on, to listen, as St Benedict says, “with the ears of the heart.”<sup>32</sup> You must become keenly attuned to the promise, “I am with you!”<sup>33</sup> It is this lived awareness of the Presence that will transform your mind and heart. For the God-centred life, all else falls into its rightful place, even if that is a sad and tragic place. Such is life as we know it.

If you are firmly grounded beyond the institution, if you have discovered your identity in God, you no longer depend on the system for an identity. You can move more freely in systems when you do not depend on them or their agents for your sense of meaning and purpose in life. You will be able to look people in the face and say with peace in your heart and genuine hope: “For us there is only the trying, the

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<sup>32</sup> See Prologue to *The Rule*.

<sup>33</sup> See Psalm 46:10. See also Exodus 3:12 and Matthew 1:23.

rest is not our business.”<sup>34</sup> Our grounding in God is the essential basis for our detachment from the outcomes of our efforts within any system, including the Church.

The second way is to work on your own inner journey. Be ruthlessly honest with yourself about yourself. Be persistent in this ruthless honesty. Be always ready to ask the simple question: “What’s happening?” And listen! Pay close attention and face what you hear within. You can assume that the things you really would rather not face, things that make you squirm, are the very things that you need to face. You may need some help in doing that. This second way, of course, goes hand-in-hand with the first way. In God I discover my true self. Any other “self” is a fraud, no matter how respected by others, no matter how “successful”.

The third way is the obvious corollary of the first two ways: Give primacy to relationships. Rules and regulations, dogmas and moral injunctions, customs and rituals, are all essential. But they are not primary. Be quite deliberate and concrete in giving your best energies to fostering, defending, promoting and celebrating relationships. The relationships you ought to focus on – over and above the relationships already mentioned, with God and with yourself – are the relationships right under our nose. The people who come in and out of your life are the ones with whom you should be seeking good relationships.

The fourth way assumes the other three ways are a rich part of your life:

“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”<sup>35</sup>

In other words, you are encouraged to use whatever human means you have at your disposal – within the bounds of the Gospel vision – to promote what you believe to be the good and the true. In this, no concrete behaviour is either prescribed or proscribed. For example, Jesus obviously felt called to cleanse the temple.<sup>36</sup> That was pretty drastic behaviour and not the sort of thing I would be encouraging, quite frankly! But, by the same token I would not discount it in principle. Discernment is the key. And common sense is an important part of discernment. In all this Jesus says,

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<sup>34</sup> T S Eliot, “East Coker,” V, op cit, 31. This is reminiscent of Julian of Norwich’s “All shall be well! All manner of things shall be well!”

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 10:16. See also Mark 13:9-13 and Luke 21:12-17. Note the promise that follows immediately: “Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” (Matthew 10:19-20.)

<sup>36</sup> See Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:11 & 15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-25.

“Do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”<sup>37</sup>

Trust the work of your spirit and the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> And take the consequences in freedom and grace.

## Conclusion

About twenty years ago, the monk, Carlo Carretto, returned to Italy from the Sahara Desert, after many years living among the Bedouin. He wrote a document entitled, “I Sought and I Found.” There he tells of his inner journey and his struggles with God. He concludes the document with a letter to the church. The letter begins:

“How much I must criticise you, my church and yet how much I love you! You have made me suffer more than anyone and yet I owe you more than I owe anyone. I should like to see you destroyed and yet I need your presence. You have given me much scandal and yet you alone have made me understand holiness. Never in the world have I seen anything more obscurantist, more compromised, more false, yet never have I touched anything more pure, more generous or more beautiful. Countless times I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face – and yet, every night, I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms! No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even if not completely you. Then too – where should I go? To build another church? But I cannot build another church without the same defects, for they are my own defects. And again, if I were to build another church, it would be my church, not Christ’s church. No, I am old enough. I know better!”<sup>39</sup>

It does not help us to become fixated on “them,” whoever “them” happens to be, when we are talking about the Church. Our identity within the Church is found in our common baptism. *We* the baptized are the Church and we have a great responsibility and possibility at this time. Each of us must invite the Spirit of God to take us where we have never been before and, by implication, thereby take the Church where she has never been before. This is part of our prophetic vocation. We may not make it to the seven o’clock news for doing this, and it may cause us much suffering, but it will be right and good and beautiful.

The Good News is always good and it is always news. It is hard to remember that when we are in pain. But we must remember it! We must also remember that

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew 10:19-20.

<sup>38</sup> See Romans 8:16.

<sup>39</sup> *Messenger*, Jan-Feb., 1989, 15. The piece originally appeared in the U.K. *Catholic Herald*. Carlo Carretto died on 4 October 1988 at the age of 78.

our world belongs to God, it is in good hands. Our lives belong to God, they are in good hands. Our Church belongs to God, it is in good hands.



The following quotation from Pope Francis was added, First Sunday of Lent, 2019:

*“Paul VI invited us to deepen the call to renewal and to make it clear that renewal does not only concern individuals but the entire Church. Let us return to a memorable text which continues to challenge us. ‘The Church must look with penetrating eyes within herself, ponder the mystery of her own being... This vivid and lively self-awareness inevitably leads to a comparison between the ideal image of the Church as Christ envisaged her and loved her as his holy and spotless bride (cf. Eph 5:27), and the actual image which the Church presents to the world today... This is the source of the Church’s heroic and impatient struggle for renewal: the struggle to correct those flaws introduced by her members which her own self-examination, mirroring her exemplar, Christ, points out to her and condemns’. The Second Vatican Council presented ecclesial conversion as openness to a constant self-renewal born of fidelity to Jesus Christ: ‘Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling... Christ summons the Church as she goes her pilgrim way... to that continual reformation of which she always has need, in so far as she is a human institution here on earth’. There are ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s ‘fidelity to her own calling’, any new structure will soon prove ineffective.”*

[Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 2013), #26]



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