

## PASSING THROUGH HISTORY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELFHOOD: AN ISSUE FOR EDUCATION AND MINISTRY

The character of the historical present and the quality of our self-presence are mutually conditioning. Any care of souls, in the ancient or modern sense, acknowledges the peril of losing one's self under the pressure or fascination of the historical present. Conformity to the spirit of the age exacts a high price – if gaining the acceptance of the world demands the price of one's own soul (cf. Mark 8: 34-38). On the other hand, we cannot afford to ignore our times, as if to let life and culture pass us by in the pursuit of timeless, disembodied spiritual realm of some kind. Both education and ministry, therefore, tend to converge in the interests of authentic self-understanding, the outcome, not of an uncritical conformity to the times, but of a discerning openness to the grace of the time – this unique, irrepeatable moment in human history. Existence in the world of time means neither a state of exile nor conformist immobility; for that reason it has often been called a pilgrimage.

It is worth asking, then, the simplest of questions: how do the passage of time and the movements of culture affect our experience of the full dimensions of our selfhood? In reflecting on that question, rather than attempting to answer it fully, we will note the 'postmodern' tensions associated with the human self, and then examine two relevant spiritual testimonies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Père de Caussade in his *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence* (de Caussade, 1948); and of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Teilhard de Chardin in his *The Divine Milieu* (de Chardin, 1965). We will follow these two testimonies with a remark on the present historical situation and then with theological conclusion.

### The Signs of the Times and the Times of the Signs

Naming the present has some relationship to that preeminently Vatican II activity of 'reading the signs of the times'.<sup>1</sup> In its entirety, the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, #4, #44 (Flannery, 1996, pp. 903-1000) is in fact an exercise in reading the signs of God's action in the contemporary world. It shows a confident, almost extrovert, perhaps a little naïve, attitude to the world: 'God's people works to discern the true signs of his presence and purpose in the events, needs and desires it shares with the rest of modern humanity' (*GS* #11, Flannery, 1996, p. 912). This kind of reading the signs is a necessary task in the ministry of religious education, as it is for the whole Church in every

age – a discernment of the grace of the present moment on a global scale.

The problem now is that, having become habituated to reading the signs of the times in a way appropriate to 'the Church in the Modern World', we now find ourselves confronted with new forms of discernment appropriate to the church to the 'postmodern' world. There is a lot of promise for the renewal of Christian faith and identity in this new mood of exploration and sensibility. Positively, what is commonly called 'postmodern' must be understood in reaction to the rigid, self-confident clarities of the past. It aims to make room for the distinctive voice and the testimony of unique experience in our human history. It has time for the particular, the forgotten, the repressed. It makes time, waiting on the uncanny 'otherness' of reality. When such otherness and uniqueness tend to be flattened by massive technologically-driven standardisation structuring human commerce, it is time to recover a sense of conversation.

Conversing with the other, in a way that relativises particular expertise yet is open 'to what it's all about', is a rare and subversive event of communication, an underground movement of intelligence working in patient playfulness and irony. There is a buoyancy of interaction, both as regards persons and events. It allows for the play of free exchange and encourages the self and the other to speak in the first person, to witness to the originality of experience and the surprise of life in its different forms. The event of conversation resists the alienating rationalism that pretends to understand everything except what is most significant for the human world. In other words, there is hope for the self in the post-modern. It allows our souls to breathe and the self to expand more creatively.

But there are problems. The signs of the times has yielded to the times of the sign—where 'sign' is understood as the image, the fabrication of a virtual world. In such an artificial reality, the movement of history can be easily lost and personal identity undermined. The media, linked with telecommunications, inundate any given human consciousness with massive amounts of information. Little wonder in the whirligig of information there is a kaleidoscope of images. An unfortunate result is that governments trade in the politics of images. What matters is not the substance or the sense of the policy, but the image of the politician. And that image – of the caring,

compassionate, articulate politician – can be made, bought and sold. The images industries are a fact in public life. Where before it served the larger truth of things, the image is now the deciding reality. Not to have a good image is regarded, in effect, as social death.

And so it is that reading the signs of the times must now confront the times of the sign – of the image, the virtual reality – as never before. The troubling possibility is that individuals and groups begin to believe in their image; or, out of deep self-disgust, begin to project or fabricate an image of themselves that only intensifies a sense of alienation. However sophisticated the artificial image of oneself might be, for the psychological present of the self it is nothing but a door opening onto a dead end.

But this need not be so; nor is it, in the actual living performance of human beings. For in that ever-expanding consciousness of 'my life', I am not enclosed in myself, but communicating with a world of others and otherness. What I most deeply am would suffocate if I were cocooned in images, especially of others' making. Through experiencing, questioning, judging, deciding, relating – and, for that matter, adoring – the flow and expansion of consciousness reveals a self-transcending trajectory, the denial of which would condemn anyone to an intensifying autism. But to the degree we recollect ourselves in the present moment in the uncanny occurrence of the universe, each time we truly mean something implicitly poses the question of the meaning of all meaning, and of the sufficient reason for all that we find true. When that same consciousness expands to moral deliberation concerned with what I am to make of myself, then the attractive good or the exacting value place one squarely within the experience of the question: What is the value of all our valuing, what is the good of all our efforts to do good and attain it? The psychological present is one of self-transcending intending, in a cloud of unknowing beyond all images, in a self-surrender beyond anything we can call our own.

By being attuned to the full range of our subjectivity, we are made open to the multiple possibilities of objectivity. Experience, feeling, imagination, questioning and hitting on answers, reflecting on evidence, and obeying the summons of conscience; believing, hoping and loving – all have their place in occupying a intelligible universe, a moral world, a creation whose origins are not of this world, yet in which the creator can be revealed. The manner in which that creator is revealed, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, opens a way of hope that even the virulence of evil and self-destruction cannot check. In short, the only way of being objective, of living beyond ourselves in the universe, is to appreciate the

dynamism inscribed into our subjectivity, the movement in our psychological present, the thrust in the lived intent of our being (Lonergan, 1972, p. 265).

If however the experience of the self-transcending self is governed by a cultural or personal bias amounting to a denial of either ultimate meaning in our intellectual search, or of transcendent good in moral decisions we make, the lived present shrinks (Lonergan, 1972, p. 110). If the good we seek is at best an agreeable construction placed on a universe indifferent to human intelligence and freedom, then the present cannot be named save in a superficial, fragmented and deeply despairing manner.

To return to more practical considerations, let us consider the following two positive instances of naming the present in a psychological and deeply Christian sense.

### The Sacrament of the Present Moment

The first draws from de Caussade's (1948) *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Deeply influenced by Louis Lallement, Francis de Sales, and Fenelon, J.-P. de Caussade's spiritual ministry began in the generation after the death of Descartes, and carried through to the first decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – a period marked by growing influence of the *philosophers*. Faith would need to find new bearings in a culture infected by Cartesian methodic doubt which was intent on placing its intellectual security only in thinking itself: 'I think, therefore I am': *Cogito, ergo sum*. In stark contrast, the spiritual path opened by de Caussade explored the possibilities of an intensification of faith through what came to be called 'the sacrament of the present moment', which, in turn, led to radical self-surrender to divine providence. The great Jesuit's efforts were entirely practical, directed to the possibility of attaining a 'psychological present' – which in fact was far from being inward or unrelated to the social or universal dimension of life. Note the following words:

Do not ask the secret of its discovery... This treasure is everywhere. It is offered to us in every moment and in every place. Our fellow creatures, friendly or hostile, pour it forth freely and make it penetrate through all the powers of our bodies and souls, right into the depths of our hearts. We have but to open our mouths: they will be filled. God's action inundates the universe; it penetrates all creatures; it transcends them all; it is found wherever they are; it precedes, accompanies and follows them; we have but to allow ourselves to be carried forward on its waves (de Caussade, 1948, p. 9).

The consciousness of the present is named as a field of interaction – realistic enough to acknowledge the presence of friends and foes; and open enough to recognise individual existence within an inter-related universe of divine creation. Yet the dominant value is that of adoring self-surrender to the activity and presence of God in all things. De Caussade, in reaction to the intellectual cynicism of his time, considers that living too much in the head is a major problem for the spiritual self-abandonment he proposes. The cult of intelligence—especially in its Enlightenment form—risked making intelligence implode in on itself, and thereby incapable of the psychological present in its fullest dimensions: ‘The intelligence, with everything that depends on it, wishes to hold the first rank among the instruments of divine action; it has to be reduced, like a dangerous slave, to the last place’ (de Caussade, 1948, p. 15). He then gives a helpful clarification of his rejection of the intellect’s tendency to place itself at the centre of the universe and to be its measure:

The divine action, being of an all-fulfilling plenitude, can only take hold of a soul to the extent in which that soul is emptied of all self-confidence, for such self-confidence is a pseudo-plenitude which excludes God’s action (de Caussade, 1948, p. 15).

In this spirituality, the present is named as a grace-filled, salvific moment. It is not fully lived by means of abstract religious notions, nor even, it would seem, through theological speculation: ‘We must then listen to God from moment to moment in order to be learned in the theology of virtue which is wholly practical and experimental’ (de Caussade, 1948, p. 44). In this virtuous theology of practice and experience, the focus is placed on conformity to the divine will:

The Will of God presents itself in each instant like an immense ocean which the desire of your heart cannot empty, although it will receive of that ocean the measure to which it can extend itself by faith, confidence and love. The whole of the created universe cannot fill your heart which has a greater capacity than everything else that is not God (de Caussade, 1948, p. 32).

The present moment is one of buoyancy, openness and flexibility. Such qualities were regarded with suspicion by Jansenist critics who made life difficult for de Caussade. Still, in the language of his day, he describes, not so much an ethics, but a deep Christian psychology:

The soul pours herself forth by all these means into

her centre and goal; she never stops; she travels by all winds; all routes and methods advance her equally on her journey to the high sea of the Infinite... ‘the one thing necessary’ is what each moment produces by God’s Order. In this consists the stripping, the self-abnegation, the renunciation of the creature in order to be nothing by or for itself... finding one’s only contentment in bearing the present moment, as if there is nothing else in the world to expect (de Caussade, 1948, p. 46).

In his unique manner of fusing spirituality with the sense of time, de Caussade plots the direction of the journey on ‘the high sea of the infinite’. It is of interest, too, that the renunciations associated with a life of serious dedication are interpreted in their bearing on the present moment; or better, as making one capable of living receptive to its full grace. Such asceticism is geared to lightness and poise of spirit in the existentially manageable span of ‘the present moment’. He makes this point through a series of images, somewhat Zen-like in tone:

In the state of self-abandonment the one rule is the present moment. The soul is as light as a feather, as fluid as water, as simple as a child, as easily moved as a ball, so as to receive and follow all the movements of grace. Abandoned souls have no more hardness or consistency than melted metal... In a word, their disposition resembles that of the air which is at the service of all who breathe it and of water which takes the form of every recipient (de Caussade, 1948, 93).

The lightness of a feather, the fluidity of water, childlike play, a bouncing ball, molten metal, the encompassing atmosphere—the images accumulate to evoke the present as a moment of grace and hope. By commending each moment as an irrepeatable actualisation of God’s providential working, de Caussade anchors the psychology of grace in time. To that degree his contribution to Christian spirituality has enjoyed a classic status. True, it awaits a larger sense of history as might emerge with a reading of the signs of the times, as well as a broader application to the common life of the Church. But it remains a rich resource for a theology that would aim to be ‘practical and experimental’.

#### Lost in the Cosmos

De Caussade’s fellow Jesuit, Teilhard de Chardin (1965), writing some two and half centuries later, was presumably influenced by his confrère at some stage of his formation in the spiritual life. Teilhard transposes aspects of de Caussade’s teaching into the experience of cosmic time and contingency. It is possible to name the present according to some

objective measurement – ‘time as the measure of motion’, as Aristotle succinctly has it. A span of fifteen billion years of cosmic time can be presumed with some measure of probability. The recognition of such a vast unimaginable past in terms of physical time tends to affect our psychological sense of time – our feel for time, as *our* time, the way we live through it and feel it passing and carrying us on. That is time with a mood. A good example here would be the variety of recent commentaries on the new millennium.

But to return to Teilhard, especially his profound meditation recorded in *The Divine Milieu* (de Chardin, 1965, pp. 76-78). He seeks to intensify the psychological present of his own situation. Descending from ‘the zone of everyday occupations and relationships where everything seems clear’, into that ‘inmost self’, to ‘that deep abyss whence I feel my power of action emanates’, he reports a profound vertigo. He feels he is losing contact with the self of routine relationships to the point that,

At each step of the descent, a new person was disclosed within me of whose name I was no longer sure, and who no longer obeyed me. And when I had to stop my exploration because the path faded from beneath my steps, I found a bottomless abyss at my feet, and out of it came, arising from I know not where, the current I dare call *my* life (de Chardin, 1965, p. 77).

His psychological present is experienced as radically precarious. The settled present of former modes of identity conditioned by the history and geography, the culture and the philosophy, the religion and science of former days, is now in jeopardy. Exposed to a form of limitless, unobjectifiable otherness, Teilhard’s previous sense of the centre is relocated by being enfolded in an unsettling and fathomless totality. He confesses his reluctance to move:

I then wanted to return to the light of day and to forget the disturbing enigma in the comforting surroundings of familiar things – to begin living again at the surface without imprudently plumbing the depths of the abyss (de Chardin, 1965, 78).

Yet he cannot hide. There is no solace in the structured, sure world of his past, nor in psychologically distancing himself from the problem by busy, immediate involvement in routine activities. Another dimension opens up, inescapable, and pervading all his existence:

But then beneath this very spectacle of the

turmoil of life, there re-appeared before my new-opened eyes, the unknown that I wanted to escape. This time it was not hiding in the bottom of the abyss; it disguised its presence in the innumerable strands which form the web of chance, the very stuff of which the universe and my own small individuality are woven. Yet it was the same mystery without a doubt: I recognised it (de Chardin, 1965, p. 78).

His psychological present is confronted with the boundless totality present in the depth, length and breadth of the history from which he has emerged. His individual existence is not a self-contained reality, but the result of a myriad conditions so incalculable that they cannot but appear as pure chance. He is dizzy by the web of improbabilities on which his life is founded:

Our mind is disturbed when we try to plumb the depth of the world beneath us. But it reels still more when we try to number the favourable chances which must coincide at every moment if the least of living things is to survive and to succeed in its enterprises. After the consciousness of being something other and something greater than myself – a second thing made me dizzy: namely the supreme improbability, the tremendous unlikelihood of finding myself existing in the heart of the world which has survived and succeeded in being a world. (de Chardin, 1965, p. 78).

The first dizzying moment arises from a contemplation of the intricate complexity of the world itself, and of the improbability of the emergence of life within it. This brings its own dislocation of identity – in regard to ‘something other and greater than myself’. This first phase of existential vertigo in the face of objective complexity and improbability of the world leads into a second. Now the dizzying point is not the *it* of the world, but the *I* that is conscious of that *it* and within that all-encompassing *it*. The fifteen billion years of cosmic emergence, as with the miracle of life that has occurred on this tiny planet, have given each of us to ourselves, and to one another: ‘the tremendous unlikelihood of finding myself in the heart of the world...’.

Vertigo and bewilderment define the negative aspect of such a ‘limit experience’. The self-contained superficial ego of ordinary life is dislocated before an unknown immensity. This can be perceived as a deeply distressing experience, bringing with it disorientation and something akin to despair: ‘At that moment, as anyone will find who cares to make this same interior experiment, I

felt the distress characteristic of a particle adrift in the universe, the distress which makes human wills founder daily under the crushing number of living things and of stars'. But it brings consciousness to a frontier of something else. Faith expands to a new fullness, in the presence of that mystery which has itself given itself into the heart of the universe: 'And if something saved me, it was hearing the voice of the Gospel, guaranteed by divine successes, speaking to me from the depths of the night, 'It is I. Be not afraid' (de Chardin, 1965, p. 78).

The believer, in the person of Teilhard, begins to inhabit time, to live the present in new manner. The self-presence built on former securities suffers a radical upheaval through a new awareness of the incalculable complexities and uncanny improbabilities involved in cosmic time. The psychological present is invaded by distress, dislocation, vertigo and a drifting confusion in the face of the enormous influences playing in, and on, an individual personal identity. But at this point, previous self-possession gives way to a new spirit of self-surrender to Christ. The Word is incarnate not only in a particular time and place within human history, but also in the whole of cosmic reality. As a result, the present is named in new way. Hope expands to a new register.

#### A Time of Promise

John Thornhill (2000) is critically appreciative of modernity in his *Modernity: Christianity's Estranged Child Reconstructed*. He describes modernity as a movement originated in a break with late medievalism's excessive reliance on tradition to promote 'the accountability of shared intellectual inquiry' (Thornhill, 2000, p. vii). Referring to a wide range of contemporary thinking which includes the historian, J. M. Roberts, philosophers (Alastair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor), economists (Paul Ormerod and Robert Heilbroner), a statesman (Vaclav Havel) and the theologian, J. B. Metz, he proceeds to give a critical but constructive – or is it deconstructive? – interpretation of his subject. He criticises modernity for what amounts to 'a forgetfulness of being' – here understood more in a Thomist sense. Without a critically realist objectivity, the intelligence of modernity has been enclosed in a methodological doubt from which it can recover only by retrieving what it has hitherto ignored. Nonetheless, Thornhill underscores the achievements of modernity – so positively in fact that he considers that the Christian differentiation of consciousness can find in the continuance and development of modernity an unparalleled scope and opportunity. It may well be argued, he suggests, that the unique witness of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is yet to come to a full understanding of its peculiar identity within that

totality of human experience that the inquiring spirit of modernity has opened up. He goes on to write,

Though the 'gospel', or 'good news' has been a fundamental theme of Christianity's self-awareness from its very beginnings, it is only in our time that the full implications of this theme are being clarified. This clarification is brought by modernity's more adequate appreciation of the full range of human experience. At the same time, discussion taking place within Christian theology is bringing a greater appreciation of the implications of the message which is essential to the 'differentiation of consciousness' defining our tradition (Thornhill, 2000, p. 190).

The theologian entertains the question of whether a full appreciation of the import of the Gospel was possible before the present era. To know the relevance of the Gospel depends on having some discernment of the situation for which it is intended. What modernity has to offer is an expansion of the situation. It works to embrace 'the full range of human existence and experience which is addressed by the Gospel message. This development opens the way to an unprecedented recognition of its full implications' (Thornhill, 2000, p. 190).

Relying on the analyses of Voegelin, Thornhill goes on to suggest the consequences of this new situation. Where the revolutionary message of Judaeo-Christian faith confronted the mythological assumptions of the sacralised cultures which shaped the ancient world, it is now released to work in a more fulfilling and reconciling manner, 'complementing' rather than 'replacing' the genuine achievements of the world's cultures and their traditions of wisdom (Thornhill, 2000, p. 191).

The present is thus named, not as an 'encircling gloom', but as a time of unprecedented promise. Faith working with and through critical realism can expand to its global dimensions precisely through the resources that the exploratory habits of modernity now offer. The problem, naturally, turns on how to disinfect the science and scholarship of the Enlightenment period of the range of reductionist ideologies that it hosted. How the Christian differentiation of consciousness can work with a more enlightened Enlightenment to allow for the whole of human experience remains the urgent methodological question. What is significant for our reflection, however, is that in Thornhill's book we find such a positive, hopeful yet critical way of naming the present, a 'sign of the times' writ large, and given a generous reading. Here one could

make intriguing comparisons and contrasts in regard to George Steiner's *Real Presences* (Steiner, 1989), especially if we bear in mind his concluding remarks on Holy Saturday (Steiner, 1989, pp. 231-232).

### **A Global Context**

The present historical phase of rapid globalisation in which the planetary proportions of our human coexistence is emerging. The universal notion of 'human nature' is earthed in the actuality of a common human history. The peculiar crisis of our times presents us with the question of how particular histories and cultures can meet for mutual enrichment in one planetary history. Here, I suggest, the psychological present can be extended, beyond the instance of an individual subject experiencing the demands of self-transcendence, to a consideration of imperatives latent in our human becoming on a global scale. Human experience now includes vast electronic libraries of the internet and the instant communication it makes possible. Human meaning is enriched by the 'knowledge explosion' in every domain of research. One's judgement of the truth of things, however intimately personal it may be, cannot ignore the evidence that can only emerge from collaboration on a global scale, enabling us to situate our individual and collective efforts in the context of our existence on this earth, a planet of an average sized star in a galaxy in which a hundred billion stars are said to shine in the immensity of a physical universe of billions of galaxies, within a cosmic history of some fifteen billions years. In such a perspective, personal and social values must be earthed in the ecological well-being of the planet itself: loving our neighbour cannot afford to neglect a love for a neighbourhood of planetary proportions (Kelly, 1993, pp. 1-29). And if this novel historical process of global humanisation is to succeed despite the collective bias toward self-destruction, there is needed a world-wide, collaborative self-transcending movement enabled by the recognition of the objectivity of truth and value. Lonergan's words are apposite: 'There is in the world, as it were, a charged field of love and meaning; here and there it reaches a notable intensity; but it is every unobtrusive, hidden, inviting us to join. And join we must if we are to perceive it, for our perceiving is through our loving' (Lonergan, 1972, 290). Without such a movement, progress will be impossible, with results that are all too easily named.

### **Dwelling in God**

So far I have made brief mention of three instances of naming the psychological present of faith today, and then drawn attention the global setting of contemporary self-awareness. It would be, however, a very truncated account of the present if it left out the trinitarian mystery of God. The self-

communicating gift of God is the presence, you might say, in the historical present of faith. Whilst the mystery of the Trinity is often dismissed as a zone of irrelevant speculation such that Kant could write 'that absolutely nothing for practical life can be acquired from the doctrine of the Trinity' (Kant, 1964, p. 50), it does deeply impinge on Christian spirituality. The divine persons indwell human consciousness in grace; just as believers indwell the mystery of trinitarian life and love in as much as they are actively conformed to God's saving will for the world.

Human history has reached a limit from which there is no retreating. Beyond that limit there is the promise of unexplored territory demanding that '...we take 'the longest stride of soul man ever took.' Affairs are now soul-size the enterprise is exploration into God' (Fry, 1951, p. 32). In this 'soul-size' conception of the present, theology's 'enterprise' as 'exploration into God' has an opportunity to appreciate the doctrine of the Trinity in a larger and perhaps more challenging context (Kelly, 1989, pp. 165-172, 203-215).

It could be outlined in this way. The trinitarian God has entered into the historical process of what is coming to be. The Father gives himself as the eschatological horizon summoning history forward into his house of many rooms (John 14: 2), to the point at which God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15: 28). In the worship of the Father, local and cultural situations are relativised— 'neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem' (John 4 : 21) — as he seeks true worshipers 'in spirit and in truth' (4: 24). God's 'seeking' is directed to energising human history with an open, hopeful sense of the present opening to a solidarity that is not restricted to time, place or culture, in anticipation of eternal life in the vision of God.

In this sense, the 'love' that God is (1 John 4: 8), originates and fulfils the history of human freedom. The promised fulfilment is anticipated in the psychological present of hope in its struggle against all forms of practical despair over the value of the present or over the possibility of an ultimate human homecoming. But for human history to live in such an horizon it must enjoy confidence in the world of meaning, and in the ability to understand and come to the truth. For it is not only the rationality of value that is at stake, but the value of rationality. The search for truth is threatened by a dispirited suspicion of our capacities for intelligent self-transcendence. Intellectual diffidence restricts knowledge to its instrumental function as a technique to bring about a delimited manipulation of data in the 'information process'. Morality is reduced to the ethics of the utility of exchange.

The ultimate question of whether there is any

meaning to such meaning-making, whether there is any *Logos* in all the *-ologies* of human culture, to connect us more deeply than a shared interest in the technical job in hand, is either ignored or deferred. Into such a situation, the Father communicates his all-meaningful Word, to become incarnate in the human conversation, to redeem it of bias and absurdity through the fullness of the gift that is the truth (John 1:14). The Word incarnate in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, is heard as a subversive surprise to the omniscient and exclusive pretensions of human wisdom (John 3: 1-10; 1 Cor. 1: 18-25). The non-violent presence of the truth which is not of this world is a judgement on the totalitarian violence of all human ideologies which, by denying God, end by mutilating humanity itself (John 18: 36-38). The Word, as the self-expression of the love that God is, exists in the world as the 'light' for each present moment. He comes into the world as 'the Word breathing love', the truth inspiring the movement of a universal love originating in the heart of the Trinity.

With the Father intimated as the absolute future of world history, and the Word incarnate as breathing forth love through his self-giving love on the cross, the Spirit is breathed forth that we may participate in God's own loving. This indwelling love inspires our hearing of that Word that has been uttered: 'No one can say, Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12: 3). The coming of the Spirit inspires dreams in the old and visions in the young (Ac 2:17). The Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, glorifies Jesus and declares his meaning to the disciples (John 16:12-15). By inspiring intimacy with God, now invocable as 'Abba' (Rom. 8: 15-16), the Spirit brings forth the fruits of self-transcendence in the believer (Gal. 5: 22) and in the Christian community (1 Cor. 12: 4-13). The love of God poured out by the Spirit gives assurance to the courageous practice of hope (Rom. 5: 5); and within the groaning of all creation and the inward groanings of Christian hope, the Spirit groans, opening human consciousness to the mystery of love at work (Rom 8: 19-28). Human values are renewed and informed by a Spirit-breathed love that 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things', endures all things' (1 Cor. 13: 7), in the love that never ends (13: 8).

Anyone wishing to name the present in hope, given the immense challenges inherent in the global and planetary dimensions of that present, there is a given in each present, the inexhaustible gift of God. God is love – as the giver, the given and the giving. Though the mystery of the Trinity may not be explicitly named in our experience of the present, it comes as an experience of giftedness awaiting its theological naming. Only through invocation, thanksgiving and praise, can such a naming fittingly take place, to locate the present wherever

and whenever it occurs, as a blessing, a moment of hope, a moment in eternal life already begun.

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\*Anthony Kelly CSsR is Professor of Theology at Australian Catholic University. Over the past thirty years Professor Kelly has published widely. One of his recent publications is *The Creed by Heart: Relearning the Nicene Creed*.

## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> More to the point: 'It is for God's people as a whole, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and especially for pastors and theologians, to listen to the various voices of our day, discerning them and interpreting them, and to evaluate them in the light of the divine Word' (GS # 44). 'The Church has the duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel' (GS # 4; cf. also *Decree of Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegration # 4)*, *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum ordinis # 9)*, *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (Apostolicam actuositatem #14)*, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum concilium # 43)*.